# AWAKENING WOMEN: WOMEN, HIGHER EDUCATION AND FAMILY FORMATION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA c 1880-1920.

by

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**Awakening Women: Women, Higher Education and Family Formation in South Australia c 1880 - 1920**

It is now over one hundred years since the first women gained admission to higher education in most countries of the industrialized west. Over that period many writers have both celebrated the achievement of a hard fought battle and deplored the slowness of universities to respond to women's needs. Recently feminist historians have begun to re-examine that experience and to place it in the context of broader social change, seeing within that debate an opportunity to contribute to wider historical questions.

This study seeks to reassess the meaning of higher education for women in the context of the demographic transition. Using a basic structuring framework of feminist history, it examines the outcome of the experience of higher education for a group of the earliest graduates of the University of Adelaide. Women's admission to the University of Adelaide is described and it is argued that the ready acceptance of women from the earliest days was due to the particular nature of South Australian society, one characterized by a vigorous middle class and a dissenting religious tradition.

The major focus of the study is the effect of that education on women's demographic behaviour and of their attachment to the workplace. Where possible, the women's life histories were reconstituted and the resultant data subjected to statistical analysis in order to illuminate patterns of marriage and childbearing in the group.

Much demographic work focuses on fertility decisions made by couples, giving little emphasis to the role of women in demographic change. This study challenges that emphasis and attempts to restore women's agency in fertility decision making. It is argued that women involved in the process of higher education were exposed to circumstances which potentially led to a change in consciousness, a change which is reflected in the decisions they made about marriage and childbirth.

The study also poses the question of consciousness as a factor in social change. It is argued that for women, access to the language and

argument of university curricula provided them with a means of attaining independence and of challenging women's traditional association with the realm of nature. Many graduates lived independently of men and found satisfying lives in women - centred communities. They were able to significantly affect their material circumstances, both within marriage and outside it. In the period studied university education provides an example of the significant liberatory potential of education for a specific group. The gender order was profoundly shaken, provoking a response which eventually subverted many of the earlier gains.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not include any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously written or published by another person unless duly acknowledged.

I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

November 1989

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Parts of this study have previously been published in *The New Women: Adelaide's Early Women Graduates*, Wakefield Press, 1986.

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## Chapter 1 The Problem and the Theoretical Context.

'Why write a book about women at Oxford?" wrote Vera Brittain in 1960," so few people are interested in them, and their numbers are so few". Their story, she claimed, was "a tale that had been told." Nevertheless Brittain did go on to write *The Women at Oxford* justifying her work with the argument that the pursuit and attainment of intellectual enlightenment could not be judged by numerical tests.[1] For Brittain it represented the quintessence of the whole movement for women's emancipation, the contest for the equal citizenship of the mind.

In one sense the story of women at the University of Adelaide is also a tale that is told. Women freely enter all faculties, are represented on academic staff, even at professorial level, although they are still very much a minority. A women holds the most esteemed position, that of Chancellor and another is Pro Vice-Chancellor. Women have certainly arrived in a manner which would have delighted the nineteenth century supporters of higher education for women and horrified its opponents. Yet the movement for women's higher education encompassed so much more than an account of the struggle for women's admission can explain.

Coming as it did, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the demand for women's higher education can be seen as an aspect of much broader social change. Economic and industrial developments had irrevocably changed the lives of middle class women. The growth of commerce and of urbanization had stripped many women of their traditional tasks and of their economic contribution to the family. Furthermore in South Australia, as in most of the Western world, a decline in fertility had begun which would further lighten the load of many middle class woman. These changes had already led to a significant questioning of women's place in the world, a questioning that challenged women's legal inequality and political powerlessness. The 'woman question' had come to occupy a prominent part in the popular press and the popular imagination.

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1 Vera Brittain *The Women at Oxford* Geo Harrop &Co 1960

The demand for higher education was then part of a much wider set of demands. Middle class women were seeking to redefine their place in a changing world The essence of those demands involved a widening, at all levels, of choice. To what extent has that choice been widened, one hundred years after the first halting steps were taken to admit women to university?

While the earliest accounts of women in universities tended to unashamedly celebrate women's achievement of that goal, later studies have been more critical. It has been argued by several historians who have examined women's admission to higher education at the turn of the century that, at least in the short term, it changed very little for women.[1] In the first place, as Vera Brittain pointed out, it affected a minute proportion of the population. Secondly, the group whose lives were touched by higher education were middle class women and usually members of the prosperous middle class, those whose lives were seen to be irrelevant to, or lacking in influence on, the lives of others, particularly working class women. If such an influence occurred, that influence has often been deemed to be pernicious. For example, those involved in the new 'science' of mothercraft advocated new standards of child care sometimes impossible for working class women to meet.

A third dimension of the critique of the 'celebratory' approach to higher education for women has focused on the illusory nature of so called advances for women. An initial gain such as an increase in the number of women finding professional careers has been offset by a concomitant reinforcement of patriarchal values such as woman's primary identification with the home.

While all these critiques have some validity, they present the researcher in higher education with certain dilemmas, not the least of which relates to political practice. Why then do feminists in industrialized countries pursue with great tenacity such goals as the inclusion of greater numbers of women in tertiary education, the demand for more places for women in graduate programmes? Why do articulate women leaders in

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1 See for instance La Pierre P J . Separate or Mixed: The Debate over Co-education at McGill University M.A. McGill University 1983 La Pierre argues that the admission of women changed almost nothing in the social fabric of Canada. Nor did it affect women's traditional role in society.

the third world demand access to primary, secondary and ultimately university education as crucial to their chances of sharing in their country's development? At the most obvious level, places of higher learning are sites of power, of access to professional positions which lead to both economic and political power. They are a vital part of the larger project of women's liberation.

How then can we reconcile accounts of early women graduates' conservatism (in the view of some historians) with our insights into the crucial need for more women to experience tertiary study? Perhaps we have been looking for answers in the wrong place. It can equally be argued that the entrance of women to higher education and concomitantly to the professions, was a vitally important watershed in women's lives. It contributed to alterations in highly significant indicators of social change such as demographic change and participation in the paid workforce. It can also be argued that for some women a social class position of their own was established apart from that of dependent of father or husband. Some became members in their own right of the emergent professional and managerial class, sometimes called the "new class."[1]

In order to separate the many complex issues in this field it is crucial to locate the questions I have raised in the context of several theoretical debates which are germane to the subject. These debates arise in different guises in several disciplines, all of which warrant brief consideration here. I will refer initially to social history, to women's history and to feminist history all of which share certain theoretical assumptions but which differ on significant points of interpretation and method. I will also examine recent work in historical demography, a field which also shares a common ground with social history but tends to have diverged along a path laid out by statisticians and economists. The history of education is another field in which issues concerning women's participation in higher education have been canvassed.

Recent developments in the area of social theory generally referred to as post-structuralism will also be briefly considered, as important insights into the understanding of the subject and of subjectivity are

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1 Gouldner A *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* Continuum NY 1979

crucial to an analysis of changes in consciousness, and changes in consciousness are an important part of women's involvement in the higher education movement. The major questions which structure this study, however come from feminist history.

**Social history**

The broad ranging changes which culminated in the development of "the new social history" over the last twenty-five years offered considerable scope for feminists wishing to analyse the changing position of women. As Susan Magarey has outlined, the characteristics of social history can be summarized under three headings: scope, approach, materials and methods.[1] Building on the work of the French *Annales* school which talked of "total history, the history of all human activities and their reciprocal relationships" English and North American historians began to consider all human activities legitimate fields of enquiry. This new focus offered considerable possibilities to women who hoped now to include those activities in which most women had remained hidden - everyday life, childbirth, domesticity, for example - in historical inquiry. Furthermore they hoped that those activities would be seen as equally valuable to scholars both male and female.

Characteristically social historians were "explicitly concerned with the theoretical concepts which they brought to their research and writing". They "increasingly offer explanation at the level of theory, and experiment with the use of explicit and detailed models in the arduous task of constructing a history of societies."[2] The explicit use of theory offered feminists a tempting opportunity to raise theoretical and political questions about the sexual division of labour, about women's oppression and about their exclusion from the historical record.

The new social historians also availed themselves of a wide range of materials and methods not previously used by historians. Assisted by technology, they were able to analyse on computers large data banks of information which were previously inaccessible or required heroic efforts of sorting by hand. Marriage registers, details of births and deaths, yielded

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1 Magarey S *Women's History and Feminist history* Deakin University Press p13
2 Blackman J and Nield K (eds) *Social History* No 1 1976 quoted in Magarey p14

the raw material with which to reconstruct the life patterns of "ordinary" women. Tape recordings of the voices of people who might otherwise leave no personal records enabled historians to restore to the historical record the personal experience of participants in a wide range of social activities, such as strikes and epidemics. Both of these innovations were of vital assistance to women's historians.

Social history, while promising considerable advantages to women did not however, provide the ideal field for an exploration of the matters of most concern to them. Part of the difficulty lay in the dominant conceptual frameworks deployed by the new social historians. Coming mainly from the left of the political spectrum, many historians were predominantly concerned with questions of social class. Using Marxist frameworks of analysis in the main, they tended to explain the social world in economic terms. While including women in their analyses, they frequently subsumed them under categories such as social class. Those who wished to give priority to the experience of women or to explain the world in terms of gender order were not content with this approach. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall point out, Marxist scholars have paid little attention to the family, the private, the home, "the place to which women have been conceptually relegated." In marxist studies it is the world of production and the state which has been seen as most important.[1]

**Women's history** √

The women's movement of the 1970's provided a strong impetus for women to uncover their past. Anna Davin, an English feminist historian, articulated that need:

> Historical understanding is essential to our struggle; we must find the roots of our oppression to destroy it; we must know where we came from to understand what we are and where we are going; we must examine the struggle of earlier generations of women to help us win our own.[2]

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1 Davidoff L and Hall C *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* Hutchinson 1987 p29

2 Davin A "Women and History " in M. Wandor (comp)*The Body Politic: Writings from theWomen's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972* Stage One London 1972 p224

The essential interconnectedness of history and politics is made clear in Davin's passionate words which could well stand for a manifesto for feminist history.

This need for historical understanding led to a mammoth search for the records of our past, a past which did not appear in standard history texts. A veritable task force of women began to research and write about diverse aspects of women's lives in the past, frequently using the methods and materials of the new social history. Women no longer remained hidden from history. A new field, women's history, came into existence and announced its permanence with a proliferation of courses, of journals and of specialist conferences , such as the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women.

Women's history has itself developed in several significant ways over the last fifteen to twenty years. Initially concerned with restoring women to the historical record, women are now, in many areas. attempting to change the record itself. No longer content to "add women" we ask how a history which excludes one half of humanity can be anything but a partial view.

At a recent conference the American women's historian Louise Tilly, in an overview of women's history, stated that now the facts of women's lives have become historical facts it is time to decide what difference it makes.[1] She claimed that we must now move to explanation; we must demonstrate how women's history illuminates wider debates. Although descriptive work still has its place it is now analytic work which should have priority. By engaging in analytic work Tilly contends that we will be able to demonstrate the difference that the inclusion of women will make to history in its widest sense, challenging its basic assumptions and its categories.

It is interesting that Tilly, in her call for analysis and explanation, is reiterating the same call made in the 1970s by Joan Kelly and Gerda

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1 Tilly L Address given to Social Science History Association meeting, Chicago November 5 1988

Lerner.[1] Yet much of women's history has begun to deconstruct the categories of traditional history and to analyse the hierarchies and the souces of power which led to their construction. Such challenges constitute the structuring framework of feminist history.

**Feminist History**

Feminist history does not necessarily arise out of women's history but coexists with it, both approaches using insights from the other on occasion. Both make considerable use of the distinctive characteristics of social history - the attention to theoretical considerations, and the methodological advances such as the use of oral history and the use of computers to analyse large bodies of data. Feminist history, however, gives far more prominence to self-conscious theorizing and to the acceptance of the transformative nature of academic knowledge when applied to political practice.

Susan Magarey points out that as early as 1970 the Australian historian Ann Curthoys argued that;

> A 'history of women'.... should do more than restore women to the history books. It must analyse why public life has been considered to be the focus of history, and why public life has been so thoroughly occupied by men. We must find out how the assumptions of female inferiority in public life and subordination in the home have operated in history and why some societies differentiate more than others... the concepts usually operating in historiography, defining what is important, must be questioned.[2]

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1 See for instance Kelly-Gadol J "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History" in *Signs* Vol 1 No 4 1976 and Lerner G *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* Oxford 1979 The discussion that followed Tilly's paper highlighted the differing perspectives of women's historians and feminist historians. Several women challenged the notion that women's history could in any sense be said to have arrived, arguing that we have added to an understanding of the past but have not replaced anything. While courses, special options , and mainstream history courses continue to use periodization suited to men's lives , such as "revolution" or "war", the insights developed by women scholars remain marginal.

2 Curthoys,A *For and Against Feminism: A personal journey into feminist theory and history* Allen and Unwin 1988 p 4 quoted in Magarey, S "Jane and the Feminist History Group" in *Australian Feminist Studies* nos 7&8 1988 p137

Feminist history challenges these concepts. Curthoys' challenge has only just been adequately addressed in the 1980s, largely because an enormous amount of work was required to begin to 'write women back into history'. Another factor causing delay was the necessity to engage in a great deal of theoretical work to refine the questions feminists felt to be central to understanding their place in society.

Articulating similar sentiments to those of Curthoys, Jill Matthews wrote in 1986;

> To put it simply: women's history is that which seeks to add women to the traditional concerns of historical investigation and writing; feminist history is that which seeks to change the very nature of traditional history by incorporating gender into all historical analysis and understanding. And the purpose of that change is political: to challenge the practices of the historical discipline that have belittled and oppressed women, and to create the practices that allow women an autonomy and space for self-definition.[1]

A major development in Matthews' work is the use of the concept of gender order. Previously the term 'patriarchy' was widely used in both women's history and in feminist history to describe the fact of the apparently universal subordination of women. The universalism of the term proved very unsatisfactory to many historians, who wished to delineate fine nuances of difference between periods and between societies. Matthews has made a considerable contribution to this area, developing the term 'gender order', which she describes as follows:

> every known society distinguishes between men and women. "Gender order" expresses this fact, but does not specify the nature of the distinction. Thus a gender order could be matriarchal or patriarchal or egalitarian. By analogy, we can talk of an economic order as being the ordering of people's relationships to the means of production and consumption which exist in every society. Such an ordering has no essential nature but may be variously feudal, capitalist or community. To distinguish between general form and specific content in this way seems to be a useful step away from extreme generalization of assumptions. Certainly the form, or ordering of gender relations has always existed; this is a

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1 Matthews, J J "Feminist History", *Labour History,* no 50, May 1986 p148

valid assumption. That the gender order has always been patriarchal, however, cannot be assumed but must be proved for each specific society.[1]

The focus on gender order reminds us that this is one of the crucial organizing concepts for feminist historians.They seek to incorporate gender into all historical analysis, drawing out the ways in which any social change affects that order, loosening the social boundaries which define men's and women's activities or drawing them more tightly.

Two recent works in this field illustrate the possibilities. In *Family Fortunes* Davidoff and Hall illuminate the way in which the emergence of the English middle class was vitally dependent on notions of sexual difference, notions which underpinned the separation of home and marketplace. While the doctrine of separate spheres was being carefully put in place in English society in the period 1780- 1850, the motivation for men's market activity was emerging from a new ideal of a domestic haven for all. At the same time it was frequently women's labour in a family business or her family's connections, financial or otherwise which put the nascent enterprise on a firm footing. Yet the social ideology which came to predominate in the latter part of the period prescribed totally separate functions for men and women, masking women's role in class formation and severely curtailing their opportunities for economic gain.[2]

The Australian feminist historian, Marilyn Lake, has also demonstrated the interconnectedness of gender divisions and historical processes in her work on soldier settlement in Victoria.[3] Revealing in her work the way in which the sexual division of labour was crucial to the running of settlement blocks, Lake clearly highlights the way in which people accepted the ideology of a strict separation of spheres at the same time as their lives contravened it.

Drawing on the insights developed by feminists such as Matthews, Lake, Davidoff and Hall, I intend to explore the impact of the higher education of women on the gender order. I hope to develop an

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1 Matthews J J *Good and Mad Women: The historical construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia.* George Allen and Unwin, 1984 p14

2 Davidoff and Hall *Family Fortune*

3 Marilyn Lake *The Limits of Hope : Soldier settlement in Victoria 1915 - 1938* Oxford University Press 1988

explanatory framework which will assist our understanding of the major changes taking place in women's lives in the period 1880- 1930 (approx), a period which has been viewed as a "crisis in patriarchy",[1] a period in which the gender order was challenged and redefined. In particular, I wish to examine the impact of higher education on the reproductive and productive behaviour of a group of early women graduates and to explore the possibility that the experience led to a change in their consciousness.

Social historians have used as an organizing concept the notion of production, an activity deemed to have taken place in the public sphere and generally considered vital for the continuance of social life. Feminists have developed the associated notion of reproduction , building on the term as first used by Marx. Reproduction is as vital to the continuance of society both in its specific sense of reproduction of the species and in the sense of the reproduction of the daily forms of social life, the caring, feeding, and teaching which enables the next generation to take its place in the world of production. Reproduction, as elaborated by feminist theorists, has both a material and an ideological dimension, inextricably connected.

The material aspect encompasses the lived experience for most women throughout history of childbearing, child rearing, nurturance of all family members and the maintainance of everyday life in its myriad forms. The ideological involves the set of belief systems which underpins the continuing willingness of women to perform those functions. Such belief systems are not static but vary enormously throughout time reflecting changes in economic circumstances, in modes of production, and in other sets of beliefs, such as prevailing religious thought. Women's propensity to accept dominant notions of their role also fluctuates, and their acceptance or resistance provides a continuing measure of women's active participation in defining their lives. It is important then, that women are viewed not only as objects of historical change but also as agents, as active shapers of the social world in which they move, as people who make choices, but who do so, in Marx's famous terms, in circumstances not of their own choosing.

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1 See for instance Beasley C Educating Rita's Grandmother: The Social Relations of the Sexes and South Australian Curriculum Reform, 1875-1915 M. Ed. thesis, Flinders University 1984

In this study I examine changes in certain women's reproductive behavior in both its material and ideological manifestations. One of the crucial indicators of choice for women revolves around questions of numbers of children born. Did higher education significantly alter women's reproductive choice? J A and Olive Banks have asserted that there was no connection between feminism and family planning.[1] I intend to reexamine that conclusion in relation to higher education.

Did higher education enable women to enter, or enter more forcefully, debates regarding women's place, thus enabling them to define the terms of women's participation in social life, to push back the boundaries, as it were, of their "sphere"? In other words, did women's agency in defining their lives increase? Joan Scott defines "agency" as "the attempt (at least partly rational) to construct an identity, a life, a set of relationships, a society within certain limits and with language — conceptual language that at once sets boundaries and contains the possibility for negation, resistance, reinterpretation, the play of metaphoric invention and imagination."[2]

**Post structuralism and gendered subjectivity**

Scott's reference to identity signals another set of concerns of feminist scholars, concerns surrounding the formation of subjectivity. Davidoff and Hall sum up those concerns very effectively:

> We start from the premise that identity is gendered and that the organization of sexual difference is central to the social world......As a generation of feminists has argued, every individual's relation to the world is filtered through gendered subjectivity. That sexual identity is organized through a complex system of social relations, structured by the institutions not only of family and kinship but to every level of the legal, political, economic and social formation.[3]

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1 Banks J A and Olive *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* Liverpool University Press 1965

2 Scott J W "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis " in *American Historical Review* Vol 91 No 5 December 1986 p1067

3 Davidoff and Hall *Family Fortunes* p 21

It follows that as social relations change, as institutions are transformed, changes in subjectivity take place, and subtle changes to an individual's relation to the world can be traced. In periods of rapid social change, such as the years from 1880-1920 not only were processes of class formation in a state of flux but so too were definitions of gender and gender appropriate behaviour. Dorothy Smith refers to the penetration of the society by the ideological process arguing that the process includes, particularly for the highly educated, an "in-depth" organization of consciousness. This involves for the educated, in Smith's terms, the imperialism of rationality over personal experience.[1]

Both Smith's work and that of Hall and Davidoff reflect the current preoccupation in theoretical work with themes raised by post structuralist theorists. For feminist historians that work has raised questions about meaning and has shifted the focus of much theoretical work from an exclusive search for causes of change to a concern with the meaning of women's words and actions in the past, particularly where those words reflect changes of consciousness. Influenced by the French theorists Derrida and Foucault, (post structuralists search for understanding of the social order through language, through which they discern both conscious and unconscious thoughts and desires. They ask, as does Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, if the marginal or powerless wish to challenge the dominant discourse, must they frame their challenge in the language of the dominant mode?) They argue that the self is not unified and rational but that the subject is multiple containing elements which are potentially contradictory. Post structuralists also challenge historians to look at power differently. Joan Scott considers that we should replace

> the notion that social power is unified, coherent and centralized with something like Foucault's conception of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships, discursively constituted in social "fields of force."[2]

Such theoretical developments can be integrated into an analysis of significant changes in women's lives . It is now possible, as Magarey points out, to conduct analyses "which discern in the images and

1 Smith Dorothy "A Sociology for Women" in Sherman J A and Beck E T (eds) *The Prism of Sex* University of Wisconsin Press 1979 p144

2 Scott J W Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis quoted in Magarey S "Jane and the Feminist History Group" p144

symbolism used in modes of expression in the past the processes of formation of gendered subjectivity."[1] Jill Matthews perceived the challenge as to "not only deconstruct the universal and show it to be masculine, we must also struggle to create our own voice and words to speak the female experience of the public world."[2]

In this study several of the themes outlined above may contribute to an understanding of the significance of the experience of higher education in women's lives . I will ask to what extent we can gauge the changes suggested by Dorothy Smith, that is the "in- depth organization of consciousness, the "imperialism of rationality over personal experience". Kerreen Rieger has already suggested that in the period I am examining, "technical rationality" became the dominant mode of extending the influence of science into the home, an area previously considered to be the domain of nature.[3] To what extent did University trained women, frequently finding employment in fields such as public health, contribute to this process?

Given the crucial place of language in the organization of consciousness can it be argued that women, given privileged access to the language of the highest culture, gained entry to a powerful mode of discourse as Alvin Gouldner has argued?[4] Or can it be argued, as Dorothy Smith maintains, that women's own experience became submerged in the discourse of rationality? Or, as Carroll Smith- Rosenberg maintains, did the abandonment of their own discourse and the adoption of the prevailing male language eventually cut women off from their own sources of power?[5] And what is meant by power in a post-Foucauldian sense in which power is widely dispersed through social "fields of force." How did the gaining of degrees empower women in the sense of giving them greater access to decision making over their own lives? An associated set of questions revolve around the area of sexuality.

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1 Magarey S Ibid p146

2 Matthews J J "Deconstructing the masculine universe: the case of women's work", in Allen M, Blackburn J, Johnson C, King M and Mackinnon A (eds) *All Her Labours* ,2 vols., Hale and Iremonger 1984 p12

3 Reiger K *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1880 - 1940* Oxford 1985 Introduction

4 Gouldner A *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*

5 Smith-Rosenberg C "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870 - 1936" in *Disorderly Conduct* Knopf 1985

Feminist historians have increasingly come to recognize the centrality of questions surrounding the social, political and cultural control of women's bodies. Any display of sexual independence on the part of women was usually met with a virulent attack. This issue is also of particular interest in relation to women graduates, who by virtue of their potential independence, both economically and sexually, seriously threatened the prevailing gender order. We need to establish why education for women came to be accepted at a particular time and how its revolutionary potential was realized or contained.

**History of education**

The field of history of education might be expected to provide many of the answers to the questions raised so far. Certainly there are many studies available, which I will outline later, detailing the debates surrounding women's admission to universities, the progress of women in the early years and the struggle for women to accommodate to institutions set up for the opposite sex and intractably opposed to change.

Yet until very recently educational history has tended to focus narrowly on institutions, ignoring in the main the broader social context. During this period the education of women and girls was largely viewed as a small subset, an obligatory reference or perhaps chapter, deemed as covering the topic. The resurgence of educational history over the last fifteen years has seen a major reorientation towards social history which promises much for those wishing to examine women's experience as central. The importing of conscious theorizing, for example, has opened the way for feminist analysis. Yet to date much revisionist history of education has manifested the shortcomings of social history for feminists, that is, it has privileged Marxist explanations and the experience of class groups. In what Sara Delamont calls a "form of inverted snobbery" revisionist writing has tended to focus on working class children, both boys and girls, neglecting such groups as elite women.[1] The most recent work, however is beginning to include analyses which attempt to

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1 Delamont S *Knowledgeable Women: Structuralism and the Reproduction of Elites* Routledge 1989 p7

integrate class and gender.[1] It is in that conceptual framework that this study is located.

One of the major characteristics of the revisionist history of education is its tendency to draw from, and contribute to, wider debates. Several authors , in seeking to establish the origins of public schooling, have articulated the links between the rise of mass schooling and broader economic and demographic change.[2] These phenomena are also vitally linked to the admission of women to higher education.

**Historical demography**

The use of the computer to analyse large data banks has revolutionized this academic enterprise, enabling accurate accounts of such crucial information as the size of families in early modern times to be written. One of the major foci of much demographic work is the demographic transition, that major watershed of the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century during which, in all Western countries, fertility declined and mortality fell. Increasingly sophisticated computer- based analyses of the rate and variation of decline in several Western countries have been produced.[3]

Yet, as several feminists have acknowledged, these analyses fall short in providing explanations grounded in social theory. Nancy Folbre points out that there is a curious disjuncture between feminist social histories of the nineteenth century U.S, which emphasize dramatic changes in women's lives, and the historical demography literature, which seldom addresses the specific experience of women.[4] Usually deploying economic explanations, demographers tend to focus on the family as a unit, assuming that husbands and wives' decisions are harmonious and based on rational criteria. There is a need to bring

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1 Miller P *Long Division: State Schooling in South Australian Society* Wakefield Press 1986, is a good example of this integration.

2 An example of this approach can be found in Davey I "Capitalism, Patriarchy and the Origins of Mass Schooling " in *History of Education Review* Vol 16 No 1 1987

3 See for instance Coale A and Watkins S (ed) *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* Princeton University Press 1986

4 Folbre N "Women on Their Own: New Measures of change in Late 19th Century Households." Paper presented at the meeting of the Social Science History Association, Chicago , November 1988

together the concerns of feminist social historians and historical demographers in relation to such significant questions as the causes and meaning of the demographic transition, a turning point which vitally affected women's lives. In this study I attempt such a resolution by examining the demographic behavior of a cohort of women graduates and bringing feminist explanations to that behaviour.

I have briefly examined several fields from which the major questions which I will address arise and which provide the main conceptual frameworks for my study. In sum I intend to examine a cohort of women graduates from the university of Adelaide with particular reference to their reproductive behaviour and with some reference to their role in production. I ask to what extent that behaviour contributed to the vast social transformation known as the demographic transition. The other side of the question of reproductive change concerns changes in ideology relating to women's role. I ask if the demonstration of women's ability to undertake serious academic study and to fill positions in the professional work force presented a challenge to the gender order and to the notion, carefully put in place during the first part of the nineteenth century, that women were associated with the private domain and men with the public world of action and discourse. The question of possible changes in women's consciousness , in their subjectivity, will also be a concern in this work. In what way did the experience of higher education shape the "gendering" of women students?

Several studies from the diverse fields I have discussed have been crucial for my understanding.

## Literature review

In order to locate the changes that higher education made to women's lives it is important to examine the broader pattern of change, as higher education was only one of the many facets of women's experience undergoing transformation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes* , set in industrializing England in the period 1780-1850, a considerably earlier time span than the focus of this study, offers a profoundly insightful exploration of the process whereby sexual difference underpinned the emergence of the middle

class and the creation of the ideology of separate spheres.[1] It was from this English middle class that white South Australian society was born, a society which in the late nineteenth century was just beginning to undergo industrialization.

The authors principal argument, "rests on the assumption that consciousness of class always takes a gendered form."[2] Before industrialization, they argue, women played a significant part in economic enterprises, both on farms and in small business enterprises. During the early period of industrialization and of the emergence of the urban bourgeoisie, many women continued to play an important economic role, bringing capital into the enterprise as well as their labour and the labour of their children. In thriving new industrial areas such as Birmingham, businesses and industries often adjoined the family residence and all family members were aware of the workings and of the day to day problems of the enterprise.

Yet as businesses became larger and in some instances, labour revolts became visible, places of work and residence were increasingly separated and with that separation women lost their productive role. An important aspect of bourgeois class formation, Davidoff and Hall contend, rested on a tension at the heart of middle class thinking, a tension between a belief in a free market economy and a commitment to the importance of maintaining ties of belonging to a social order.

Furthermore, they believe, that the provincial middle classes cannot be understood outside a religious context.

> Middle class men and women were at the heart of the revivals which swept through all denominations. Their most vocal proponents had their sights fixed not on gentry emulation but on a Heavenly Home. The goal of all the bustle of the market place was to provide a proper moral and religious life for the family.[3]

Women were the obvious "bearers" of the moral code of the bourgeoisie. As the physical separation of work and home proceeded, so too women were expected to remain in the home, to withdraw from the

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1 Davidoff and Hall *Family Fortunes*
2 Ibid p 13
3 Ibid p 21

morally tainted world of business and to display qualities of femininity, dependence, passivity and asexuality. This description is in itself not new. What is novel about Davidoff and Hall's work is their insistence that sexual difference was not merely affected by the process of class formation but was itself integral to it.[1] Women came to be more tightly associated with the family, both in a specific ideological sense and in a material way. Opportunities for women outside the family shrank to a particularly low level:

> ...women's work opportunities were closely constrained in relation to their position within the family and the path was never easy for would-be independent spinsters..[2]

The emergence of the middle class can be seen from women's perspective to be predicated as much on women's withdrawal from market activity as on men's withdrawal from domesticity although, paradoxically, men's market activity was justified in the name of the family. As many writers have pointed out, this situation was fraught with tension and with contradiction. The historian Eric Hobsbawn noted that the notion of the bourgeois family flatly contradicted that of bourgeois society. "Within it [the family] freedom, opportunity, the cash nexus and the pursuit of individual profit did not rule."[3] While the middle class was the class of self assertion women were to efface themselves publicly; while bourgeois women were to eschew sexuality and embrace religion and domesticity, the women of the streets proliferated, presenting a very different model of sexuality. While the bourgeoisie extolled service to humanity whether in the colonial or civil service for its sons, it confined its daughters to the hearth and to a very narrow range of religious based activity.

These contradictions were, of course, to lead by mid-century to a groundswell of unrest among middle class women, unrest which led to the emergence of the women's movement and to demands for access to better education, to well paid work and to political representation. It is

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1 Another innovative study which demonstrates the centrality of gender to class formation is Mary Ryan's *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790 1865* Cambridge University Press 1981

2 Davidoff and Hall *Family Fortunes* p 25

3 Hobsbawm E J *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* Abacus 1977

necessary to acknowledge the fundamental nature of the bourgeois relegation of women to domesticity to comprehend the enormous task women faced in challenging that limitation and re-emerging into the public domain.

Davidoff and Hall's study provides a particularly useful analysis of a social class in formation, the social class from which at a later stage university graduates were to come. Moreover their study makes central the issue of gender as a crucial part of class formation. It will be argued in a later section of this study that a further stage of class articulation occurred towards the end of the century, during which the definitions of femininity worked out in the early part of the century were reworked in accordance with the needs of the professional and managerial class.

Martha Vicinus, in her study *Independent Women*, locates the movement for higher education in England as part of the mid-century wider movement of middle class reform.[1] During the second half of the nineteenth century, she argues, the liberal intelligentsia transformed education and the professions in England, providing an opening that middle class women were quick to seize. Extending Vicinus's argument, I argue that the interest in, and desire for education by that group was fuelled by the increasing acceptance of the idea of the career based on talent. This was a notion readily espoused by the new entrepreneurs and professionals unable to join the Tory-Anglican hierarchy of tradition.

The bourgeoisie, keen to aquire education for their sons in order to secure their newly claimed class position, were not received with open arms by the ancient foundations of Oxford and Cambridge. Frequently non-conformist in religious matters, the bourgeoisie was excluded by religious tests until 1871. Moreover the type of education provided by these institutions did not appeal to the new men of commerce. As I explained in an earlier study, the transformation brought about by capitalism and industrialization also challenged the complacency of the ancient universities and shook them into an uneasy alliance with

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1 Vicinus Martha *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* Virago London 1985 p 123

nineteenth century "progress."[1] The growth of industry and the accompanying growth of science, given new impetus by the revelation of Darwin's theories in 1859, caused many reformers to question the use of Classics as a basis for all knowledge.

The notion that it was "the sole business of the university to train the power of the mind, not to give much positive or any professional knowledge" was being questioned by 1850 by the Royal Commission on Oxford University.[2] Nevertheless the ancient universities were resistant to changes to their membership and to their courses of study. It was the new universities which were quick to dispense with religious barriers and to introduce professional schools. London University, which had grown out of the "radical infidel" University College in Gower Street, was described as "an institution which stank in Oxbridge nostrils."[3] Yet it was London University which first admitted women to degrees in 1878 whilst Oxford and Cambridge withheld full admission until 1919 and 1948 respectively.

The emergence of the new universities, initiated and supported by the middle class, proved to be crucial not only for middle class sons but, as we shall see, for their daughters. Women were quick to take advantage of major changes occuring in a society in flux. Vicinus argues that the founders of women's colleges in England sought a better education for middle class women, not a revolution in social relations.[4] Yet I will argue that unwittingly or not, the admission of women to universities did presage a revolution in social relations, in the gender order, causing reverberations which echo in our own time. That revolution was inextricably bound up with the continuing process of class formation, during which the professional and managerial sector of the bourgeoisie secured its hold on power in the emerging corporate state, a society characterized by a shift from entrepreneurial capital to corporate capital and by a process of increasing state formation.

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1 Mackinnon A G *One Foot on the Ladder: Origins and outcomes of girls secondary schooling in South Australia* University of Queensland Press 1984 p30ff

2 Maclure J Stuart *Educational Documents: England and Wales 1816-1963* p68

3 Gardner W J *Colonial Cap and Gown* University of Canterbury 1979

4 Vicinus *Independent Women* p135

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg recognizes the revolutionary potential of the admission of women to higher education.She believes that such an education would take women outside conventional structures and social arrangements. She argues that

> to place a woman outside of a domestic setting, to train a woman to think and feel "as a man", to encourage her to succeed at a career, indeed to place a career before marriage, violated virtually every late Victorian norm.[1]

Indeed, it severely set at risk the enterprise described by Davidoff and Hall, the relegation of women conceptually and materially to the realm of the private. This notion, as has already been noted, was fragile at the best of times and was frequently contested. Vicinus argues that the founders of women's education, "hedged in on all sides by social and economic constraints", gained their intellectual freedom at the price of political timidity.[2] This approach seems to imply that for significant social change to occur direct political action is necessary. I believe that we need to define social change in a much broader way and to look beyond the narrowly political.

Taking a much broader approach in her work on North American "college " women (the transatlantic equivalent of the British university women) Smith- Rosenberg charts the new territory encountered by the pioneers. For the first time, she argues, young women had left the physical and emotional security of home and kin.[3] Furthermore, those who made the daring step of entering the new co-educational universities violated many taboos of gender-segregated bourgeois society. As Smith-Rosenberg states, "co-education threatened the very principle of gender polarity."[4]

One species of graduate woman in particular - "the single, highly educated, economically autonomous New Woman" - constituted, Smith -Rosenberg believes, a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon.

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1 Smith-Rosenberg C *Disorderly Conduct* p 252
2 Vicinus *Independent Women* p135
3 Smith-Rosenberg C *Disorderly Conduct* p249
4 Ibid p250

> Eschewing marriage, she fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical, economic and social reforms and wielded real political power...Repudiating the Cult of True Womanhood in ways her mother - the new bourgeois matron- never could, she threatened men in ways her mother never did.[1]

This is a very different analysis than Vicinus's idea of political timidity. Perhaps some of the difference can be accounted for by Smith-Rosenberg's shift of focus to demographic behaviour as well as political. In particular she highlights the notion of the single woman, independent economically and emotionally, an historically rare phenomenon. By choosing not to marry, these few women struck at the very heart of domestic ideology, of separate spheres. The degree of virulent reaction which greeted the phenomenon is some indication of its threat. In this study I follow Smith- Rosenberg's analysis as one starting point, testing her generalizations in the South Australian context. I ask if women graduates did display a demographic pattern that was different from the norm.

In order to assess the demographic typicality or otherwise of graduate women some engagement with recent demographic literature is necessary. Of particular interest both to demographers and to historians of women is the vast demographic change known as the demographic transition. The major decline in fertility and in mortality which occurred in most Western countries took place in very much the same period that women began seeking higher education. It was demographic change, particularly the rising age of middle class marriage, as I will argue in the following chapter, that created one of the conditions for educational advance. At the same time the entrance of women to higher education greatly amplified, for one section of society, several significant features of that change. The social position of women and the decline in fertility were inextricably linked.

This fact does not appear to be acknowledged by the major analysts of the fertility transition. Explanations of the causes of the demographic transition have tended to focus on economic and structural factors.

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1 Ibid p245

Lesthaeghe and Wilson, writing in their contribution to the Princeton Fertility Project publication, sum up the classic position :

> The gradual decline of the familial mode of production, the rising aspirations with respect to intergenerational mobility, the role of education where parents can increasingly afford it, and the increasing degree of independence between the generations all lead to much faster diminishing returns from children.[1]

Certainly all these factors, part and parcel of the growth of industrial capitalism, and of the bourgeoisie, played their part. What is lacking is an analysis of women's part in each of them, an approach which sees women as both objects and agents of the changes taking place. If for instance one can postulate the importance of education for children as a vital motor for demographic change, as Caldwell does, then how crucial was the notion of education for women? If women came to value education for their sons, how would they consider the absence of it for themselves and for their daughters? These and other associated questions I will address in the following chapters.

The demographic historian John Caldwell places enormous emphasis on education as a motor of demographic change. He argues that the changes in education characterized by the large scale provision of mass schooling in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century reversed the 'wealth flow' from children to parents so that parents 'invested ' in children for increasingly longer periods, thus incurring direct costs and opportunity costs.[2] Not only did education change the economic value of children, in Caldwell's view, but it broke the exploitative hold of parents on children.[3] This was achieved through the disintegration of family ideology largely brought about by the spread of mass education.

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1 Lesthaeghe R and Wilson C "Modes of production, secularization, and the pace of the fertility decline in Western Europe,1870-1930" in Coale A and Watkins S (eds) *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* Princeton University Press 1986 p ??

2 Caldwell J C "Towards a Restatement of Demographic Transition Theory" *Population and Development Review* 1976

3 An account of the way in which the value of children as economic assets was drastically reduced can be found in Zelizar V A *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Value of Children* Basic Books 1985

Caldwell used contemporary experience in the third world to explore the historical experience of the West. From that work he observed that in order to understand the fertility transition one must demonstrate links between macro level explanations (such as those proposed by sociologists) and micro explanations (which tend to focus on issues such as individual choice.) The answer lay in examining "middle level" institutions, such as the family, kin groups, and ethnic groups. In focusing on the family Caldwell deduced that the major impact of the spread of mass education was ideological, redefining the child as a future worker. It also led to the decline of family morality (backed by religion) "that enshrined the value of children living austerely and of children and (and wives) working hard and being helpful without making undue demands."[1] Furthermore education imposed universal values, not the particularistic ones of family.

Leaving aside the parenthetical reference to wives, understandable perhaps in the context of a general discussion on children, a feminist would observe that such a dramatic change constitutes a challenge to patriarchy in its most direct sense as 'the rule of the father'. This issue, not taken up by Caldwell, or by Mark Stern, who comments on Caldwell's work in his study, nevertheless constitutes an important argument for my purposes.

Caldwell's contribution to the demographic transition debate, particularly his emphasis on the institution of the family and on the role of mass education, is useful and pertinent to this study. So, too, is the work of Stern who in a detailed analysis of Erie County, New York sought to bring an understanding of social class to the debate. Stern found a broad explanation for the decline in fertility in the changing family economics and class structure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Shifts in opportunity, he argues, altered the logic of family formation and child rearing.[2]

Specifically, Stern argues that the growth of corporate capitalism in the United States transformed both social classes and the labour market.

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1 Quoted in Stern M *Society and Family Strategy Erie County, New York 1850 -1920* State University of New York Press 1987 p14

2 Ibid chapter 1

The business class split into "old business", those who could rely on wealth and inherited property, and "new business", a group of business employees and professionals who had no inherited wealth or position and increasingly relied on qualifications for their advance. The labour market changed; large corporations and organizations such as law firms and hospitals employed the labour of business employees and professionals in ways inimical to old forms of family labour. The new business class needed to adopt new stategies to adapt to the managerial revolution. Stern maintains that "education was the switching station for the change in family strategy".[1] His detailed empirical work demonstrates that the new business class in Erie County was the first to avail itself of the new high schools and the first to demonstrate significant fertility decline. One of the results of the spread of mass education which passes virtually unnoticed in the demographic literature is the fact that it was women who would largely staff the new schools, who would themselves need more education for that new role.

It is not my intention at this point to explore any further the work of historical demographers such as Caldwell and Stern as I will return to their work in Chapter 4 in my discussion of the Adelaide graduates. However their work does present certain problems for a feminist approach to demographic change. Although Caldwell and Stern make isolated references to women, on the whole they play little part in their analysis. Stern does acknowledge, for instance, that while school attendance "exploded" among boys of the new business class, for girls cultural factors were more important. Nevertheless their work exhibits the shortcomings of much social history from a feminist viewpoint - a tendency to use explanations which subsume women under some other group such as family or class.

This is curious when one considers the centrality of child bearing to women's lives. Nancy Folbre reminds us that at the heart of feminist theory lies a central insight about the nature of motherhood: that it is the social and historical context of childbearing and childrearing that largely determines their structure and meaning.[2] This context, she continues,

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1 Ibid p3

2 Folbre N "Of Patriarchy Born: The Political Economy of Fertility Decisions," *Feminist Studies* 9, No 2 Summer 1983 p261 passim

links motherhood to the larger pattern of patriarchy. Thus, "the social relations which govern human reproduction often reinforce the domination of women and the exploitation of women's labour." Given the feminist preoccupation with the social aspects of motherhood Folbre asks why they have had little to say about the demographic transition to lower fertility rates. Feminist theory, she believes, must offer a unique insight into explanations of fertility decline.

Folbre's attempt to make good this deficiency is innovative and useful. She reviews theories of fertility decline, noting that missing from both economic and noneconomic explanations is any explicit consideration of economic inequalities between the sexes and between the generations. Focusing on relations between the sexes, Folbre argues that the transition to capitalism was a crucial turning point as it diminished patriarchal control over adult children, therefore reducing the economic benefits of large families.This contributes to a decline in desired family size which weakens resistance to women's demands for conrol over their own reproduction and modifies the traditional sexual division of labour. In other words the bargaining power of women increases. The possibility that changes in women's bargaining power might affect fertility decisions has never been conceded in the literature, Folbre asserts.Yet an acknowledgement of this factor provides for the possibility of political struggle.[1]

Folbre's work complements that of Caldwell and Stern, who see the crucial change to patriarchal relations brought about by the undermining of father- son authority. However these authors frequently display a gender-blindness. As Folbre insists, the transformation of economic relationships between parents and children are so closely intertwined with the transformation of economic relationships between women and men that they cannot be isolated. As returns from adult children's labour diminish, a sexual division of labour which channels women into childbearing and rearing becomes more costly to individual families.[2] At this point women begin to seek non-market activities which contribute to the family's standard of living.

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1 Ibid
2 Ibid p275-6

Folbre's work is particularly useful for an understanding of the childbearing patterns of early women graduates. A feminist argument, giving priority to the experience of women, adds the missing dimension to otherwise useful social histories. Arguably daughters of the new business, professional and managerial classes, early women graduates may have optimized their bargaining power within or outside traditional families. This proposition will be explored. It is in this context that the question of changing subjectivities will later be addressed.

Another writer whose work offers promising insights for this study is Wally Seccombe. Influenced by Folbre's notion of increased bargaining power for women, Seccombe sought an explanation for the widespread desire to prevent further conceptions among married working class women in early twentieth century England. Noting the flaw in the fertility literature, he states

> The standard models of fertility regulation conceived by demographers are framed at the level of the reproductive *couple* , as if spouses made purely harmonious joint fertility decisions. But insofar as the costs and benefits of additional children are unequally distributed between the sexes, men and women have different incentive structures for childbearing.[1]

Recognizing the deficiency Seccombe suggests that

> If the pivotal task is to explain a profound alteration to spousal relations, an adequate conceptual framework *must* allow for the distinct interests and prerogatives of husbands and wives. When needs and goals are in conflict, how are fertility decisions reached and divergent objectives negotiated?[2]

In his article Seccombe uses qualitative evidence (mainly letters) to support the argument that working-class women did gain more bargaining power within their families in the first years of the twentieth century. The reasons for the change were complex, including a fear of endangered health and a drop in living standards. However, a new element enabled women to assert their needs in a way not previously

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1 Seccombe W "Starting to Stop: Working-Class Fertility Decline in Britain" *Past and Present* (forthcoming)

2 Ibid p28

possible. That element was a change in consciousness, made possible, Seccombe asserts, by both the diffuse impact of feminism, particularly a questioning of conjugal rights, and by the legitimation by the medical profession of women's fears for their health. I don't wish to discuss Seccombe's substantive points at this stage: however, I believe the introduction of qualitative evidence to try to tease out subtle changes in the balance of power between husbands and wives is a crucial development in our understanding of the fertility transition.

Other writers see in the fertility decline of the late nineteenth century a continuance of a move towards autonomy previously manifest in the form of changes in divorce and property laws. McDonald, in an article on the modern family, explains woman's changing role as a consequence of autonomy, "the individual's capacity for self-direction".[1] He quotes a study by Quiggan who noted that the decline in the birth rate in the late nineteenth century required the co-operation of husbands and wives. Quiggan concluded that this indicates "a changing attitude to women, including a belief that they should not be subjected to an unremitting cycle of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation."[2] McDonald concludes that the pursuit of greater autonomy for women within the family was clearly a major cause of fertility decline. This type of argument, reminiscent of Lawrence Stone's changes in "mentalité", is not, I believe, sufficient on its own. It is very difficult to establish why a particular idea "emerges" in a specific historic setting. However it needs to be taken into account when considering more economistic demographic explanation.

So far I have canvassed a range of arguments which pertain to the very broadest questions which can be asked of women's entrance to higher education, questions such as "Did education dramatically change women's lives? Did it lead to greater fertility control or greater autonomy?" I ask if the experience was part of the wider transformation which took place in women's lives in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century and if so what was the specific mechanism which set early graduates apart? Was it a result of wider change and if so did it capitalize

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1 McDonald P "Families in the Future:The Pursuit of Personal Autonomy" in *Family Matters: Australian Institute of Family Studies Newsletter* December 1988 No 22 p44

2 Quiggan P *No Rising Generation: Women and Fertility in Late Nineteenth Century Australia,* Australian National University Press 1988 quoted in McDonald p44

on that change and secure its gains? Was it, in effect part of the challenge to patriarchy, to the gender order? Although I cannot expect to find answers to such large questions in a limited study I can illuminate some areas and evaluate the usefulness of wider theory for South Australia.

The questions I have raised come mainly from fields such as social history, feminist history and demography. I now turn to works specifically concerned with the history of women's education and assess their contribution to an understanding of women's lives. It is not surprising that there has been a wealth of publication on women and universities in the last ten years. Not only has women's history expanded but many universities have publicly celebrated the anniversary of the graduation of their first women graduates. This impetus to take to the pen has resulted in some work in the celebratory mode but most writers have availed themselves of the opportunity to reflect analytically on the terrain covered by women over the one hundred years since their admission.

In his useful work on five Australasian Universities (Sydney, Melbourne, Otago, Canterbury and Adelaide) Gardner comments that it is often difficult to pick up the major themes which link them from official university histories as they are "commonly overlaid by the theme of uniqueness." Clearly the university historian realizes that the task is to establish a separate identity for the institution, to describe affectionately the idiosyncrasies of staff and place, to evoke happy memories. Comparative studies, Gardner urges, should usefully lead to better balanced university history where uniqueness is allowed but similarities can be drawn out. "My impression is," Gardner maintains,"that under closer scrutiny, the area of the unique shrinks - at least in the eye of the uncommitted beholder."[1]

This has certainly been my experience in examining several recent works on women in universities in England, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Within virtually ten years ( with the exception of the U. S., where some progress was made earlier) women in those countries gained admission to higher education in one form or another. This one fact overwhelms any major consideration of differences

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1 Gardner W J *Colonial Cap and Gown: Studies in the Mid-Victorian Universities of Australasia.* University of Canterbury 1979 p10

between institutions; paradoxically an analysis of differences can highlight the different weighting given by particular societies to the several factors leading to women's admission to higher education.

Most studies of women and higher education contain three aspects - a discussion of the politics of admission, a description of the experience, and an evaluation of the outcome. Clearly the emphasis varies and it is the evaluation of outcomes which has been, until recently, least well analysed. The most recent and comprehensive study, Barbara Miller Solomon's *In the Company of Educated Women,* is strongly analytic and also tackles a fourth aspect, "the uneasy connection between feminism and women's educational advancement". This particularly valuable work is not, Solomon argues, a history of institutions but of "generations of women: those who hungered for education, those who fought for it, and those who took it for granted."[1]

In reviewing the writing on the politics of admission, one finds that few writers have examined, even in a fairly superficial way, the wider context of the 1860s and 70s. Gardner's work on Australasia is typical in locating the impetus for change in the demand for better qualified teachers in the growing school system. He does not examine the reasons for that demand or the fact that it was women who were increasingly filling the schools.[2] Farley Kelly, in her "short" history of women in the University of Melbourne also mentions the importance of the reorganization of education during the decade of the 1870s. She however, also notes the narrowness of occupational choice available to the growing number of middle-class women who needed to be self-supporting and the fact that demographic imbalance and late middle class marriage made some women's economic independence imperative.[3]

In her very detailed account of the history of McGill University in Quebec, Margaret Gillett focuses on the response to the demand for

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1 Solomon Barbara Miller *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* Yale University Press 1985 pxvii

2 This omission is understandable as Gardner's work is exploratory and confessedly limited in scope, the expanded version of the Macmillan Brown lectures. His work nevertheless raises some very interesting themes.

3 Kelly F *Degrees of Liberation: A Short History of Women in the University of Melbourne* The Women Graduates Centenary Committee of the University of Melbourne 1985 p 6 f

women's education rather than on the reasons for the demand itself.[1] A broader account of the social reasons underlying that opposition in England can be found in Joan Burstyn's valuable work.[2] Burstyn traces the changing ideals of womanhood and the difficulty certain powerful administrators faced in reconciling their views of the nature of women with the idea of their education. Gillett's work demonstrates that attitudes of educators such as McGill's Principal Dawson could delay women's admission to a university by a few years, and could shape the form that education might take, whether it would be segregated or co-educational. They could not however, prevail in the long run against the wider social changes noted by Kelly.

Solomon's work on higher education for women in the United States does take into account the larger context. In explaining the growth of female academies in the period 1790-1850 Solomon stresses that female education was linked with the Republican ideal; that republican wives gained a special role in the creation of an informed citizenry. The second "great awakening" which swept America during this period also elevated the ideal of the Christian wife, mother and teacher as a crucial "influence" on the developing republic. These sentiments, resulting in the strong growth of female academies, established a firm base on which the later movement for the higher education of women could build.[3]

Solomon points out that factors other than changing sentiments played their part in bringing about an acceptance of female education. Demographic change, particularly later age at marriage, led to the phenomenon of unmarried daughters, needing to be self-supporting for several years or, perhaps, for life. Industrialization, particularly in the north-east, altered the domestic tasks of daughters, factory production taking over some of women's earlier role. Although class differences played a part, (wealthier daughters may have been sent to an academy to make them cultured marriage partners, poorer girls for a preparation to teach) the great class divides of industrializing England were not evident. The ideal of domesticity which became so stultifying in England, was

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1 Gillett M *We Walked Very Warily: A History of Women at McGill* Eden Press Women's Publications 1981

2 Burstyn J *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* Croom Helm 1980

3 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women* Chapter 2

tempered in the United States by the Republican ideal of useful motherhood and the Christian ideal of usefulness, of the special female mission.[1]

The tracing of the early nineteenth - century background in Solomon's work explains the earlier development of a system of higher education for women in the United States. She emphasizes the crucial nature of school teaching as a base, and the vital role of religion, which justified women's admission to evangelical colleges. Oberlin College in Ohio admitted both men and women to its classes in 1836, educating them together, but with a strong sense of each sex's separate mission " to carry out God's cause on earth". Interestingly, although the demand for university (rather than academy) study for women gained strength from the 1850s, and began to show success from the 1870s, those pressing for women's admission to men's universities such as Yale and Harvard encountered the same opposition as the advocates of women's higher education in England, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.[2]

If the accounts of women's higher education vary in the amount of attention given to the broader context they are far more uniform in their coverage of the "politics of admission". This aspect often constitutes the major focus of an historical study. Ailsa Zainu'ddin's well-contextualized work for example, written in 1973, is a thorough account of the personalities, arguments and successes of advocates and opponents of women's higher education at the University of Melbourne.[3] Farley Kelly draws on Zainu'ddin's work and on archival sources to detail the battle drawn between the "progressive" members of the university government who were responsive to women's pleas for admission and the "old guard", who firmly resisted.[4] This battle was to be fought with varying degrees of success and with slight regional variations in Sydney, in Christchurch, in Oxford, in Montreal, in Toronto and in Harvard, indeed, in nearly all universities which had been established for men and whose bastions women now attempted to broach.

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1 Solomon Ibid
2 Solomon Chapter 4
3 Zainu'ddin A "The Admission of Women to the University of Melbourne 1869- 1903" in Murray-Smith S (ed) *Melbourne Studies in Education* 1973
4 Kelly F *Degrees of Liberation* p9

Kelly reports that:

> Opponents' arguments grew more complex as the acceptance of women's access to higher education seemed more certain, but they remained constant across the English-speaking world. Local conditions to some degree influenced the choice of argument; for instance, clerical fear of interference with their control of university government was a major factor in England, particularly at Oxford, while it was less important in Australia.Yet most colonial opposition came from predictable quarters, with arguments that were familiar to the moderately well- read Australian.[1]

She might well have added any moderately well-read Canadian, New Zealander or American as the opponents of women's education resorted to the same range of arguments, varying them in intensity, emphasis and timing. Kelly identifies the major sources on which opponents drew as Biblical authority (which advised women to submit to their husband's superior authority), social convention which made innocence synonomous with ignorance, evidence from the newly emerging fields of comparative anatomy and physiology, and from the economic consequences of the fuller employment of women. These same arguments were employed in England as a range of writing attests.[2]

Gardner, in his comparative work on five Australasian universities, argues that in the new 'Wakefield' societies, that is the planned colonies of South Australia, Otago and Canterbury, "women were accorded a greater if still circumscribed role, and a better balance between the sexes was achieved from the outset." These societies were also characterized by a high level of dissenting religious groups. Although there was no social platform for independent feminism, he maintains that there was more opportunity for enlightened women to influence sympathetic men in high places.[3] Canadian, English and American studies also point to a broad pattern, discernible through the individual studies. It was in areas where Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and other

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1 Ibid p4

2 See for instance Burstyn J *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* , Bryant M *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century* University of London Institute of Education 1979 and Delamont S and Duffin L *The Nineteenth- Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World* Croom Helm 1978

3 Gardner *Colonial Cap and Gown* p69

dissenting religion flourished that the admission of women to higher education was first entertained. In America evangelical reform gave women a new place; they needed education for their new role as moral guardians. The form that education would take, whether the same as men's or different, was by no means uncontested.

If broad patterns can be observed of the politics of admission they are also discernible in the experience of the early women students. Barbara Solomon sums up one of those patterns very nicely in her reference to the first three generations of women. Others have sought to identify patterns in the struggle for acceptance. Writing of fifteen universities in English speaking Canada, Donna Ronish noted the common pattern of reluctant acceptance of the first pioneering female sudents, the negative reaction when the numbers visibly grew and then the eventual, if begrudging acceptance by the turn of the century.[1]

These and other studies warn against an account of any institution which focuses only on its uniqueness. A concentration on the broad structural features can, however, overlook the active participation, the agency, the experience and feelings of the women involved in the early phases of university life. We need to look at both the experience of graduates as a group and as individuals.

A heightened consciousness of the importance of that experience has led over the last few years to a flourishing of works focusing on the women students and graduates. Centenary celebrations have sharpened a desire to know what it felt like to be a pioneer in a new and socially ambiguous field. Committees set up to examine the status of women in universities today look back to earlier graduates and staff in order to measure the progress made, the distance still to go. In this context several collections of short autobiographical reflections have given readers an opportunity to trace the changing attitudes of graduates from the early days to the present.[2] Although the voices of the earliest graduates cannot

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1 Ronish D Y Sweet Girl Graduates: The Admission of Women to English-Speaking Universities in Canada in the Nineteenth Century. Thèse Presentée a la Faculté des Etudes Supérieures en vue de l'Obtention du Grade de Philosophie (Ph. D.) Université de Montreal 1985

2 See for instance Grimshaw P and Strahan L (eds) *The Half -Open Door: Sixteen Modern Australian Women Look at Professional life and Achievement* Hale and Iremonger 1982, Dawson M and Radi H *Against the Odds: Fifteen Professional*

be heard in this way other historians have seached letters and diaries and sought reminiscences from family members in order to reconstruct fragments of the experience and consciousness of the very first to undergo higher education.[1] Such collections are particularly useful for this work as I attempt to gain an understanding of the changing consciousness of early graduate women.

This, of course is part of the third dimension of histories of university women which I referred to earlier, the analysis of outcomes. What difference did a higher education make to women's lives? This was a matter of major importance to contemporaries of the women concerned who feared that women would be unsexed and refuse to take their place in the traditional family hierarchy. Advocates of women's education hoped for better occupational choice for women, some hoped to change the marriage relationship, seeking greater equality for women. Both advocates and opponents foresaw changes in marriage; advocates hoped that women would gain more choice, that being economically self-sufficient they could exercise more discretion in choosing a marriage partner or not marry at all, opponents feared that those choices might undermine the family.

In late nineteenth century Oxford the social class distinction between those who would expect to earn a living and those who would not was nicely illustrated by the students' own perceptions. A typical query at cocoa parties was, "Are you going to teach when you go down or be a Home Sunbeam?" Howarth and Curthoys suggest that in highly socially differentiated societies there were always present a small group of upper class students for whom the notion of paid work was unacceptable.[2]

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*Women Reflect on their Lives and Careers* Hale and Iremonger 1984 and Gillett M and Sibbald K *A Fair Shake: Autobiographical Essays by McGill Women* Eden Press 1984

1 Examples of this approach may be found in large histories such as Solomon's survey of higher education in America, in histories of particular institutions such as Gillett's history of women at McGill and in articles. An example of such an article is Williams P "Pioneer Women Students at Cambridge, 1869 - 1881" in Hunt F (ed) *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850 -1950* Blackwell 1987. A study which uses both letters and diaries and autobiographical reflections is Mackinnon A *The New Women: Adelaide's Early Women Graduates* Wakefield Press 1986

2 Howarth J and Curthoys M "The Political Economy of Women's Higher Education in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain" in *Historical Research* Volume 60 No. 142 June 1987 p220

Nevertheless the vast majority of Oxford graduates would become teachers.

Understandably then, those authors who examine the outcome of the university experience tend to look at occupational choices made by women graduates and at any changes in marriage patterns. Gardner argues that the wholesale move into teaching (mainly secondary) by women graduates was "probably the first real evidence of wider social horizons for their sex."[1] Thus he concludes that the greatest single effect of women's graduation was infiltration into the staffs of the new girl's high schools. This finding has been reported in several other studies in Australia, in Canada and in England.

In the United States Solomon reports that

> Mary Van Kleeck's study of over sixteen thousand college graduates (as of 1915) indicated that an even higher proportion, 83.5% of those working, were teachers...Significantly, teaching has functioned as an intermediate or final step in the careers of distinguished female achievers; among the 1,359 individuals included in *Notable American Women* (1-111) many engaged in teaching permanently or for a period.[2]

Solomon points out that this conclusion holds for private women's colleges, co-educational institutions and state universities. It also appears to hold for the newly emerging material on black women. These facts cause Solomon, taking a rather different tack from Gardner, to ask why college women still turned to what was the most traditional option? Part of the answer lies in the fact that for women of a lower middle class background teaching was a vehicle of upward social mobility. For educated women of higher social levels teaching was a way of continuing to study while earning a living; it also frequently paid better than the semi-professions such as social work and librarianship which required further training.

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1 Gardner *Colonial Cap and Gown* p 107
2 Solomon *In the Company of Educated Women* p127

The question of occupational choice for women graduates is an important part of this study. As I am concerned to establish whether higher education for women did challenge the gender order, I need to take into account the extent to which women's choices were widened. Gardner views new opportunities in teaching as "the first real evidence of wider social horizons for their sex." Solomon, taking a feminist view, sees teaching as a traditional option. So too does Margaret Rossiter in her comprehensive study of American women in science. She describes attempts by the earliest American women in academic life to secure post-doctoral fellowships for young women with doctorates in order to prevent them from "sinking into plain schoolteachers".[1] I will address this divergence in more detail in Chapter 5 where I examine the careers of Adelaide graduates.

An equally compelling set of issues arise around the question of the marriage rates of early women graduates. Some early statistical work on this topic is available as graduates were called upon to rebut the notion that they were unmarriageable, and possibly infertile, from almost the era of the first graduates. A study of Troy Seminary graduates from1833 to 1872 forshadowed the low marriage rates of college or university women. These early academy graduates, Anne Scott revealed, showed significant proportions unmarried. Solomon quotes Mary Van Kleeck's analysis of college women (as of 1915) which revealed even higher percentages of unmarried women in the college generations. On the whole statistics suggested that less than 50 percent of college women married.[2]

Gillett quotes Robert J. Sprague, a frequent contributor to the *Journal of Heredity,* who examined several Eastern American womens' colleges and found low rates of marriage amongst the graduates of the classes of 1867 - 1892. He also calculated that those who married produced on average only 1.91 children each. These findings, Gillett reports, are consistent with the situation at McGill.[3] In New Zealand a similar situation existed. Gardner cites a study of early Canterbury graduates,

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1 Rossiter M *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* Johns Hopkins University Press 1982 p49

2 Solomon *In the Company of Educated Women* p119

3 Gillett M *We Walked Very Warily* p 16-17

noting that 54.7 percent remained unmarried. He also comments that graduates frequently married later than their contemporaries.[1]

Confronting a similar set of figures on Oxford and Cambridge women Howarth and Curthoys ask

> Did college education make women unattractive to the opposite sex or unfit them for life of housekeeping and motherhood? Or make them regard marriage as a 'rather dull and unintellectual career', while giving them the economic independence to opt out of it? Or simply channel them into teaching in girls' schools, where they had few opportunities of meeting men?

They go on to hypothesize that the low rate of marriage among college women may have had more to do with nuptiality patterns in the social classes from which they were recruited than with the effects of university education. To support this claim they cite a contemporary study by Clara Collet, a distinguished graduate of University College London who calculated from census returns that over half the women in the servant-keeping classes in Kensington were still single at forty-five. Collet suggested further that within these classes the least likely to marry were probably the daughters of professional men and clerks.[2]

Perhaps social class was as salient a factor in the low marriage rates as was the claim made by some contemporary feminists that they could choose to earn their own living and had 'a lofty conception of the marriage relation'. [3] It appears that in this period many women began to entertain higher expectations of marriage. It was in this 'servant-keeping class' that the idea of a companionate marriage, one where husband and wife could share ideas and possibly discuss such issues as ideal family size, began to be noted.

Did highly educated women pioneer the notion of a wife as an intellectual partner to her husband as Delamont believes? [4] Perry Williams describes a striking example of such an intellectual partnership

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1 Gardner *Colonial Cap and Gown* p110
2 Howarth and Curthoys "The Political Economy of Women's Higher Education " p229
3 Delamont and Duffin *The Nineteenth Century Woman* p182
4 Ibid P184

in the marriage of Hertha Marks and Will Ayrton.[1] Although few marriages at the turn of the century would have attained the level of academic endeavour of that union, several writers have argued that the internal dynamics of the marriage relation was changing. This was possibly related to the economic change described earlier; where women's child bearing function was no longer paramount, women began to look to other activity to contribute to the family. For the professional class the education of daughters began to make economic sense.

The notion of changing relations between married partners brings us to the question which Barbara Solomon refers to as the "uneasy connection between feminism and women's educational advancement." The uneasiness of that association is highlighted in Delamont's work on the educational pioneers in England. Delamont coined the phrase 'double conformity' to describe the necessity for both educators and educated to conform to two sets of rigid standards; "those of ladylike behaviour at all times and those of the dominant male cultural system."[2] Thus women seeking acceptance for their inclusion in higher education did not compromise themselves by associating with those seen to be supporting openly feminist issues such as the demand for suffrage or for the repeal, in England, of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Such activities were seen as the antithesis of ladylike behaviour and would have brought down the wrath of parents, clergy and those doubtful of the benefits of higher education, upon the infant institutions.

Gardner makes a similar observation of New Zealand commenting that graduates were often cited by suffrage campaigners as evidence for women's equality. However, in New Zealand, as in Australia, graduates themselves rarely played a part in suffrage politics.[3] He contends that for graduates seeking professional careers open political activity would have affronted employers. Both Gardner and Delamont's positions are no doubt true of involvement with overt political issues. This perspective, however, employs a particularly narrow definition of feminist activity, a

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1 Williams in *Lessons for Life* p188

2 Delamont and Duffin *The Nineteenth Century Woman* p140

3 This was possibly because in New Zealand and in South Australia women's suffrage was achieved relatively early in a period where there were few graduates. In Canada, where women's suffrage was achieved later many university women played an active part in suffrage campaigns.

definition sometimes termed public feminism. Similarly Solomon's reference to the uneasy connection between feminism and women's educational advance seems to rely on a concern with women's participation in public feminist affairs.

Although there were graduates in all the countries discussed who did play a part in public feminism it seems that the majority did not. I believe that it is essential, then, also to reconsider a definition akin to that proffered some time ago by Daniel Scott-Smith. Smith used the term domestic feminism to argue that women's position could be strengthened within the family through such means as voluntary limitation of fertility.[1] This definition presents some difficulties as Smith assumes a separate spheres model of society, and argues that gains within the family benefitted all women. His work has been challenged on this basis. However this model has some force when we consider the importance of changes in spousal relations. As more subtle explanations of fertility change are suggested, such as those of Seccombe and Folbre, an increase in bargaining power for women within the family, a lessening of the power imbalance between men and women, comes to be seen as an important aspect. And higher education, I will argue, did increase women's bargaining power.

A similar problem arises in the literature which examines the link between feminism and fertility reduction. In their classic work on Victorian England, Banks and Banks conclude:

> The feminist movement as such was not a causal factor in the advent of family planning, and any of its activities which may validly be linked with this development are to be seen as consequences not only unanticipated, but almost certainly unapproved. [2]

Disagreeing with this conclusion, Quiggin points to the unsatisfactory nature of the Banks' definition of feminism, which is very much public feminism. She quotes Scott-Smith's assertion that with the

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1 Scott-Smith D "Family Limitation, Sexual Control and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America" in Hartman M and Banner L (eds) *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* Harper and Row 1974

2 Banks J A and Olive *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* Liverpool University Press 1964 pp128-129

increased importance accorded to the role of wife and mother in Victorian America, married women aquired a new autonomy within the family.[1] Arguably this new autonomy can be viewed as a form of feminism in that it led to women having some control over their bodies and through myriad individual decisions, contributed to the demographic transition. In order then to test Solomon's proposition of the uneasy connection between feminism and women's education I believe a wider view of feminism must be taken than has been generally used.

Linda Gordon's definition is wide and inclusive. She views feminism as a "sharing in an impulse to increase the power and autonomy of women in their families, communities and/or society".[2] Such a definition allows us to view the actions of many individual women as contributing to a challenge to the gender order. It enables us to look behind such blanket descriptions as 'demographic change' and discern the actions of many individual women.

In this review of a range of literature from several fields I have highlighted the major themes I wish to address and the principle theoretical approaches I find useful. To sum up, using insights from feminist history I ask to what extent women's entrance to higher education challenged the gender order, the power relations between men and women. In order to explore that question I focus particularly on changes in women's reproductive behaviour. Following the work of feminist demographers I explore the role of educated women in the fertility decline. I draw on a range of writing on women's higher education in several Western countries to assess the similarities in women's experience and, paradoxically the differences in the response of individual women to that experience. I look briefly at changes in graduates' access to paid work and evaluate the links between occupational choice and class position. Finally, I ask whether there were discernible differences in consciousness in the way graduate women saw themselves in relation to men, to other women and to wider society.

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1 Quiggin P *No Rising Generation: Women and Fertility in Late Nineteenth Century Australia* p13

2 Gordon L *Woman's Body, Woman's Right* Penguin 1977 xiv

**Methodology**

In order to address these questions in a broad theoretical framework I use a range of sources. For the debate on women's admission to the University of Adelaide, sources from the University archives (including private papers) were consulted, supplemented by contemporary periodicals which commented on events.

To establish the social class background of the graduates and to find out their marital status, age at marriage, number of children ever born and other information crucial to the demographic study, a large computer-assisted study was undertaken. Information was collected from a number of official records. University Calendars provided the names of the first two hundred women graduates, the previous school they attended, and details of academic progress. Some university registers provided incomplete documentation of students' parents regarding address and occupation. On the whole, however, these proved to be too sketchy to be of much use.

A large number of early graduates had attended the Advanced School for Girls in Adelaide and their family details could be found in a computer printout which I had compiled for an earlier study.[1] Nevertheless the bulk of information necessary for family reconstitution was obtained from the Registry of Births, Death and Marriages in Adelaide where a time-consuming examination of personal records was undertaken. Details of the process of searching are given in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4. In some instances where documentation was unavailable anecdotal evidence was obtained from surviving family members or literary evidence from periodicals or biographies was taken into account.The material collected in this way became the data base for statistical analysis.

The demographic study provided the major raw material for an examination of women's reproductive profiles and in some instances for their occupational status. Occupation could sometimes be found on marriage certificates and, for single women, on death certificates. A

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1 Mackinnon A Less for Fashion than for Substance: The Advanced School or Girls, M Ed University of Adelaide 1981

different set of sources was needed to gain an understanding of women's feelings and experiences. In order to get beneath the skin, as it were, of the earliest graduates I searched for diaries, letters, autobiographies and biographies. These proved to be hard to find as few early graduates attained public acclaim and their papers are rarely deposited in public collections. An appeal through a local newspaper brought one or two serendipitous finds such as the diaries and baby books of Annie Welbourn.

Canadian and American histories seem to have access to student diaries. These appear to be almost non- existent in the Australian context. Was it that residential colleges, which Adelaide lacked, provided the atmosphere or privacy which Adelaide students did not share? Adelaide women students frequently walked or rode their bicycles a fair distance to university classes and returned to a household where there were family chores to be done and less time for privacy. It seem scarcely likely that as a group they were less introspective.

Several of the later group of the earliest graduates (those who had graduated by 1922) were still living and were very happy to reflect on their experience.Thus I was able to use taped interviews to capture their reminiscences. These taped reflections and the diaries and other autobiographical material provided insights into two aspects of graduates' lives. I was able to discern very individual voices, personalities shone through the often fragmentary sources: on the other hand a sense of a cohort could be detected, common themes and concerns were evident.

Much has been written about the shortcomings of oral history as a source of historical evidence. Critics question the validity of memory of events recalled from a distant past, perhaps a past which spans eighty or ninety years. Others challenge the representative nature of any particular reminiscences. And, it has been pointed out, those reflecting on their life span will tend to order their experience in ways which make sense in the light of subsequent events. These difficulties did not present a problem for this study. Generally I was not looking to autobiographical material to substantiate events but to gain an understanding of university women's perceptions, the meanings of their own lives.

What I was seeking was less tangible. Writing of the difficulty in discerning individuals' subjectivity Anna Tröger claimed:

> Generally you could say that the ... influence of the dominant discourses is stronger in educated persons, even going into the structure of their own narratives. They are already shaped according to the dominant discourses, mostly in the form of analyses - they don't tell stories.[1]

Dorothy Smith also believes that for middle class women a language of their own is not possible. She contends that some groups enjoy their own language, their own 'submerged tradition' but;

> they [submerged traditions] have largely disappeared for women and most particularly for middle class women - that is women who have in common relatively highly developed skills in literacy and are oriented towards written media, the authority of women's magazines, professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists) and so on.

More pervasively, she continues;

> The penetration of the society by the ideological process includes, particularly for the relatively highly educated, an "in-depth" organization of consciousness.[2]

In the taped reminiscences of early graduates, indeed in all the autobiographical material, signs might be found of narratives "shaped according to dominant discourses". Similarly, however, I expected to find individual responses which revealed a range of diverse strategies, resistances which shaped those discourses in particular ways. I believe that both Tröger and Smith tell only half the story and tend to deprive educated women of a sense of agency over their lives. Possibly a study of their fertility decisions may illuminate subtle ways in which educated women challenged the dominant discourse. Through their texts I also

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1 Tröger A "The Conceptualizaton of the Subject in Oral History and Feminist Research", Humanities Research Centre conference paper University of Adelaide August 1986

2 Smith D "A Sociology for Women" in Sherman J A and Beck E T *The Prism of Sex* pp143-4

searched for any change in consciousness which could illuminate any shifts in the relations between men and women.

These are large and fairly speculative questions and the answers are sometimes elusive. What can be approached with more assurance is the question of the admission of women to the university of Adelaide, the university which Gardner declared to have the best claim in Australasia to the title "spiritual daughter of London University."[1]

1 Gardner *Colonial Cap and Gown* p37

## Chapter 2 The Keystone of the Arch

Writing in 1898 Alice Zimmern described women's admission to universities as "the keystone of the arch, without which the rest of the fabric could have neither stability nor permanence." Like other Victorian reformers she believed that access to all levels of formal education was crucial for women to enter the professions, train other women and girls and prove their worthiness to vote[1]. Zimmern was writing in the English context; her hopes however were those of many women activists in all parts of the Western world.

Others had very different views of the purposes of women's higher education. As Solomon points out in the American situation, women's special role as mothers of male citizens (and, in a later period, as teachers of male citizens) provided the dominant rationale for the higher education of women, a rationale accepted by both men and women supporters. However, that rationale co-existed with a philosophical recognition of the rights of individuals. These varied aims adopted by educational reformers highlight some of the basic contradictions in the area. Another contradiction, that between the education provided within a university and the probable destinies of its female graduates, clearly contained the possibility for social unease. The notion of a liberal education, slanted in the colonies to an eventual professional career, was at odds with the ideal of a wife and mother, subordinate to her husband in most respects.

The Adelaide case presents a puzzling situation for the feminist historian versed in the history of women's higher education, as two basic ingredients seem to be missing. There was very little male opposition and little evidence of female advocacy. The notion of women's admission seems to have been taken for granted from the earliest days of the university's founding. Opposition to the idea came not from local opponents but from a colonial administration in faraway London which did not like the idea of a colony initiating a precedent before it had been considered worthy of adoption in England. The nature of South Australian society in the 1870s does, however, indicate a great deal about sources of possible support for the admission of women to a new

1 Zimmern A *The Renaissance of Girls' Education* London 1898 quoted in Vicinus *Independent Women* p122

university. In this chapter I will tell the story of women's admission mentioning en route some of the possible explanations for the puzzling omissions.

Both Ronish's work in Canada and Solomon's in the United States point to the fact that certain religious groups favoured women's education more than others. It was the Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists for whom Evangelical reform had strengthened women's role , who first admitted women to places of higher learning. Anglicans and Roman Catholics lagged behind. In late nineteenth century South Australia dissenting Protestant religions played a prominent part. Hilliard and Hunt point out that

> at each census from the 1860s to the 1970s ...a higher proportion of the state's population identified itself with the Baptist, Churches of Christ, Congregational, Lutheran and Methodist churches than anywhere else in Australia, whereas those churches that were a powerful majority in their United Kingdom homelands - the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland - were weaker in South Australia than in any other colony or state.[1]

The Methodists were particularly strong at their peak in the 1870s, comprising one in four of the South Australian population.[2]

It was not only its religious composition which made South Australia a likely climate for a reasonably enlightened approach to women's education. The political and social views of many of the colony's prominent citizens made them part of a liberal progressive ethos which resulted in South Australia being hailed twenty years later as the social laboratory of the Western world. Gardner makes much of the planned nature of the Wakefield settlements of Adelaide, Otago and Canterbury. Describing the character of John Macmillan Brown of Christchurch, he points out that the "first practical promoter of higher education for women in Australasia " was a meritocrat, one who believed in the career open to talent. If talent was found in women then it was to

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1 Hilliard D and Hunt A "Religion" in Richards E (ed) *The Flinders History of South Australia* Wakefield Press 1986 p194

2 Ibid p206

be developed. Men such as Macmillan Brown were prominently represented in the groups who supported women's admission to the University of Adelaide.

### Early Steps Towards Higher Education for Women

It was, however, one of the Adelaide elite who first proposed a scheme of higher education for girls. The lack of an education for girls and young women beyond that provided in a few state-supported elementary and private girls' schools became an issue for South Australians in the late 1860s. That lack was felt by the South Australian Governor, Sir James Fergusson, himself the father of daughters. In July, 1869 Fergusson wrote to Sir Henry Ayers remarking on "the want of some means of higher education generally acceptable to young ladies here - which I had been led to believe existed." He proposed a scheme for a Ladies Public College and informed Ayers that he had enlisted the support of "three or four gentlemen" and intended to enlist others who had taken a part in promoting education. Interestingly those prominent citizens included not only the Anglican Bishop but leading non-conformist clergy.[1]

Ayers reply was encouraging. He wrote:

> ..the observations which you so appropriately made at the opening of the Alfred College with respect to the want of means for a higher class of education for young ladies, did not escape my notice. The absence of such means has seriously inconvenienced us for many years and I cordially approve of the scheme proposed in your paper for supplying the want.

His support was not without qualification: Ayers believed that to set the age of admission at fourteen years of age would be "fatal to the success of the proposed institution." He argued that if young ladies' "habits, manners and character" were to be influenced, then the process should be begun earlier. On a more pragmatic level he believed that the number of young ladies of that age who were "desirous or able" to continue their studies for any length of time would be so small that the

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1 Letter from Sir James Fergusson to Sir Henry Ayers 10 July 1869 Private correspondence of Sir Henry Ayers, (Education folder) University of Adelaide Archives (hereafter U A A)

fees would have to be unacceptably high. Nevertheless, Ayers concluded that if the scheme were to be ultimately placed on a basis which he considered feasible he would be happy to become a subscriber to it.[1]

Fergusson's plan was an interesting one, probably based on English models such as Cheltenham Ladies College, which the Governor would have known. It was clearly directed at "improving the Education of the Young Ladies of South Australia of the upper and middle classes". Fergusson demonstrated a fine sense of social distinction in his reasoning. The lower class were not to be considered as their labour would be needed by their families. But, he continued

> the provision must be within the reach of both of the classes named, as in this community persons who belong to the middle class today may be ranked tomorrow in the upper, and that which is necessary for the upper class is not too good for, while it may serve to elevate and improve, the middle class.[2]

The issue of an emerging upper class preoccupied the Governor. He claimed that it was common in Australia to find parents who had risen from a lower class anxious to have their children educated suitably to their altered position. These parents had to send their daughters to England or repair there themselves at great personal inconvenience. Hence Fergusson proposed a school which would meet their needs. He outlined two possible models : one residential with a lady principal, the other an Educational Institute in which all pupils would be instructed in classes, but with board and lodging provided separately.The latter he favoured as" better suited to the divided ecclesiastical condition of South Australia." Boarding houses could be provided by different denominations and could perhaps provide for "pupils requiring somewhat varied expenditure."[3]

The proposed college was to be called The Victoria Institute or College. A Council of Management, composed naturally of men, was to be formed and a Ladies Committee of similar size would recommend among

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1 Letter from Sir Henry Ayers to Sir James Fergusson 12 July 1869 in Ayers correspondence U A A

2 Sketch of a scheme for a Ladies Public College for South Australia. Ayers correspondence U A A

3 Ibid

other things the course and duration of studies. The male Council would, however, decide the curriculum. Clearly this was unlikely to be a proposal initiated by a group of women, although we cannot assess the conversations that took place in Adelaide drawing rooms, vice-regal or otherwise. It is obvious that developments in women's education in England, where the Taunton Commisioners were reluctantly examining the state of women's education, were known to South Australians. Co-incidently, 1869 was the year of publication of J S Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, in which Mill argued "the claim of women to be educated as solidly .....as men".[1]

The Victoria Institute never came to be. The institution most resembling a female college which was set up ten years later, the Advanced School for Girls, was a very different entity, run by the state and catering for a wider group than the upper and soon-to- be upper class envisaged by Fergusson. Not all Adelaidians shared their Governor's vision of an emergent gentry, a class he referred to at a farewell dinner in 1872, stating that he had

> originally believed (that) South Australia was like an English County... but that it had to work without the natural leaders which in an English county gave the tone to society.... (He now believed that) thirty years had raised an Upper Class in the colony of which any county in the old country might be proud.[2]

One dissenter from that viewpoint was the radical politician Rowland Rees who referred to that upper class in 1874 as "a mushroom, conceited, varnished aristocracy".[3]

The proposed Female college provided an opportunity for a letter-writer to an Adelaide newspaper to ventilate his views on female education. Female education, he (she?) maintained, was a scheme for putting male heads on female shoulders. He could not see the use of the higher branches of education, of "educational mathematics and the classics" for any for whom they would not form the tools of a profession.

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1 Mill J S *The Subjection of Women* London 1970 p20

2 Van Dissel D "The Adelaide Gentry, 1850-1920" in Richards E (ed) *The Flinders History of South Australia* p334

3 Ibid

He expatiated predictably on women's proper sphere, domestic relations,and the feminine virtues " which it is her glory to cultivate". Furthermore he maintained that "this pedantic itching" was not a female idea but originated in some of her enthusiastic patrons. [1]

This letter is interesting in that while it rehearses arguments common to those opposing women's education, it was rare in Adelaide. Indicating disagreement with its sentiments was a note appended by the Editor: "We publish this; but we are sure the writer entirely misapprehends the movement. - Ed". Was there considerable truth in the claim that the idea did not originate in a female mind ? Certainly the public presentation of the scheme came from male supporters and I have not discovered any evidence of women taking part in the debate. Yet in the 1860s it was rare for women to speak publicly or to present their views in any public forum. In England the early advocates of women's higher education frequently enlisted men to present their views and further their cause. As Davidoff and Hall's work reminds us, the fact that women were absent from the official record does not mean that they played an insignificant part in determining events. Nevertheless, research in women's history in South Australia has not brought to light any particular group of women at this stage who appeared to be championing women's education.

The point is an important one, for five years later the Act of the University of Adelaide attempted to include in its Charter the admission of women to degrees. Although this initial attempt was not successful it was a British decree which overruled the move, not local resistance. Again women's voices are not heard in the lead up to the decision to admit women. Again the beliefs, both religious and secular, of the male advocates seems to explain their actions.

**Founding of the University of Adelaide**

The writers of its centenary history describe the establishment of the University of Adelaide as the result of what has been called "a

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1 Letter signed 'Ne Sutor Ultra Crepidam' Register 1869 in Newspaper cutting book U A A

splendid act of self- abnegation".[1] It was also a model of religious co-operation. In February, 1872 three denominations, Congregational, Presbyterian and Baptist, joined together to found a college which was to be primarily theological but would also offer some secular courses. Classes began a few months later offering Classics, Philosophy, English Literature, Mathematics and Natural Science. Union College, as it was appropriately named, was an immediate success, manifesting a "decidedly secular appeal".[2] The need for more funds led the Reverend James Lyall, a Presbyterian minister connected with the college, to approach a wealthy friend for assistance. Walter Watson Hughes agreed to support the College with a donation of £20,000, a very large sum for the period.

Hughes was a retired sea captain who had been a sheep farmer in Macclesfield and on the Yorke Peninsula. The discovery of copper on his property at Wallaroo and later at Moonta made his fortune.[3] Others claimed that his fortune was originally based on "the nefarious practice of opium dealing".[4] This matter was of less concern to the recipients of his generous gift than its disposal. At this point the foresight of a congregational minister, James Jefferis, led directly to the founding of the University of Adelaide. Jefferis, a graduate of New College, University of London, and one of the lecturers at Union College, believed that the College needed a complete Arts course such as a university would provide. He suggested that:

> If a wider basis were adopted for the courses of secular instruction... other denominations... would be disposed to unite in the establishment of a system of university training.... leaving the theological courses to be followed in separate colleges in affiliation with the University.[5]

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1 Duncan W G K and Leonard R A *The University of Adelaide !874 - 1974* Rigby 1973 p1

2 Ibid p2

3 This account of events follows Duncan and Leonard *The University of Adelaide* pp2-3

4 Howell P A "Saints or Scoundrels? A Re-appraisal of some notable South Australians, with Reflections on Related Issues." in *Journal of Historical Society of South Australia* No 7 1980

5 Duncan and Leonard *The University of Adelaide* p2

University historians, Duncan and Leonard, relate that in September 1872, Jefferis's suggestion resulted in a meeting where three proposals were discussed :

1 That it is desirable to further liberal education in the province by founding a University for work in Arts and Medicine.

2 That the University shall have the power to affiliate any college or institution irrespective of its religious beliefs.

3 That a committee representing all classes in the province be set up to carry out these aims.

These proposals were all adopted and Law was added to Arts and Medicine.[1] Some of the hopes and ideals of the founders can be seen in the proposals: the university was to make no religious distinctions, as the exclusions from Oxford and Cambridge still rankled in the memories of non-conformists. All classes were to be represented, an ideal which did not survive but which indicated the break from stultifying class barriers which the founders wished to make. Hopeful of building a new society they wished to do away with centuries-old privilege.

In the same month a University Association was formed. Mr W W Hughes was appointed President and Dr Augustus Short, Bishop of Adelaide, Vice-President. Dr Short's appointment warns of too ready an acceptance of a non-conformist ascendency, as he was the colony's leading Anglican and his vigorous support for the University played a large part in gaining its acceptance. Nevertheless the new University Association, in a letter outlining its aims in more detail noted:

> Members of all denominations having joined heartily in the movement, one important though incidental advantage resulting from it will be the helping to lessen the religious difficulties of the community.[2]

After the preliminary meeting in September the *Register* contained a long editorial discussing favourably the idea of a University for Adelaide. This writer also stressed that for a University to command the support of the community at large " it should keep absolutely clear of

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1 Ibid p2-3

2 Letter dated 31st October from University Association to person unnamed (possibly the Governor) U A A

theology, and devote itself to the liberal arts, embracing natural science, law, medicine and perhaps technology." The choice of disciplines was particularly radical for 1872, emphasizing the point that Adelaide did not need a University based on an Oxbridge model. Deploring the fact that those wanting a university training had to travel to England, the writer argued that a local institution would reduce the expense by fully two-thirds,

> and thus bring the higher education it would afford within the reach of persons of moderate means, many of whom we feel assured are as anxious as their wealthier neighbours that their sons should enjoy the benefits of collegiate training. [1]

Pursuing the idea of broader access the writer commended the notion that the university should adapt itself to the special wants of the community. He believed that it should not only admit full-time students but follow the example of "the Working Men's College established by the late Professor Maurice" and admit evening students from the artisan and business classes. Strongly supporting a vocational model the writer pointed out the need for the university to train teachers, which would raise the general standard of education.

In their early deliberations the men who made up the University Association also suggested a wide range of subjects adding to the predictable classics, philosophy, English literature and language, such innovations as political economy, modern languages, natural science and natural history, geology, zoology, botany, chemistry and even agricultural chemistry. Most innovative of all was technology. They intended eventually to set up schools of law and medicine. Part of their goal was a scientific, industrial and agricultural base to build a strong society.

The insistence on the secular nature of the new institution and the determination from the start to provide courses in science, leads to important understandings about the university promoters. They were part of that stratum of the middle class, so visible in industrializing England, now transplanted to Australia, who saw knowledge, or symbolic property, as their new capital. This new group, Sara Delamont argues, was

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1 *The Register* September 18 1872

without inherited property and capital and had a strong interest in "cultural interruption", a process which created novel roles for women.[1]

Interestingly, in the light of these quite radical and innovative proposals, there is no mention of women as potential students. The University Asociation specifically hoped to gain for "the young men of the colony " the advantages of a literary and scientific education. The proposals for a secular and broadly based university represented quite a departure from most English models, although not from London University, whose "spiritual daughter" Gardner claimed Adelaide to be. It is particularly curious to reflect on the absence of any mention of women students, as two years later, in the application for a Royal Charter it was clear that Adelaide wanted to bring in two major innovations. One of those was the admission of women, the other the granting of degrees in science.

These two innovations are critically connected and can be explained by reference to the social origins of the founders. Again Delamont's analysis is helpful. She suggests that for the new middle class the mother came to play a crucial role in the transmission of the symbolic and cultural capital, so necessary for class consolidation. The commitment of the wife/ mother to this role was essential. If not involved in this vital social function a woman was better off as a paid worker supporting herself.[2] Hence the commitment of this group to women's education was understandable.

Before turning to the question of women's admission I will briefly consider the events which resulted in the new university failing to take up immediately the opportunity of a more radical and innovative curriculum. The University Association, numbering 200 of Adelaide's leading men, appointed an Executive Council to take steps to promote the foundation of the university. In April, 1873 the Executive Council reported to the Association that they had distributed a circular throughout the colony and in England in the hope of attracting annual subscriptions and donations. Their efforts had been disappointing and Hughes' gift remained the single large contribution. Many appeared to be reluctant to

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1 Delamont S *Knowledgeable Women* p160
2 Ibid

contribute until the new institution began to take shape. Accordingly the Council made plans to begin classes based on the secular subjects taught at Union College. They did not intend to appoint professors with full salaries but to establish lectureships in a wider range of subjects.

Hughes put an end to these plans. When approached for some of his promised gift the donor specified that the income from his deed of £20,000 was strictly limited to the endowment of two Professorships - the first in Classical and Comparative Philology and Literature, the second in English Literature and Learning and Mental and Moral Philosophy. Furthermore Hughes specified that the first chair was to go to the Reverend Henry Read, the second to the Reverend John Davidson.The Executive Council, who had wished the sum to be distributed over a wider area, drew up statutes defining the appointment of professors and took the ingenious step of persuading the two proposed incumbents to waive one half of their stipends for twelve months so that classes could be provided in other subjects.[1] The courses of study planned by the Council included beside the two specified by Hughes the following areas Mathematics, Modern History and, as group of its own, Geology, Mineralogy, Chemistry and Agricultural Chemistry.

It is noted in the minutes that two other clergy in the Association moved an amendment before adopting the report, disapproving of the arrangement made with Read and Davidson. Perhaps they had special insight into the financial difficulties of men of the cloth. Meanwhile Hughes was so dismayed that others had not followed his generous example that he considered his money should be put to other educational uses. "As it has turned out," he wrote to the University Association, "the attempt to start a University is a dead failure."[2] The matching of Hughes' gift by his friend Thomas Elder, a year later in 1874, enabled two Professorships to be established, one in Mathematics and the other in Natural Science (including Geology and Mineralogy as well as Chemistry).

The foregoing account gives some idea of the constraints faced by the Adelaide University Association who sought to bring into being some

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1 Report from Executive Council to the Members of the Adelaide University Association April 8th 1873 U A A

2 Duncan and Leonard *The University of Adelaide* p3

fairly radical ideas. Nevertheless, the distinctive nature of the new institution was nicely drawn out by the theme of the inaugural address: in that address, in April 1876, the Vice-Chancellor, Bishop Short, established at considerable length,"the amicable relations between Science and Religion", even drawing in the work of free thinkers such as Comte and J S Mill. The established church put forward its progressive face.[1]

**The Admission of Women**

We do not have any record of the Association's public view on admitting women to degrees.Yet some of the members no doubt supported the move. In 1869 Governor Fergusson, an Association member, had initiated a move for a female college. John Hartley, headmaster of Prince Alfred College strongly supported women's education. He was studying for his science degree at the University of London in 1868 when women were first admitted to classes there. Charles Pearson, a disciple of F D Maurice, had taken part in a lecture programme for women in England and knew first hand of women's academic capabilities.[2] He wrote:

> My lectures at Liverpool and Manchester... certainly had the effect on myself of destroying any vestiges of prejudice I might have remaining about the fitness of women to receive the same intellectual training as men. [3]

Two daughters of the Reverend Silas Mead, 'the Baptist Bishop of South Australia', became University students.[4] In effect many of the men who played an active part in the University Association were precisely those of non-conformist background and liberal leaning, that new class who were typical of graduates of the University of London.

Was the admission of women a male idea? Helen Jones believes that there were only

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1 Ibid p7-8

2 Tregenza J *Professor of Democracy* Melbourne University Press 1968

3 Quoted in Zainu'ddin A "The Admission of women to the University of Melbourne, 1869- 1903" in Murray- Smith S (ed) *Melbourne Studies in Education 1973* Melbourne University Press p53

4 Hilliard and Hunt "Religion" in Richards E *The Flinders History of South Australia* p207

> ...the most amicable male sentiments towards the plan of opening the University of Adelaide to women from its inception. In the debate preceding the passage of the University of Adelaide Act in 1874 no discussion occurred on women's admission, and women were not specifically mentioned in the act. They were admitted to the classes from the first without comment.[1]

The University Council's determination to gain formal recognition of its desire to admit women, demonstrated in a lengthy process which I will outline shortly, supports Jones's view. It might be argued that some wider economic or demographic factors rendered women's position in the colony as visibly different, as requiring intervention into a previously accepted means of female socialization. This does not seem to be the case. Bacchi points out that there was a pattern of almost universal marriage for women up to 1876, with South Australian women marrying at a younger age than their contemporaries in Great Britain or in the rest of Australia. She also notes a tendency toward larger families between 1861 and 1876, and a low participation of women in paid work due to South Australia's rural character and low degree of industrialization.[2]

As a consequence, Bacchi maintains, the Victorian concept of women's role as homemaker and child-rearer became well established. This seems to be the key to the support for women's higher education. Educated women, as homemakers, would strengthen the society with their moral guidance and special nurturing skills. And they would transmit the necessary cultural training, a training increasingly associated with the knowledge required by the new schools. Newspapers of the period stressed women's involvement in reforming enterprises such as the Female Refuge and the Benevolent and Strangers Friend Society, strongly affiliated with churches of varying denominations. James Jefferis, initiator of the entire university project and Congregational minister, commented on the Refuge in 1870:

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1 Jones H *Nothing Seemed Impossible: Women's Education and Social Change in South Australia 1875 - 1915* University of Queensland Press 1985 p86

2 Bacchi C " The 'Woman Question' in South Australia" in Richards E (ed) *The Flinders History of South Australia* p406

> I do not think the clergy can do much in stimulating and helping others to the work. It *must* be done by women. Her sympathy and tact and tenderness alone can prevail.[1]

John Hartley, another University Council member from its earliest days and a supporter of women's higher education, while displaying radical ideas on university education, had very traditional nineteenth-century views on women's place. Women, he believed, made excellent schoolteachers, but they were not to abandon their special duties. His views are clear in a letter he wrote to a female schoolteacher:

> This leads me to mention distinctly and separately one great difference between men and women. Many of the latter earn their bread during the day and spend the evenings and early mornings, which would be a time of comparative rest, in the discharge of women's special function as the ministering angel of life, or else in domestic duties.[2]

Hartley's views contain a characteristically contradictory stance common to "reforming" men of the new middle class. While admitting women's intellectual abilities, he envisaged the use of those abilities in very traditional pursuits. Charles Pearson, another promoter of women's admission, went on to become the founding Principal in 1875 of the Presbyterian Ladies' College in Melbourne. In his inaugural lecture on 'The Higher Culture of Women' Pearson advocated the right of women to compete on equal terms with men for the 'career open to talents' but was careful to point out that four- fifths of women would marry and spend most of their energies in rearing their families. Pearson appears to be quoting English figures on marriage rates as in Australia at this time the marriage rate was much higher. His reference is an interesting example of the way in which school and university reformers transplanted English arguments to Australian soil in a period when economic and demographic realities were quite different. His views appear genuinely progressive, however, and he ridiculed opponents of women's higher education.

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1 Quoted in Bacchi p412

2 Quoted in Mackinnon A *One Foot on the Ladder: Origins and Outcomes of Girls' Secondary Education in South Australia.* p73

> Nature, says the conservative theorist, has intended women to stay at home and manage their houses and we will not recognize the fact that a certain considerable percentage of women must for ever remain without houses to manage.They may be teachers, but they shall not have that training and those tests, which make the teaching of men efficient. They may be nurses, but they shall not acquire that medical knowledge without which tenderness and care may sometimes be the most dangerous of allies. It is unfeminine, improper, indelicate, that they should lecture to public audiences, or argue in courts of law; but reason and custom permit that they should amass large fortunes by singing and acting on the public stage.[1]

The views of these men, characterized by a common belief in women's intellectual capacity, yet an observance of the different destinations of women scholars, were not at odds with the thinking of advanced women of the period. Not surprisingly, in view of the demographic realities of the 1870s, many thoughtful women saw marriage as the most likely future of the majority of women. Catherine Helen Spence, the colony's leading spokeswoman and advocate of voting reform, saw higher education and training for a 'livelihood' as a basis for a better marriage choice. It would save women from the "humiliating position of seeing in marriage their only refuge from poverty and neglect, to allow them to take a dispassionate view of an offer".[2] This sentiment was heartfelt as Spence herself was able to take a dispassionate view, refusing marriage offers and choosing a single life of public service.[3]

Spence also thought educated women could enter marriage on a more equal basis. They would be better companions and those who had worked before marriage would understand the management of money. Dress and fashion, she hoped, would lose their slavish grip on women's lives. Social gatherings would be less frivolous, public morals would be improved and she hoped that women would enter public life, bringing greater attention to women's property rights and divorce laws. These views reflect Spence's strong commitment to a life of service for both men and women. Deeply religious, Spence belonged to the Unitarian Church

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1 Tregenza J *Professor of Democracy* p79

2 Spence C H *Some Social Aspects of South Australian Life* Adelaide 1878 Reprinted from the South Australian Register Kyffin Thomas p8

3 Magarey S *Unbridling the Tongues of Women :A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence* Hale and Iremonger 1985

which allowed women a greater part in religious observance. She also typified a group of thinkers in Adelaide whom Spence would have characterized favourably as 'doctrinaire'. She saw the move for women's suffrage, for example, in the following terms

> This, the greatest step towards enfranchisement of women all over the world, is, I think, directly due to our doctrinaire ancestry, which I trace to Molesworth, Grote, Mill, Wakefield and Rowland Hill, all advanced Radicals and strong for women's rights .[1]

Spence, however, seems to have played no public part in the move for women's admission to the university. Another woman whose views on the role of educated women are recorded was Lillian Mead, daughter of the Reverend Silas Mead and a university student in the 1890s. In 1895, under the auspices of the W C T U she published a pamphlet entitled, *The Awakened Woman*. In it she outlined a classic nineteenth century position, that men and women were intended to be "essentially equal and relatively different". Believing firmly in women's intellectual ability and aptitude for higher education, she argued that no-one can arbitrarily decide what is woman's place. That could not be determined until women have complete freedom of choice. Nevertheless Mead thought that the awakened woman *will* choose the home and the world, in that order, as her special womanly endowments are "her power to teach, purify and inspire man; her capacity for guiding and ruling, her special function as the distributer, the orderer, the mother, the comforter and the beautifier in life."[2]

Mead's position can be seen as a statement of the ideology of separate spheres, of men's work and women's work. It appears to present no challenge or threat to the status quo. It would strike a chord of sympathy in a male reader who did not wish his comfortable world to be disturbed. There is however, a subtle difference in Mead's argument, an essential and significant point. The element of choice is crucial. Women must be able to choose their place. Of course Mead argued in keeping with nineteenth century realities and assumed most women would be located

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1 Spence C H quoted in Jones H Women's Education in South Australia: Institutional and Social Developments, 1875 - 1915 Ph.D. Adelaide 1980 p265

2 Mead L *The Awakened Woman* Adelaide 1895

within the domestic sphere. The seeds of radical possibilities are sown however, if the element of choice is conceded. Mead did not contribute to the debate for the admission of women, indeed her work was published twenty years later. Her views and those of Catherine Helen Spence do nevertheless allow some insight into the thinking of late nineteenth century South Australian women on the purposes of women's higher education. On the basis of their writing we can assume that the thinking of progressive men and women in the state was not far apart.

**The Battle with London**

If the attitudes to women's higher education must be carefully drawn out from indirect sources, from reading between the lines, the progress of the actual admission was well documented and can be approached far more directly. The men who demanded women's admission to degrees may not have articulated the reasons for their support but they made up for that deficiency by their determination.[1] In 1913 the Vice -Chancellor, Doctor William Barlow, who had been the Registrar in 1878, wrote a long Memorandum entitled *In regard to the steps taken in 1878 for obtaining a Charter for the University* in response to a request from the Governor of Queensland. Part of the difficulty with women's admission was the fact that it was bound up with another innovation, the granting of science degrees. Barlow explained to the Queensland Governor, William MacGregor,

> When the original Act of the University of Adelaide was enacted in 1874, no University south of the Line had, it is believed, in its Royal Charter power to confer the Degree of either Bachelor of Science or Doctor of Science, or to confer Degrees on women. The Royal Charters of the Senior Universities of Sydney, of Melbourne, and of New Zealand did not comprise these powers.

He continued,

> Notwithstanding these omissions, it was determined here to attempt to obtain these coveted powers. The University of London had already obtained power to confer those Science Degrees, and so the Parliament of this State

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1 Perhaps their failure to refer to women's admission in the public minutes was a deliberate choice knowing the likelihood of opposition from London.

inserted the words "Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Science" in Section 12 of the original Act, No. 20 of 1874.[1]

Interestingly, Adelaide was ahead of London University in terms of the admission of women to degrees. Although women were admitted to classes at London University in 1868 they were not admitted to degrees there until 1878, four years after Adelaide's request. There were, therefore, no English or Australian colonial precedents for the admission of women. Precedents did, however, exist in other colonial societies. Mount Allison, a Methodist institution in New Brunswick, Canada, admitted women to degrees on equal terms with men in 1872, the first Canadian University to do so.[2] James Inch, University President, proudly and accurately proclaimed "While other institutions were halting and hesitating and putting the door ajar, "Mount Allison "boldly opened its doors to all irrespective of sex."[3]

Adelaide supporters of women's higher education probably knew of Mount Allison, although I know of no reference to it. They also may have known of the American models such as Oberlin College, co-educational from 1837. America could boast a range of institutions evolving from academies to colleges which approached a university model. The state - run University of Iowa opened in 1855 with male and female students. Interested Adelaidians may also have heard of the new women's college, Vassar, founded in 1865 by a devout Baptist who wanted to make women better teachers.[4]

London was the only University cited in the University Association's submissions, reinforcing the importance to the colonists of the English connection. Barlow outlined subsequent events in his memorandum to MacGregor.

Apparently it was deemed necessary to reserve that Act for assent of Her late Majesty Queen Victoria. That assent was not withheld, but the Governor of

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1 Barlow W "In Regard to the steps taken in 1878 for obtaining a Charter for the University." Memorandum written to Sir William MacGregor, Governor of Queensland 1913 U A A p1-2

2 Ronish D Y *Sweet Girl Graduates: The Admission of Women to English- speaking Universities in the Nineteenth Century.* p49

3 Ibid

4 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women* p 48

South Australia received a despatch (sic) - No. 6 of the 10th of February, 1875 - in which Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies forewarned His Excellency of the fate likely to befall any Petition from colonists presumptuous enough to pray for power to confer those two Science Degrees and to confer degrees on women.[1]

The Council persisted with its unwelcome demands and further petitioned the Colonial Secretary for Letters Patent in August 1878. In January 1879 Michael Hicks- Beach, Colonial Secretary replied, again withholding Letters Patent until the unwanted innovations had been removed from the Adelaide University Act. Paragraph 4 of the dispatch from the Colonial Secretary, reproduced in Barlow's memorandum, spelt out the specific nature of the presumption in relation to women.

With regard to the request contained in the Petition, that Her Majesty's Letters Patent may expressly recognize the granting of Degrees to women, I have the honour to aquaint you that Her Majesty's Government think it preferable that the constitution of the University of Adelaide should not, in the first instance at all events, contain so considerable a departure from the principles and procedures of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, in conformity with which the Degrees to be recognized in the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne and New Zealand have been determined.[2]

Adelaide thus found itself in precisely the situation it had been at pains to avoid, following in the footsteps of Oxford and Cambridge, the traditional representatives of a model Adelaide did not want to follow in several significant respects. Clearly a far-flung colony was not to introduce new ideas. The London *Times* did not have much to say on the topic of women students in Adelaide but it ridiculed the strange new notion of science degrees:

A bachelor, master or doctor of science would be like one of the insignificant dignitaries in the Society of Oddfellows or Foresters. How far his titled and jewelled badges were genuine or fictitious must be a puzzle which none but a South Australian would put himself to the pain of guessing.[3]

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1 Barlow Memorandum p2
2 Ibid p3
3 Mackinnon A *The New Women* p21

Keen to obtain the Letters Patent, which would otherwise be withheld, the Council reluctantly withdrew the two offending clauses from its Petition.They sought the passage in the South Australian Parliament of an amending Act, which was passed in September1879.[1] At the same time Council determined to further petition the Queen for full recognition of the powers assumed in the original Act. A long letter was drafted by the Letters Patent Committee of Council urging the Minister of Education to take further steps to request reconsideration of the issue. Barlow noted in his Memorandum that at the same time, (January, 1879) as the dispatch was received from London "it was understood in Adelaide that a power to confer Degrees on women had then recently been granted by a Supplementary Charter to the University of London." [2] The opportunity to create a precedent was lost to Adelaide.

The letter, written in October 1879, vigorously defended the Council's wishes to grant science degrees and to admit women to degrees. It began with an acknowledgement that the offending provisions in the Act had been repealed. In the same sentence the writer urged the Secretary of State to reconsider. The necessity to grant science degrees was dealt with first, as was usually the case. The writer pointed out that the repeal was effected with great reluctance , and only because it had been made a condition for the granting of "<u>any</u> Letters Patent". The people of the province had, through their representatives, made a strong demand for such degrees. During the debates on the repeal of the power (to grant science degrees ) "member after member spoke against it". [3]

Adelaide now had precedent to argue. "A denial to Colonial Universities of power to confer Degrees, which those in the United Kingdom may grant, seems indefensible in principle," continued the writer, citing the Charter of two new Universities in the United Kingdom, the new University of Ireland and the University of London. This argument was the major one invoked on behalf of women and again the Victoria University of Manchester, and the University of London were

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1 This was Act No. 143 of 1879, The Adelaide University Act Amendment Act. Barlow p4

2 Barlow Memorandum p4

3 Unsigned Letter in University archives, dated October 1879 U AA p3

cited. The absence of women either as students seeking entry or as a powerful lobby group seems implicit in the following passage:

> My Council cannot regard the fact, that women have not yet sought for Degrees in this University as a sufficient reason for withholding the power. Women, knowing the Secretary of State's decision, will not study for the unattainable, though a considerable number of them have from time to time, as non-matriculated students attended the class of the professor of English Literature, and the grant of the power would probably induce a competition for Degrees on the part of many women who are now debarred from coming forward by the knowledge that no amount of industry, and not even the most conspicuous success, will entitle them to the only suitable reward.[1]

Behind the scenes some girls were preparing to study for the unattainable; the first steps toward preparing for university admission were underway. In the same month as the letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies was being prepared, in October 1879, the Advanced School for Girls, an innovative state-run high school established to teach the higher branches of education, began its classes with thirty students. In that same year Edith Emily Dornwell, a student at the State Central Model School, won a bursary, one of the six provided by the state that allowed able girls to go on to the Advanced School for Girls. After a distinguished school performance, Edith was to become the equally distinguished first female graduate and first graduate in Science in 1885.

This information was not, of course made known to the Secretary of State. It does nevertheless indicate the sincerity of certain Adelaide men in Parliament and in the University Council in seeing through the admission of women to degrees. Strangely the public documents make no mention at all of reasons of principle for the admission of women. There is no spirited defence of the part to be played by educated women. It is taken for granted as a desirable end and the pragmatic issue of precedent is given priority. The researcher is left with the impression of a group of men, largely of non-conformist background, who took for granted women's intelligence and ability but who also assumed that women would use that ability in pursuit of their own ends, in the home and in public matters specifically pertaining to women. Women would be equal

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1 Ibid p7

but different. A remark made by Ailsa Zainu'ddin, of Melbourne University, seems as apt of Adelaide;

> One almost feels that here the expatriate liberals of Britain are taking their arguments to their logical conclusion in a society where they are not outweighed by the more conservative members of an Establishment.[1]

Having sent the letter requesting reconsideration of the repealed clauses, the University Council did not reliquish the issue. Notes from the Council Minutes for 1879 and 1880 reflect continuing interest in its progress. In February, 1880, a report in the minutes noted "Read Agent-General's letter of 2nd of January last detailing steps taken by him to procure the issue of Letters Patent."[2] In early April another report stated "Read Agent-General's letter dated 3rd January last detailing further steps taken by him to procure the issue of Letters Patent." Based in London, the Agent-General Arthur Blyth, who had been Chief Secretary at the time of the passing of the 1874 Act, was working hard to satisfy the wishes of his colonial colleagues.

Shortly after the April meeting a reply arrived from London. The petitions of the colonists had been successful. Michael Hicks-Beach, Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to Governor Jervois acknowledging receipt of the dispatch enclosing Act No.143 of 1879, amending the Adelaide University Act of 1874. He also responded directly to the long letter from the Registrar imploring reconsideration:

> "I have again taken this subject into my consideration, and, having regard to the strong feeling entertained in the Colony, and to your recommendation in favour of this renewed application, I request that you will inform the Council of the University that I will advise Her Majesty to Extend the scope of the Letters Patent so that the Adelaide University may be authorized to confer Degrees on Women, and that Degrees in Science granted by that Body may be duly recognized.[3]

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1 Zainu'ddin A "Admission of Women to University of Melbourne" p89

2 Notes taken from Council Minutes for 1879, 1880 and 1881 Women Graduates Envelope 222 U A A

3 Letter dated 12th February 1888 from M Hicks-Beach to Governor Jervois in folder from Government House Adelaide sent to Rt Revd Chancellor of Adelaide University. U A A

This capitulation, a triumph for the persistent Council, could not be effected until a further Act of Parliament had been passed, repealing the 3rd section of Act No. 143 of 1879, so that the power to confer Science Degrees and to confer degrees on women could be restored. Accordingly a Bill was drawn up as required and was enacted as Act No. 172 of 1880. In October 1880, a year after the letter requesting reconsideration had been sent, the Governor was urged to forward the new Act to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and to urge the issue without delay of the Letters Patent.

The Act forwarded to London left no doubt about the acceptance of women. It read

> Women, who shall have fulfilled all the conditions prescribed by "The Adelaide University Act," and by the Statutes and Regulations of the University of Adelaide for any Degree, may be admitted to that Degree at a meeting of the Council and Senate of the said University

To strengthen the point it added

> In "The Adelaide University Act," words importing the masculine gender shall be construed to include the feminine.[1]

Letters Patent were formally granted on March 22,1881. The Charter recognized that degrees would be conferred "on any person, male or female." After six years of negotiation with the Colonial Office and three acts of parliament the Council of the University of Adelaide achieved what it had set out to do in 1874. During that period changes in other universities had robbed it of the opportunity of being the first in Australia to admit women to degrees, a claim which it appears to richly deserve. It is ironic and, indeed, unfair that Melbourne University, where opposition to the admission of women had been intense in the 1870s, had been able to pass in 1880 a University Constitution Amendment Act which in effect admitted women to the Arts Faculty.[2] Thus Bella Guerin graduated

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1 Badger G Notes prepared for Centenary Publication p11 (private donation to A Mackinnon)

2 Zainu'ddin A "Admission of Women to the University of Melbourne" p82

Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University in 1883, two years before Edith Dornwell graduated in Science in Adelaide.

These young colonial graduates were among some of the earliest in the British Empire and gained the right to admission to degrees well before their contemporaries in Oxford and Cambridge. The first to graduate in the British Empire was Grace Annie Lockhart of Mount Allison College, New Brunswick, who took her degree in 1875. Two years later, Kate Edgar graduated Bachelor of Arts from the University of New Zealand, followed by two Arts graduates from Canterbury College in 1880.[1] Bella Guerin followed in 1883, and in 1885 Adelaide and Sydney both celebrated their first women graduates. Nevertheless Gardner points out that " in 1881 Adelaide was the first Australasian university which could offer women an impeccably legal degree diploma." As the legality of the New Zealand degrees was never challenged in court this issue remained academic.

Of more importance for this study is Gardner's observation that "the full acceptance of women materialised earliest as a simple little-noticed extension of high school education, and most tardily as the result of a battle of principle."[2] In a later chapter I will consider the careers of early graduates and test the value of that claim.

The sincerity of the Adelaide University administration in relation to women can be illustrated further by a comparison of the admission of women to medical degrees in Adelaide and the "most stoutly fought battle of all " at Melbourne University, the fight for admission to medicine.[3] The University of Adelaide admitted women to classes in science and arts without difficulty but did not have to face the question of women in medicine until 1887. In that year the *Register* reported:

> A lady having applied for admission as a student for the recently- arranged medical course, the Council took advice on the subject and found that there is no reason in law why a lady should not be allowed to pass as a medical practitioner if her abilities and diligence entitle her to take the required degree. The

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1 Kelly F *Degrees of Liberation* p1
2 Gardner W J *Colonial Cap and Gown* p87
3 Zainu'ddin "Admission of Women to Melbourne University" p96

question of expediency, however, had still to be considered. Was it advisable that students of both sexes should be admitted to attend the same classroom and receive instruction in medical subjects?

The considered opinion of the *Register* was that it would be advisable as long as the ladies were allowed to occupy "a particular portion of the classrooms by themselves" and were able to carry out their practical anatomical and clinical studies separately. In this arrangement there would be nothing "which would necessarily offend even the most fastidious taste".[1] It is doubtful if this measure, probably agreed to initially to comply with the proprieties, ever eventuated, as there was only one female student, Laura Fowler, in the second medical intake of 1887. The expense of duplicating facilities would have been impractical.

By contrast, in 1887 in Melbourne a group of young women tackled the university Council, "fully aware of the necessity for separate lectures in certain subjects" and hopeful that funding could be found for their provision.The medical school rejected separate teaching on financial grounds and common teaching on grounds of conventional decency. One of the opposing medical professors, in hoping that women would reconsider their desire to study medicine, came close to the mark when he feared not only that "the fullness and explicitness of the teaching will suffer.." but that "*existing interests may be injured..*"[2] The women were eventually accepted on equal terms with men but with a short-lived period of separate hospital practice. The battle for the admission of women to medicine at Melbourne was typical of the situation in most British and Canadian universities.[3] The easier acceptance of Adelaide was not.

The struggle for the right to study in professional schools made visible perhaps the most pressing fears behind the opposition to women's higher education, the fears expressed that existing interests might be injured. Women's entrance to liberal studies could be justified by a range of arguments concerning women's mothering role; well-educated women

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1 Badger G Notes prepared for centenary publication p14

2 Zainu'ddin A "Admission of Women to University of Melbourne" p99. Zainu'ddin's emphasis

3 See for instance Gillett *We Walked Very Warily* and Bryant *The Unexpected Revolution*

would make better mothers, better companions to their husbands. As Chancellor Bishop Short commented of non-graduating women students in 1876," high mental culture on their part must react on the other sex."[1] Women's talents could be put to use in philanthropic, home-oriented activities, even in teaching, without mounting any apparently significant challenge to the power balance between the sexes. At least it appeared that way to many men and women. In fact, as I will argue at a later point, the move did represent a threat to the prevailing gender relations.

The move into professional schools such as medicine made stunningly clear a fact that deeply threatened many men; women would ultimately be challenging them for their jobs. Male Melbourne medical students opposed to women in their midst categorized them as 'blue-stockings', 'man-hunters' and 'job-stealers'. The earliest women students were careful to defuse potential opposition by justifying their interest with the need for educated women to attend women and claiming that suffering and death occurred through lack of such attention.[2] If any such opposition existed in Adelaide, evidence of it did not survive in available records. Such apparent lack of overt opposition perhaps indicated a more liberal attitude on the part of the early medical school. It could also have been the result of the small size of the medical school and the fact that few female students presented in the earliest years.

**The Earliest Women Graduates**

Women were well represented at the University of Adelaide from its inception as Adelaide admitted unmatriculated students to its classes. On the first enrolling day, 6 April 1875, six women and one man turned up and women were the majority of students in the 1875 session.[3] "Thirty-three ladies have, as non- matriculated students, attended some of the university classes during the first year of its operation," proclaimed Chancellor Short, expressing his gratification. The first matriculated student was Edith Cook in 1877, one of the most promising young teachers in the State teaching service. She studied individual subjects but was not able to enrol for a degree. In 1881, at the age of nineteen, she

1 Quoted in Mackinnon A *The New Women* p23
2 Zainu'ddin A "Admission of Women to Melbourne University" p101
3 Gardner *Colonial Cap and Gown* p86

became the second headmistress of the new Advanced School for Girls.[1] The first female matriculant to enrol was Frances Williams, who studied for two years but did not complete a degree.[2]

Edith Emily Dornwell was not only the first woman to graduate from the University of Adelaide but the first person to take out a degree in science. It was nicely appropriate that the two issues which had been so significant to the university council had found their resolution in one person. Edith Dornwell was also an appropriate symbol of the hopes of the founders of both the university and the Advanced School for Girls in that she was entirely a product of the state system of education. In 1879 while a student at the Central Model School, Edith had won a bursary, one of the six provided by the state that allowed able girls to attend the Advanced School for Girls.

It seems strange that Edith was the only science graduate in 1885, given the determination of the Adelaide founders to offer science degrees. The explanation probably lies in the boys' schools where the classics were the subjects of higher status, the subjects seen to lead to careers in the professions or the public service. Classical subjects were not initially taught at the Advanced School and the first women graduates who took Arts degrees would have taken classical subjects by private tuition.

Edith Dornwell completed her degree in 1885 with first class Honours in physics and physiology. In her undergraduate degree she had distinguished herself by gaining first class Honours in each year. Conferring her degree, the Vice-Chancellor, Chief Justice Samuel Way, proudly claimed that she had not merely done honour to the University, but she had "vindicated the right of her sex to compete on equal terms with the other graduates for the honours and distinctions of the University."[3]

In spite of this vindication, Edith's sex did not rush to take up the degree courses offered by the University. This shortage of matriculated female students was a reflection of the lack of a solid academic

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1 Article from *Advertiser* 1915 date unknown, in possession of Mrs M Caw, daughter of Edith Hubbe (nee Cook)

2 *University of Adelaide Calendar* 1878 p11; 1882p24

3 *Advertiser* 17 December 1885

preparation available before the establishment of the Advanced School for Girls in 1879. It took some years before enough girls reached the required standard to pass the Matriculation, later Senior Public, examination. The crucial role of the Advanced School is reflected in the fact that by 1898 thirteen of the university's fourteen women graduates were old scholars of the Advanced School.[1] By 1900, twenty years after the coveted right to admit women to degrees had been won, only twenty-four women had graduated although many more had studied as non-graduating students. By 1902 Way, now Chancellor, noted that the University had awarded degrees to 260 graduates, 34 (13%) of whom were women.[2]

I do not intend to document here the year by year progress of women students and of their successes. That has been written about to some degree elsewhere although considerable work remains in tracing the first few cohorts of men and women students in relation to both their class background and their subsequent careers.[3] My major concern is to assess where possible the experience of the early graduates and to ask whether that experience constituted a challenge to the gender order, a change in relations between men and women. Could women's entrance to higher education in South Australia be seen as "the keystone of the arch" as Zimmern envisaged it ? In America in the 1870s M. Carey Thomas , describing her university days at Cornell, spoke of "a fiery ordeal to educate a lady by co-education".[4] Did Adelaide University present such an intimidating face to the earliest women to venture there? If not, did that mean that Adelaide society was necessarily more enlightened?

Edith Dornwell, a lone female undergraduate, seems not to have suffered from her experience. She wrote later of happy memories, and much encouragement from Dr Stirling. Interestingly she commented that:

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1 Jones H *Nothing Seemed Impossible : Women's Education and Social Change in South Australia 1875 - 1915* University of Queensland Press 1985 p90

2 Jones H *Nothing Seemed Impossible* p94

3 For some discussion of the earliest graduates see Jones H *Nothing Seemed Impossible* and Mackinnon A *The New Women*

4 Smith- Rosenberg C *Disorderly Conduct* p252

> Although there was so much prejudice in those days against the advancement of women, and against their entry into universities, I had every reason to be grateful to professors and students. They evinced no objection to the presence of a woman among them, and without exception did their best to make my position easy and comfortable.[1]

Some social acceptance was indicated by her membership of the initial subcommittee appointed in 1885 to draw up the rules of the Adelaide University Lawn Tennis Club.[2] It seems likely that one student, one of 56 students studying for degrees, a student prized by the four incumbent professors as the sole representative of her sex, would not be made to suffer the indignities other women faced in universities where they were clearly not wanted.[3] And, as family reminiscences relate, Edith Dornwell was a strong-minded person, one not easily swayed from her purpose.

The earliest female students left few private recollections of their experiences. Laura Fowler, the first woman to graduate in medicine, wrote copious letters to her brother James, studying at Oxford, during her school days. James' return to Australia, however, marked the end of that correspondence during Laura's university years. It seems clear that the few women at the university attended classes with men but kept to themselves socially. Helen Jones describes how by 1888, when there would have been a handful of undergraduates and a larger group of non-graduating students, the women students had acquired a room of their own.[4] Cold, uncomfortable and most often entered through a window as the door was inconveniently distant, the common room provided a place of warm companionship and solidarity for women students.

Until 1909 the University was for most women a place to attend lectures and examinations. The limited social life of the common room, while of support to women, was not formalized. In that year the women students formed a club with the object of bringing past and present

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1 Brown L (ed) *A Book of South Australia: Women in the First Hundred Years* Rigby 1936 p 147-8

2 Jones *Nothing Seemed Impossible* p92

3 Adelaide women took pride in this acceptance and referred with horror to the indignities which faced the medical student, Sophia Jex- Blake in her four year battle with Edinburgh University . See Brown L *A Book of South Australia* p148

4 Jones *Nothing Seemed Impossible* p92

students together, creating a sense of atmosphere and fostering common interests. Many social gatherings were planned including one each term to which staff and "guests from the men's side" were invited. Other activities, such as the very vigorous debating club and some concerts, were only for women. Mabel Hardy, recollecting the period between 1909 and 1914 wrote;

> We satirized, more or less wittily, the follies of the day, especially those of our contemporaries among the men students. For this performance we had to don male attire, hence the 'women only 'rule.[1]

Shortly after, in 1914, the Women Graduates Club was formed, a club which devoted itself to 'topics of science and art'. The creation of the women's clubs marked in a visible sense the women's arrival at the university. Before that time, women students remained shadowy figures, quietly going about their studies and determined not to stand out. It seems clear that as Solomon suggests the university woman of the first generation knew she was a pioneer enlarging the female sphere.[2] At the University of Adelaide she did not seem to have to suffer the "fiery ordeal of co - education" referred to by M. Carey Thomas but was probably intent on demonstrating to her detractors that she was not a freak.

Adelaide certainly did provide a group of men who, within the constraints of late nineteenth-century life could be considered enlightened. As we have seen they genuinely supported women's higher education. Their support did not go as far as condoning a challenge to the social relations of their society; indeed it can be seen as an important part of their campaign to consolidate their class position, one which I have argued depended upon a stronger relationship with education. Nor was a challenge envisaged by the earliest graduates who were usually at pains to prove their womanliness. If they should overstep the bounds of propriety there were exhortations from male editorialists in the local newspapers. The decade in which women began to enrol for degrees in significant numbers, the 1890s, was also significant in South Australia for the achievement of the female franchise.[3] The threatening nature of these

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1 Ibid p93

2 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women* p 95

3 The Constitution Act Amendment Act giving women the right to vote and to stand for parliament was passed in 1894.

two developments resulted in what Carol Bacchi termed a virulent campaign against the "new woman" in the *Observer* .[1]

### An Opposition Gains Momentum

In 1881, the year in which women were first permitted to enrol, the *Observer* had reminded its readers that woman's education was a preparation for life and for most women that meant marriage. But, the writer warned, "as things are shaping now, it bids fair to fall to the lot of fewer and fewer in the coming years". Happily the education which prepared a woman for marriage was also suited to make her "the more useful and happy and pleasant if she is fated to be an old maid". As well as the basic domestic education, necessary for all women, the writer felt that "the use of speech and occasionally of writing" would help a woman maintain her place as a useful and respected member of society". For this reason he believed the academic side of women's education was far too scanty. These were limited objectives indeed, aimed as they were at making women, single or married, pleasanter companions to men.[2]

A short time later another *Observer* leader pursued the topic further, making the point that the two elements of most value in making a woman an asset to social life were politeness and intelligence; the former was to pervade her whole conduct, the latter to be chiefly visible in her conversation. The writer conceded that education in colonial circumstances was more important than in England where the narrowness of school education is often supplemented by "conversance with periodical literature, or with people who have a large knowledge of life".[3] Demonstrating an early version of 'cultural cringe', the writer thus amplified his view of women's education as an extension of her accomplishments. Her education was for the adornment of society, and, by implication, of men, rather than for any intrinsic value to herself.

Given this view in some parts of South Australian society, it is not surprising that by the 1890s, when women were demonstrating their serious intentions in relation to both higher education and the vote, that

1 Bacchi C "The Woman Question" in Richards E (ed) *The Flinders History of South Australia.*

2 The *Observer* Adelaide September 10 1881

3 The *Observer* Adelaide October 1 1881

certain editors began to register their alarm. Bacchi observes that the old fear about the effect of too much study on a woman's nerves was raised - "Speak to her suddenly and see her start." "New women" were described as "an example of change without improvement - of advance backwards". They were "irresponsible" and unpatriotic, "the mischiefmakers and the miserymakers of society".[1] In 1895 the Observer reprinted an article from the Quarterly Review. "Who would bind himself to spend his days with the Anarchist, the athlete, the blue-stocking, the aggressively philanthropic, the political, the surgical woman?", it asked.[2] This was clearly aimed at the women who supported suffrage and higher education and who played an increasing part in public life. Obviously for many who had been prepared to accept women's education as adornment, events were moving too far, too fast.

The fact that opposition to women's advance became more visible and vocal reflects an unease at major changes which took place in South Australia from the 1870s to the 1890s. As the colony moved from its predominantly agrarian state towards an urban industrial society, tensions were felt in traditional class relations and in relations between the sexes. The admonitions to women to maintain their "traditional role" reflected, as always, fears that the role was irrevocably changing. The 1860s and 70s in South Australia were characterized by strong economic growth rates and agricultural expansion. As I noted earlier, marriage rates were high and families large. By the 1880s economic growth had slowed rapidly, coming to a virtual halt in the 1890s depression. Drought forced a retreat from the previously expanding agricultural frontiers and sent many back to the city.[3]

Within this period the transition to industrialization began and factories making such items as ready-made clothing and prepared food began to create alternative employment to traditional commercial work for women. The growing professional and commercial sectors provided more jobs and raised the aspirations of many, swelling the ranks of the new strata of the middle class. These, too, were the decades when many

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1 The *Observer* Adelaide May 11 1895, 18 July 1896, 23March 1895, 23 November 1895 in Bacchi C "The Woman Question" in Richards E (Ed) *The Flinders History*

2 The *Observer* Adelaide 19 January 1895

3 Stevenson T L " Population Changes since 1836" in Richards E ( Ed ) *The Flinders History* ch 7

public health measures were implemented, such as the building of deep drainage in Adelaide. Mortality began to decline, particularly in relation to infectious diseases, although this decline was experienced very differently in different social classes. By the 1880 an identifiable slide in the birth rate was apparent, a slide which gained momentum in the 1890s.[1]

The beginning of the decline in the birth rate was viewed with alarm by many in South Australia, a society built on the ideals of planned capitalist development, religion and the family. Highlighting one of the tensions in this ideal, a tension still apparent in much political thinking today, was the understanding that it was desirable to plan the economy but undesirable in the extreme to plan the family, that bastion of all things "natural" and unrestrained. Yet "planning" of a sort was clearly taking place. As Stevenson points out, advertisements for various mechanical and chemical means of contraception, including douches, pessaries, sponges, chemical abortificients and condoms, were common in both medical and general publications during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.[2]

Other demographic changes signalled that the institution of the family was not immune to social change; the 1880s witnessed a significant rise in the number of women who never married, a rise in the age of marriage and an increase in the numbers of women in the workforce. That increase was evident in the manufacturing, commercial and professional sectors. Domestic service, in the meanwhile, registered a significant drop.[3] All of these changes had considerable implications for education, an aspect which I will allude to briefly here and develop in a later chapter.

The changes which caused such concern by the 1890s were not unanticipated. The establishment of the Advanced School for Girls in 1879 and the 1875 Education Act were harbingers of change which many had discussed. Catherine Helen Spence, for example, had put forward an influential interpretation of social change when she had argued in the *Register* in 1875 that changes in population growth and movement were

1 Ibid
2 Ibid p189
3 Bacchi C In Richards E (Ed) *The Flinders History* p428-9

forcing unprecedented numbers of women into the paid work force, and, secondly, that industrialization of domestic produce was leaving housewives idle and frustrated. In both cases, she believed, women, should be able to find rewarding work and to do that they needed a more useful education.[1] This was the rationale for her support for the Advanced School for Girls.

At the same time, the passing of the 1875 Education Act in South Australia established a centrally controlled system of state elementary schools, compelling children between the ages of seven and thirteen to attend school. The ramifications of this Act, of the desire to admit women to the new university and of the establishment of the Advanced School, were considerable for women. In keeping with liberal theory, such as that of J S Mill, women were being admitted to citizenship. Practically, the necessity for children to attend school invoked extra costs and, as attendance regulations tightened, children's domestic labour could not be counted on, factors which some have argued contributed to the fertility decline.

The large demand for trained teachers to staff the new schools created new opportunities for women to move outside the familial setting and to engage in paid work. Although that work was often brief and placed women, for the most part, in a position subordinate to men it did provide them with a systematic education as preparation and a period of independence, a period arguably where their consciousness of themselves as individuals was heightened. This period of independence may also have contributed to changes noted by commentators but difficult to prove - such as the growth of the middle class ideal of marriage as one based on love and companionship rather than contract.[2] The liberatory potential of these institutional developments was considerable. However, there was a basic contradiction which was to lead to considerable tension.

Davey says of the 1875 Education Act:

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1 Magarey S *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence* p 116

2 Elford K "Marriage and Divorce" in Richards E (Ed) *The Flinders History* p327

It was a vehicle of social reform and laden with assumptions about class and gender relations commonly held by the middle-class males who presided over the development of South Australia.[1]

Those assumptions included notions of efficiency and of rational management: they also assumed a sexual division of labour. Education was an important means of reaching their goal of a more efficient "managed" society. Women were certainly part of that plan and it was from that perspective that the earliest supporters of women's higher education, middle - class males, envisaged women's future roles. They would be reformers and managers within the constraints of a class divided and sexually segregated society.

Bruce Curtis maintains that schooling had little to do with educating for a changing work force *per se* but had more to do with resolving "the contradiction between the formal equality of citizenship and the social subordination of the mass of the population demanded by bourgeois civilization".[2] The contradiction was particularly acute for middle class women who were to be both agents, in social class terms, of the subordination of the masses, yet at the same time, would be expected to experience their citizenship in gender- appropriate ways.

A significant factor in the educational changes described above was the secular nature of reform. The state, never entirely absent from the earliest days of settlement, came to assume the central role in social organization. Connell and Irving argue that in this period the churches played a diminishing role in the cultural sphere. Speaking of Australia as a whole, they claim that the churches' near monopoly of education was broken when state education systems at the primary level were established between the 1860s and the 1880s.[3] Further, they argue, "it was a secular ideology that accompanied the rise of the mercantile bourgeoisie; the belief in progress largely bypassed the churches at this time."[4]

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1 Davey I "Growing Up" in Richards E (Ed) *The Flinders History* p391

2 Curtis B *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836 - 1871* Althouse Press 1988 p106

3 Connell R W and Irving T H *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument* Longman Cheshire 1980 p126

4 Ibid p126-27

As I have pointed out, university promoters also saw the establishment of a university free of religious control as vital to the harmony of a young society with a broad mix of religious groups and a large contingent of dissenters. Many of those groups in South Australia were aware of progress and endorsed a wider role for women, while still viewing them basically within the framework of the family. In the society of the mid 1870s the family reigned as the centrepiece of a comparatively stable and prosperous society characterized by a fair degree of religious and political tolerance. The education of women would, it was hoped, enhance that ideal. The economic realities of the mid 1890s, "a time in which almost every aspect in the Colony has stood still of late years," as William Epps observed,[1] did not seem so reassuring and the fact that women appeared to many to be doing anything but staying still was a further cause for jeremiads. The prophets of doom began to link women's aspirations for degrees with fertility decline, marital instability and social upheaval.

**Changing Class Relations in South Australia**

To a certain degree they were right. The 1890s were years of considerable upheaval. Holton points out that nineteenth century European analysts such as Saint-Simon, Marx, Töennies and Weber linked the shift from agriculture to industry with a range of parallel transitions. These included:

> the concentration of population in cities rather than their dispersal in the countryside, the defeat of landed autocracy and the development of democratic and/or class - based politics, and the weakening of traditional bonds of community by individualism, private capital ownership and public bureaucracy.[2]

We cannot apply this model directly to South Australia, Holton warns, as European settlement took place in Australia during the course of European modernization. Thus "the modern capitalist economy, urbanization, democracy and individualism were already becoming

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1 Richards E " The Peopling of South Australia" in Richards E (Ed)*The Flinders History* p132

2 Holton R "Twentieth Century South Australia: From a Patrician to a Plebian View" in Richards E (Ed) *The Flinders History* p557

established and represented the greater part of the European legacy to nineteenth century South Australia."[1] A similar argument underlies the importing of certain educational ideas such as the ideas I have mentioned above. They were also part of the European legacy. Their generally easy acceptance in the 1870s in South Australia can be explained by the relative absence of social dislocation. In England, for example, women's education in the 1870s and 80s was greeted with greater alarm as it seemed to many to be both a symptom and cause of such threatening facts as the increasing number of single and independent women.

Holton argues that as a result of the relatively "modern" nature of South Australian society from settlement we would not expect to see such marked discontinuities in the transition from agriculture to industry in South Australia. Nevertheless there were considerable changes which irrevocably altered both class and gender relations. Movement to the city of Adelaide from country areas intensified in the last two decades of the century. Adelaide's population had increased from 28% of the South Australian total in 1861 to 45% in 1901.[2] Many of those urban dwellers male and female worked in the small, family-run factories and workshops which played a large part in the urban workforce in this period. And, as Pavla Miller has observed, it was impossible to transplant capitalism to South Australia without simultaneously transplanting social forces more or less strongly opposed to it.[3] These forces provided the raw material for class -based politics.

As employers reacted to the economic downturn of the late nineteenth century by changing methods of production from the old, skilled craft methods to larger scale production and by the employment of women and juniors, social class boundaries sharpened. The payment of Members of Parliament from 1891 facilitated the election of unionists such as Francis John Hourigan who championed the poor and reminded complacent parliamentarians, celebrating Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897, that "poverty, misery and destitution was as fierce as it ever was." He spoke of the large numbers of people in the Destitute Asylum, or seeking

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1 Ibid

2 Ibid p 558

3 Miller P *Long Division: State Schooling in South Australian Society* 1986

relief, of unemployment, low wages and of the robbery, drunkenness and prostitution which disfigured South Australian society.[1]

This group was increasingly to come under the gaze of the solicitous middle class and to be subjected to ameliorative social policy. South Australia was often cast as predominantly middle class. The much quoted Richard Twopeny, author of *Town Life in Australia* (1883) , wrote that "Few South Australians get beyond the comfortable stage, and, on the other hand, a greater number reach it" than in other Australian colonies.[2] The exact magnitude of this social group is difficult to chart precisely. Catherine Helen Spence, delineating the group who would benefit from the Advanced School for Girls spoke of "the urgent needs of the great middle class," those with incomes "varying from £100 to £600."[3] Her definition provides a rough guide to the contemporary notion of what constituted the middle class.

It was also a class undergoing transformation in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As small enterprises gave way to larger factories and businesses many previously self employed men and women became managers and business employees. The state came to play a larger part in employment in South Australia; bureaucracies were born and a new managerial stratum flourished to administer the new state system of education and such activities as the collection of tax (from 1884) and the administration of welfare. Professional employment grew and changed as some professionals became salaried employees of the state. Increasingly education became a pathway to employment and created a nexus between education and life chances which had not been significant for much of the population before. These professionals and managers, often the beneficiaries of state education, have been variously called "the professional - managerial class" or "the new class."

**Changing Gender Relations**

The changing class relations accompanying the social transformation that I have briefly sketched also had significant

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1 Hancock J and Richards E "Wealth, Work and Well-being: Some Historical Indicators" in Richards (ed) *The Flinders History* p585

2 Ibid p585

3 Spence C H Letter to the *Register*, 18 September 1879

implications for gender relations. Sara Delamont claimed, following Bernstein, that the new middle class, reliant on the transmission of symbolic property for its class position, viewed wives and mothers as important transmitters of that symbolic property.[1] Alvin Gouldner is another theorist who has outlined the emergence of the new class, a class he sees as produced through a historically unique level of public education. Such an education, Gouldner maintains, takes the student away from parental supervision and is mediated through new class teachers who lead students to take the viewpoint of the collectivity and who train students to believe that "their discourse does not depend upon their differing class origins - that it is not the speaker but the speech which must be attended to."[2] Thus, through education all authoritative claims are potentially open to challenge.

Such a formulation has significant implications for women who, enjoying a similar education to men's, are also placed outside familial relations and traditional authority. This is similar to the point made by Smith-Rosenberg which I mentioned earlier. She argued for the radical nature of removing women from the relations of the home to an impersonal, institutional structure. Gouldner offers a way of conceptualizing the changing position of educated women and their demands to play a larger part in civil society. His analysis reveals that education was double-edged for women. While it prepared them for a changed role within the 'new' class family it also gave them the tools to challenge that role, a consequence which was surely unintended by the male promoters of higher education for women.

Gouldner says of the new class, that it "may be the best card that history has yet given us to play".[3] This statement has particular force for women. Gouldner believes that an important part of women's liberation is not only an expression of resistance to the oppression of women in general, but a demand by educated, middle - class women for full membership in the new class.

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1 Delamont *Knowledgeable Women*
2 Gouldner A *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* p 44
3 Gouldner *The Future of Intellectuals* p7

In postulating the contribution of the new class Gouldner does not look specifically at the particular part women were expected to play in specific societies. In late nineteenth century South Australia, indeed in all of Australia, concern at the decline in the birth rate and the visibility of those groups Francis Hourigan accused Adelaide parliamentarians of neglecting, the unemployed and the destitute poor, ensured that women would be viewed as professionals and managers with a mission - the reform of the working class family and with it, the reform of the preventable evils of the changing society. This specific aim of many who supported women's education, in effect, ensuring a very different outcome for women, may well have vitiated the liberatory processes Gouldner describes. Certainly women came to be viewed as members of a professional stratum but their membership was seen as separate and different. They would be women teachers, women doctors and later, women social workers.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have described the events leading to the admission of women to the University of Adelaide in 1881. In order to analyse the significance of the Adelaide experience I have sketched the social and economic climate of late nineteenth century South Australia.

In marked contrast to the experiences in many other parts of the western world, the admission of women in Adelaide was not a pitched battle between men and women but was promoted by a group of middle class Adelaide men, often of non-conformist religious background and liberal political views. Women do not appear to have been directly involved in lobbying for university entrance, although their views, as much as they can be ascertained from public writing, concur with those of the men promoting their cause.

Not only did the male University Council condone the admission of women, they were prepared to fight a distant colonial secretary for that right as well as for the right to admit students to science degrees. The linking of the two innovations was no accident and symbolizes the increasing secularization of South Australian society. Their success in

gaining both powers vindicates Gardner's description of the University of Adelaide as "the spiritual daughter of London University."

In seeking to explain their behaviour I have attributed their thinking partly to the colonial nature of South Australia and therefore to the legacy of their English background where social change had already altered class and gender relations, as industrialization had changed the face of English society since the end of the eighteenth century. Men of the professional and emerging managerial stratum, whose claim to class maintenance rested on education, demonstrated both their faith in science and their attitude to the role of women in the new university they founded.

There was also, I believe, a genuine radical motive to do things differently from the mother country and particularly to provide education for a wider group. This radical impulse did not however extend to a fundamental alteration of class relations or of the relations between the sexes. It was rather an acceptance of the career based on talent and education, not privilege.

Part of the reason for the genuine acceptance of women's higher education was an incorporation of women into the realm of the civil, indeed into citizenship. Women did not appear to be challenging their traditional role in any significant way and their education and citizenship could be viewed as augmenting their traditional function in keeping with the needs of their class. By the 1880s and 90s, when economic downturn, drought, and the beginnings of the transition to industrialization were making social change inevitable and women's public role more visible, a less sanguine attitude to women's education could be observed.

The beginning of the decline in the birthrate in South Australia evoked concern about both the quantity and quality of the population. While women were seen to be part of the problem, as they were obviously limiting births, they were also viewed as part of the solution. As the role of mother and housewife was increasingly extended and brought into the public gaze, highly educated women professionals came to play a larger part in "managing" the women and children of South Australian society. They did not, however, set the agenda for such

administration. Broader needs such as "national efficiency", led to the extension of scientific principles to the home.

Was this "the keystone of the arch" for women as Zimmern had hoped or was it perhaps a renovation of the old edifice? Before answering the question certain things need to be established. Who were the early graduates of the University of Adelaide and what social groups did they represent? What became of them after graduation? In the next chapter I will examine the background of the first graduates, using their own stories and their own voices where possible. Through their voices, fragmentary as they are, emerge real women with hopes and fears, aspirations and disappointments. They remind us that they were not ciphers of broad historical forces but active agents in the process of social change.

## Chapter Three: Who were the early graduates?

Two of the earliest graduates of the University of Adelaide were Edith Emily Dornwell and Agnes Marie Johanna Heyne. Both intelligent and enterprising young women used the new state system of secondary and now, tertiary, education to gain degrees and a livelihood. In many ways they epitomized the new possibilities for women. Both were students at the Advanced School for Girls where they achieved considerable success. Noted by their teachers for their ability they were urged to embark on university study. Both gained scholarships, vital to their ability to undertake studies. Both acquitted themselves extremely well and went on to become teachers. In keeping with the vast majority of young women of their era they married and bore children. Their stories, however, diverge at this point.

Edith Emily Dornwell, was the first woman to graduate from the university of Adelaide. Born in New Zealand in 1865 to Sarah and Bernard Dornwell, Edith later moved with her family to Adelaide. Her father, originally from Hamburg was, according to family recollections, a horse dealer. The family was not "well-off" and Bernard's death while Edith was still at school might well have meant the end of any academic aspirations for his daughter.[1] However, as I mentioned earlier, while attending the state central model school Edith won a bursary, one of six provided by the state to allow able girls to attend the Advanced School for Girls. She also topped the examination.

A year later Edith obtained first prize and £20 for the examination known as the Exhibition for Girls. This pattern continued throughout Edith's schooling and her young headmistress, Edith Cook (later Hubbe), pinned her hopes on the young prizewinner. "I hope that her after career may prove as eminently satisfactory as her school life has done", she wrote on Edith's final report. Interestingly the headmistress reflecting on her pupil was very little older than a school girl herself and had been a non-graduating student at the university a short time before. The fact that she became headmistress, at the age of nineteen, of the new but highly esteemed Advanced School was a reflection of the lack of women

1 Information about Edith Dornwell's early life comes from the Dornwell papers, in possession of Mrs. E. Raymond, Melbourne. I have also benefitted from Mrs Raymond's reminiscences of her mother-in-law.

educated in the systematic manner demanded by the Education Department. Quite clearly young women with academic potential, such as Edith Dornwell were to be strongly encouraged.

Edith Dornwell matriculated with honours in French, German, animal physiology and modern history. She enrolled in a Bachelor of Science course in 1883, one of the first women to enrol and the first student, male or female to enrol in a science degree.[1] She was encouraged in this choice by professor Edward Stirling, lecturer in physiology at the University of Adelaide and staunch campaigner for women. She was not unaware of her position, writing:

> Dr Stirling said that if I were successful, and he was convinced that I would be, I would gain the distinction of being the first woman graduate of the Adelaide University, and the first woman to graduate in science in Australia.[2]

Edith completed her degree in 1885 with first class honours in physics and physiology. She spoke of happy memories of her work and although aware of prejudice against the advancement of women she felt that both students and professors had done their best to make her position "easy and comfortable". As I discussed earlier, on her admission to a degree in 1885 the Vice-Chancellor, Chief Justice Samuel Way, expressed tremendous pride in her achievements. Her friend Lois Cox wrote her own less eloquent but equally sincere tribute:

> Dear Edie,
>
> Sincere congratulations, you are an honour to the colony. Do have your photograph taken in cap and gown a la Princess of Wales and send me one before I go to England, ... Please do now. I shall call on Adela Knight in London and she would be so pleased to see it. You are a perfect wonder of successful mental effort.[3]

The second woman to graduate and the first woman Arts graduate was Charlotte Elizabeth Arabella Wright, the daughter of veterinary

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1 Adela Knight also enrolled as a non-graduating student in 1883 and gained that year the Sir Thomas Elder prize for physiology. She was subsequently accepted by London University from which she became the first Australian women to graduate.

2 Dornwell papers.

3 Private letter 9/12/1885. Dornwell papers.

surgeon from North Adelaide. Charlotte was also a student at the Advanced School for Girls. After completing her degree Charlotte ran a school for girls at Semaphore until her marriage to Mr. F.A. Graham. Subsequently she went to live in Western Australia and little is known of her later life, except for the fact that she had children.[1]

Agnes Marie Johanna Heyne was the second woman to graduate in Arts. Her father is listed in official records as a seedsman, an occupational title which is an unsatisfactory indication of the family in which Agnes grew up. Ernst Bernhard Heyne combined intellectual ability and practical horticultural and botanical knowledge. He had been a student at Leipzig University and was an accomplished linguist and mathematician. In 1848, during political unrest, he and his brother Carl left Germany, Carl for the United States and Ernst for Australia. In Melbourne Ernst worked with Dr. F. von Mueller, helping to lay out the botanical gardens. Later Ernst came to Adelaide where he started a nursery at Sydenham Road, Norwood. There he married Laura Hanckel, daughter of a book-binder and bookseller from Hamburg. Ernst and Laura had four children who survived to adulthood and Agnes was the eldest daughter. Ernst Heyne's occupation was typical of the small business class. He was a small proprietor, one unlikely to be able to afford private schooling for his children. Yet Agnes' heritage was rich in other ways. Both her parents had come from a German background steeped in the love of learning and of books, a background which highly valued education.[2]

Agnes, born in 1871, attended Norwood Model School where she was noticed by the director of education, John Anderson Hartley, as particularly gifted. Agnes went to Hartley's house at seven every morning to be coached in Latin and Greek. This enabled her to win a bursary to the Advanced School for Girls. Her career at the Advanced School was exceptional, culminating in a scholarship to the university . There she won first class honours in both classics and mathematics. It was not possible until 1899 to undertake an honours degree.

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1 Personal correspondence from Mrs. Dorothy Hicks, niece of Charlotte Wright.

2 Official school and university records of Agnes Dorsch (nee Heyne ) have been supplemented by taped interviews by Alison Mackinnon, with her daughter, Mrs. Ida Kearney, during 1985.

These two young women illustrate very clearly a new pathway open to women - a pathway deliberately opened by state intervention. Through state schools and scholarships they could acquire a university degree and enjoy the lifelong benefit of challenging intellectual work. But were they typical? Was that part of the petit bourgeoisie - the class of small proprietors and dealers - a class transforming itself through education into a new stratum of the middle class, the predominant group which sent its daughters to the university?

Studies from other countries seem to suggest that such a pattern is only partly true. Lynne Marks and Chad Gaffield in a study of Queen's University, Ontario, Canada - a university which admitted women in the late 1870's - argue that "the young men and women from well-to-do families were dominant within the student population". They found that the children of farmers were the largest single group but "the majority of students were from small-town or urban households with fathers who were clergymen, merchants, physicians or manufacturers or who worked in other professional and managerial positions". They also warn that the existence of even a small minority of students with fathers in manual occupationals "emphasizes that a simple image of nineteenth-century university students as elites is not correct".[1]

Barbara Miller Solomon points out that in the United States the established Eastern elites, such as the Boston "Brahmins" preferred to educate their daughters privately at home in boarding school, and through travel abroad. The 'new rich' imitated this pattern, similarly preparing their daughters for a life of leisure. Rather, Solomon argues the 'female collegians' came from "a range of families within the broad and expanding middle class:

> Heads of those families included those in the professions (doctors, ministers, lawyers, professors, and teachers), those in business (manufacturers, proprietors and tradesmen) and still others in agriculture. What distinguished a large proportion of the fathers was their economic and social mobility; they were achievers in professional and business enterprises."[2]

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1 Marks L and Gaffield C. "Women at Queen's University, 1895-1905: A "Little Sphere" All their Own?" in *Ontario History* , no. 4, December, 1986

2 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America.* , pp. 64, 65.

Solomon quotes a study undertaken by the Association of Collegiate Alumnae. This valuable study surveyed 3, 636 women who graduated from 22 colleges between 1869 and 1898 and documented family income levels. The study illustrates that the families of female graduates were not the poorest members of the American Society, nor were they the wealthiest; only 7.3% came from wealthy families with incomes over $10,000 a year.

During this time the average income for a U.S. family of four increased from $680 in 1869 to $830 in 1890. The average income of the families of these college graduates was $2,042 - yet more than 34% of the women surveyed were from families whose annual incomes were below $1,200. [1] Solomon points out that on average in 1890, teachers earned $250 per year, ministers $900, and physicians $1200. Clearly for some families such as those of teachers and clergy who prized education there was considerable financial sacrifice in sending a daughter to college, or, in the Australian situation, to University. In order to make that sacrifice parents needed to see a positive benefit in educating their daughters.

A recent English study draws similar conclusions. While noting that

> the appeal of university was not, like that of the training colleges, purely vocational, nor is it at all easy to generalize about the financial circumstances of women university students.

Curthoys and Howarth are nevertheless able to draw the conclusion that the clientele of the Oxford Women's colleges was "drawn overwhelmingly from the professional, commercial and industrial middle classes".[2]

Who were the parents of the early graduates of the University of Adelaide and why did they choose to send their daughters to university?

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1 Ibid, p. 65.

2 Howarth J and Curthoys M "The political Economy of Women's Higher Education in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain" in *Historical Research*. Volume 60, Number 142, June, 1987, p. 217.

A combination of evidence from official records and literary and oral sources can help to answer these questions.

The authors who wrote the history of Queen's University in Ontario were extremely fortunate in that extensive registers were available in which students enrolling listed the occupations of their fathers. Unfortunately the registers which remain at the University of Adelaide are very few and the information variable. In order to build up a complete data bank for the first women students it was necessary to utilize University Calendars and vital statistics of birth, marriages and deaths. The University Calendar of 1922 listed the names of all graduates up to that period and from that listing the women graduates were taken. In all 192 women students graduated up to 1922. The majority had undertaken Bachelor degrees, a few Masters degrees and a handful Ph.D. degrees - these usually at another institution.[1] The Calendars yielded information on previous school attended, the time and (usually) place at which the Senior Public examination was taken and the degree which the graduate had completed. Results of examinations, scholarships and special prizes were usually given. In order to gain a picture of the social class background of the graduates it was necessary in the first instance to find the occupation of each graduates' father, and mother if possible.

This information and far more extensive information on graduates' family patterns was collected from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The date of graduation gave an approximate idea of age and a graduate's birth certificate could then be located. Birth certificates usually yielded father's occupation and address and in some cases place of birth - at home or in a hospital. By searching death certificates it could be ascertained if a woman remained single. Those not found were assumed to have married and a search made for marriage certificates. If found, these yielded information on age at marriage, occupation at marriage, husband's age and occupation and address and the place at which the marriage took place. Thus where records were found, a married woman's husband's occupation could be compared with the father's occupation - an interesting indicator of social mobility. The demographic data will be discussed in more detail in the following Chapter. For the purposes of this discussion it is only necessary to

1 Degrees will be listed in the following Chapter.

examine father's occupation. It was possible to supplement the records in the case of those students who had attended the Advanced School for Girls - a significant number of the graduates. An attendance register from that school yielded parents' occupations covering the period 1894 - 1908.

**Fathers' Occupation**

Fathers of the early graduates were overwhelmingly middle class. Hardly any of the students at this period were daughters of the rich and powerful elite in South Australia.[1] Where one or two fathers did rise to strong positions in the community and to financial strength that position was often based on a profession - in the case of a mining engineer - or on recently acquired wealth. Some families were undergoing the process of consolidating wealth and position. The case of the Fowler family is an interesting case in point. Laura Fowler came from a family which gained considerable wealth as the wholesale grocers D. & J. Fowler. Laura, Adelaide's first woman medical graduate, grew up in a cosmopolitan setting as befitted the children of a wealthy elite with business interests in England and Adelaide. She went at first to a private school run by a Madame Marvel, then travelled with her family to England where she boarded at a school named Argyle House. After her schooling Laura with her sister Marion went to stay with relatives in Germany where the girls learnt the language and music and painting. A letter to her brother Jim, a student at Cambridge, gives the impression of a lively 16 year old being brought up to a life of fashion and accomplishments. She wrote

> My dear boy be sure you perfect yourself in the German bows, you <u>must</u>, it is most decidedly necessary. Also my dear boy, if your means will allow you must learn the German valse.[2]

The following year the Fowler family moved into Wooton Lea, a large mansion at Glen Osmond extensively decorated and luxuriously equipped with "swimming bath and tennis lawn". Yet the concern that

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1 Dirk Van Dissel has listed members of the 'old' and 'new' Adelaide gentry in his chapter titled 'The Adelaide Gentry, 1850 - 1920' in Eric Richards (ed.) *The Flinders History of South Australia - Social History.* After examining this list I have found very few women graduates from "gentry" families (i.e. the colonial, social elite) in the period to 1922.

2 Fowler papers, PRG 34. Mortlock Library of South Australia (hereafter M L S A )

business could suddenly let them down is revealed in many of Laura's letters. She wrote to Jim:

> May 1st, 1885. Business safe, we are going to get another servant so that we shall have more leisure time for study and reading. When we have only two servants in this large house we have so much to do.

As well as portraying her growing academic aspirations Laura's letters show her preparation for domestic life:

> Nell and Mari cooked some cakes this morning which turned out very well and the butter is to be made tomorrow so we are being initiated by degrees into household duties.[1]

Certainly some families were securely middle class - professional and sure of their place in the world. Cornelius Proud, father of the talented Proud sisters was a stock broker and inveterate traveller. Aileen Ingleby's father was a K.C., her grandfather a Q.C. Helen Mayo's father, a well-to-do engineer who lived in a large house on West Terrace, Adelaide was a friend of university professors who could advise on his growing family's education. These people were solid 'old' middle class, professional and business proprietors, frequently of Methodist, Baptist or Unitarian religion. But many others of the parents could be more accurately described as petit bourgeois - like the families of Edith Dornwell and Agnes Heyne.

In order to gain a picture of the overall background, father's occupations were sorted into fifteen groups. The occupational groupings were constructed from information from the 1881 and 1891 censuses which was aggregated and recoded into fifteen general occupational groups indicating some measure of class situation.[2]

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1 Ibid.

2 This occupational classification was constructed by Ian Davey and Alison Mackinnon

**Table 1.** Occupational Categories of Fathers

| Recode number | Occupational group | Number |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | professional/proprietor | 31 |
| 02 | merchant and agent | 32 |
| 03 | business employee | 21 |
| 04 | govt. and institution employee | 21 |
| 05 | seller of services and semi-prof. | 16 |
| 06 | manufacturer and master | 5 |
| 07 | skilled worker | 19 |
| 08 | transport worker | 3 |
| 09 | labourer, unskilled worker | 1 |
| 10 | servant | 0 |
| 11 | primary industry proprietor | 7 |
| 12 | primary industry worker | 1 |
| 13 | other employed | 0 |
| 14 | not employed | 0 |
| 15 | unknown | 35 |
| | Total no. | 192 |

These categories can be further aggregated so as to separate employers from employees, non-manual workers from manual and within the manual worker group, skilled from unskilled workers. It must be born in mind that using a stratification approach to occupations as a basis for a social class analysis is not entirely satisfactory. Also the use of occupational categories common to the late nineteenth century is often puzzling to the late twentieth century researcher. George Swan Fowler, for instance, the father of Laura, is listed on her birth registration as a grocer, a term that conjures up a rather different picture from a wholesale merchant. Nevertheless, such classification will be undertaken, in order to gain a clearer picture than is available from literary and oral sources.

To further aggregate the categories, professionals, urban and primary proprietors - business men, manufacturers and master craftsmen - were grouped together as 'bourgeoisie'. They were employers or self-employed and were of considerable standing in the community. Business employees, government and institution employees, sellers of services,

and semi-professionals were grouped together as petit bourgeoisie - or non-manual workers, a group referred to in the nineteenth century as the modest middle classes. They were to provide many of the aspiring members of the new middle class. The term petit bourgeois here describes those white collar workers who worked for salaries or wages in distinction to employers and self-employed. This group has been portrayed by some educational historians as particularly keen to take advantage of schooling and to pursue educational qualifications. Not only did they keenly recognize the benefits of education but they feared the ever present likelihood of downward mobility[1]. Skilled workers were categorized as a separate group and groups 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13 were combined as unskilled workers. This aggregation, while imperfect in many ways attempts to come to terms with class divisions - in a measurable way. In one sense it is an attempt to measure the unmeasurable. Nevertheless this formulation, supplemented by the nuances of literary evidence, is a starting point.

**Table 2.** Class background of Students

| | number | percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Bourgeoisie | 75 | 47.8 |
| Petit bourgeoisie | 58 | 36.9 |
| Skilled Workers | 20 | 12.7 |
| Unskilled | 4 | 2.6 |
| Total | 157 | 100.0 |

Certainly the fathers could be described as 'middle class' but it is important to qualify that notion in important ways. A few were from the old established bourgoisie. Another group were in the process of becoming that group known as the new middle class. A considerable number, approximately 15%, were not, at that stage, middle class at all but working class, both skilled and unskilled. Amongst the skilled workers

1 This is argued by Henderson P in "Class Structure and the Concept of Intelligence" in Dale R, Esland G and MacDonald M (eds) *Schooling and Capitalism* R outledge and Kegan Paul 1976

were a blacksmith, a wireworker, carpenter, machinist and cutter. Several skilled workers from the printing trade - a printer and three compositors - obviously saw some value in their daughters receiving an advanced education. This is in keeping with research which has demonstrated that for skilled workers, as the old apprenticeship system disappeared, educational credentials increasingly became important for their sons and daughters.

**Mothers' occupation**

A far more difficult task is to find mothers' occupation before marriage as students' birth certificates do not usually give mother's occupation. Moreover, while it is possible to trace mothers back through their marriage certificates which may indicate their occupation the database would remain incomplete as very many of the women graduates' mothers were married elsewhere. But if women only appear faintly in the official records, as is often the case in women's history, much information can often only be gleaned from oral and biographical sources.

Mothers emerge strongly from their daughters' recollections as active, forceful and intelligent. It is evident from private sources that some of the mothers had been teachers at some stage of their lives, often in informal settings, and that they were a considerable influence in their daughters' decisions to continue their education. The Sharman sisters remember that their grandmother had had a little school in the Hindmarsh valley. Marthe Wait's mother, a Frenchwoman, coached university students in French before a French lecturer was appointed.[1] Mary Raymond Ekin-Smyth supported her family by painting and drawing after her husband became an invalid.[2] Others had assisted in family businesses; Phyllis McGlew (Cilento) recalled that,"my mother helped (my father) with his business. She was very good at it." Others spoke of their mother's independence: Aileen Bond's mother, for instance, was travelling around the world at the age of twenty-three when

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1 Interview with Miss Marthe Wait Australian Federation of University Women (South Australia) Oral History Collection. Special Collections Barr- Smith Library (hereafter A F U W collection) At this stage students could sit for French examinations from the University of Melbourne but they had no access to lectures.

2 Correspondence with Margaret Lee, niece of Isabel and Frances Ekin-Smyth

her trip was interrupted in South Australia by her meeting with Aileen's father.[1] Anna Martin recalls that her mother "nursed the district":

> She got married at nineteen years of age - she had no nursing training, but if there was a birth or a death or somebody was ill, mother was there. I think we were kind of Social Workers - not paid of course - our doorbell would ring at any particular time of the day or night. Anybody in trouble.[2]

Rosamond Benham's mother, Agnes, was a particularly strong model for her daughter. With her brother Paris Nesbit, an eccentric Adelaide Queen's Counsel, Agnes Benham established a newspaper called the *Morning* which claimed to be 'the advocate of lost causes'. Using that newspaper, and its successor,the *Century* , as a vehicle, Agnes wrote on many radical causes endorsing, among other things, more accessible divorce and university education for women. A small item by Agnes in the *Century* also suggests that she may have had a small income from the sale of "Electro-Homeopathy' remedies.[3]

But not all daughters were lucky enough to have mothers who provided them with examples of women acting purposefully in the public realm. These models were far more prevalent in the second generation of graduate women, sometimes daughters or nieces of the earliest graduates. Equally compelling as a source of motivation for daughters was the lack of opportunity for paid work in many middle-class mothers' youth. Several graduates speak of their mothers' urging them on to opportunities which they themseves had been denied and had felt keenly.[4] The Sharman sisters recall their mother's favourite saying as "learn all you can, my dears, it's no load to carry."[5]

**Social mobility**

Several of the daughters of skilled workers improved their social position considerably through their education, becoming part of the new

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1 Interviews with Lady Cilento (nee McGlew) and Mrs Aileen Bond (nee Ingleby) conducted by Alison Mackinnon

2 Interview with Miss Anna Martin , Hindmarsh Project I am grateful to Ian Davey for permission to use this transcript

3 Mackinnon A and Bacchi C "Sex, Resistance and Power: Sex Reform in South Australia c 1905" in *Australian Historical Studies* No 90 April 1988 p 63, 69

4 See, for example, interview with Phyllis Lade (nee Duguid) A F U W collection

5 Taped interview with Miss Sharman and Mrs Leslie A F U W collection

middle class. Constance C., daughter of a wireworker of Prospect, gained her Senior Public qualifications at the Advanced School for Girls and went on to study medicine. In her third year she won the Davies Thomas Scholarship and in her final year the prestigious Everard Scholarship. Many became teachers, a secure and valued career for women in that period.

Hilda D, daughter of a blacksmith, became a teacher and at the age of 32 married a boot and shoe retailer. Alma S, daughter of a carpenter/builder, was also destined for teaching. She passed her Senior public examination at the University Training College and gained her degree through the education pathway whereby intending teachers taught as pupil teachers for two years, attended the University Training College for two years and were able to complete a degree while in the employ of the department.[1] The teacher training route provided an important avenue to higher education for a significant number of girls of petit bourgeois or working class background.

The education department pathway to the university warrants discussion at this point. At first prospective teachers were encouraged to add one year of university work to their teaching studies, later that period was extended to two years and a very determined young woman managed to squeeze a third year from the reluctant Education Department. Those less lucky had to complete their degree, if they ever did, by part-time study, while teaching, often in remote country schools. Others, of course, never completed their degree.

Dorothy Hunter was born in Victoria where her father worked for the railways in small towns in the Mallee. Dorothy was always keen to go to high school. She recounts her story.

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1 These vignettes are reconstituted from University or Advanced School for Girls sources, supplemented from data from the Registrar of births, deaths and marriages. I have been asked by the Registrar to maintain confidentiality on the material gained from the official records of births, deaths and marriage. Consequently, where material comes from that source I have not used the woman's name. Where full details are given, the material has come from other sources such as interviews or biographies.

And so my father deliberately demoted himself, on the railways, and we went to a little town called Epsom, so that I could go to high School in Bendigo. I had to ride five miles in every day and five miles home afterwards.

After Dorothy completed high school her parents came to South Australia, where Mr. Hunter and a relative established a fruit farm.

I wanted to teach secondary work and the best way to do it was to get into Adelaide University. At that time you could do a final year through the Education Department, and a few would be selected for a second year. I insisted that I wanted to get a degree through the Department which meant getting a third year. And when I got permission several others said, "Well, if you get it Dorrie, we ought to get it". So I encouraged the others to ask them. We were the first ones that brought pressure on them, to allow us to stay and complete a degree. Of course those who went in as private students could stay as long as they liked. We were government students and we didn't pay any fees at all ... when I first asked the reply was that didn't I know that there was a war on an it was my duty to go into the school and teach. I said, "If the war ends can I have another year?" "Yes", said the superintendent. And the war did end. I was a real little rebel.

For Dorothy the Education Department and a state high school were vital elements in her pursuit of a degree and the chance to enjoy a career as a secondary teacher which meant to her considerable independence.

At Gawler I bought a car so that I could live in Gawler during the week and come down to Adelaide for weekends. It was most unusual then for a woman to have a car. I remember the whole school being outside to see me arrive the first time I came in.[1]

For Anna Martin, daughter of a Brompton Pottery worker, the path to a degree was much longer. Although she began her degree in the later period of this study (1919, 1920) she did not actually graduate until 1930. Anna's father had little formal education, but was of French Hugeonot descent. Her mother was of German descent, and Anna's grandmother came from a University town in Germany. As in the Heyne family there

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1 Reminiscences of Dorothy West (nee Hunter ) A F U W collection

was not much money but a great respect for education. Anna went to a small private Anglican School in Croydon.

> I was sent to school when I was three and three quarters, because mother was always having new babies. But I was ready for it. It was not kindergarten, it was starting school in earnest. I was reading books like Longfellow at eight and reading all my mother's and father's books quite early ... We were rather advanced compared to the state education system in those days because we had a great deal of history and geography in our school. And one of the curates, Arthur Cain, was very fond of Latin so he wanted to have some students and because I knew some Latin before I even went to high school. I was always top of my class.

Anna's father would have liked to send her to a private school to become a 'lady' but there was no money. She went to Adelaide High School, in preparation for teaching.

> There we did matric. in Latin, French, Maths. and English. We didn't study any Greek at all, in fact they were shocked when I asked to do Greek.

A distinction was made between those who were going to teach in primary schools and those who were going on to a degree. Very few were groomed for a degree:

> I was one of the five girls in the Higher Public who was allowed to do the full five subjects. It was very hard and the five of us were allowed to work in the top boys class, those who were trying for scholarships, who wanted to be lawyers and doctors. it was very stimulating. Our maths. master gave us the hardest problems he possibly could, so that when we took the examination it was like eating icecream.

Anna passed her five Higher Public subjects and studied Greek with Mrs. Dorsch (formerly Agnes Heyne) while she was working as a Junior Teacher. Having been one of the top mathematics girls at Adelaide High she now found herself in the infant department at Croydon School. She was given a class of sixty-six five year olds to teach. Anna was sixteen years old. She was part of the new system of training whereby some selected students could do two university subjects a year during their primary school training. Anna was next posted to Moonta High School and then Norwood High School where the headmaster encouraged her:

He would say, "Now don't drop your university subjects. If you've got anybody to keep in, then I will come and look after them." Her next two postings proved very arduous and unhappy and Anna left the Education Department determined to complete her four subjects in one year. "I know my subjects and I expected to get the prize for philology. I had asked one of my sisters to do the domestic chores at home while I did my examination but a terrible 'flu epidemic broke out. Seven in our family came down with it. If I had had the 'flu I could have put off the examinations. I had seven exams. to take and I had seven patients. I was absolutely worn out. It was so hard to push the pen. I think I only passed in two out of four subjects. I passed philology but I didn't get a credit. I was just too tired!

Dispirited, Anna took a private teaching post in a Catholic school in far north Queensland, where she studied her last two subjects, arranging for supervision for her exams:

that was 1930. Sister Mary said to me, "Well, you've got nothing to do, the girls are doing their examinations, you might as well go home a little earlier, so as to be in time for the commemoration". then I had the great journey to get down from North Queensland in time. There were no aeroplanes in those days. I got there on the morning of the ceremony. the Professor of Mathematics expressed his pleasure at seeing me and my father, puffed out his chest so far you'd think he was getting his degree.[1]

Dorothy Hunter (later West) and Anna Martin epitomize both the possibilities and the difficulties of gaining a university degree for those of working class, and petit bourgeois background. The Education Department and the high schools opened up a pathway for determined and able young women to graduate. While this satisfied the Department's need for teachers in the rapidly expanding state system and teachers who could be paid less than their male colleagues. both elementary and secondary, it also meant a route to independence for a group of women.

If the daughters of skilled workers and, indeed, petit bourgeois families, needed the assistance of the state to get to university that assistance was obviously crucial to unskilled workers families. The four unskilled fathers were listed as carrier, mariner, labourer, and miner. The

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1 Taped interview with Miss Anna Martin.

daughter of the carrier won a scholarship for up to 3 years free tuition in the Bachelor of Music. She became a music teacher until her marriage at the age of forty-seven. The mariner's daughter also attended the Pupil Teachers School and became a teacher, marrying an engineer at the age of thirty-four. The daughter of the labourer distinguished herself in her Senior Public examination at Adelaide High School and also became a teacher until her marriage at the age of twenty-five. (These women may well have continued teaching - or resumed teaching at a later stage of their lives. The information available here merely gives occupation at time of marriage.) The labourer's daughter married in 1918 a man listed as a Sergeant in the A.I.F. His civilian career is not known.

For all of these women of working class background high schools and teacher training were essential to university participation, a pattern that has continued in Australian universities until the late 1960's. No doubt the same pattern was important for men, many of whom became headmasters and in their turn encouraged their sons and daughters to higher education. For most women their education gave them the opportunity for independent careers before marriage and a livelihood to return to if they needed to support themselves. For others it gave a lifelong independence.

The vast majority of the fathers were however, middle class. Nearly 85% were bourgeois or petit bourgeois. Yet, as was mentioned earlier they were not the 'elite', the 'old' or even the new Adelaide establishment. In his book *Society and Family Strategy* Mark Stern hypothesizes that shortly after the turn of the century in New York State the business class split in two. It divided into the old business class, those with personal business proprietorships and the new business class, those who were business employees or professionals rather than proprietors or manufacturers. Stern argues that each stratum had its own social status, family strategy and world view. 'New' business, he contends, had to struggle to establish an identity of its own. The professions had originally been able to make their professional skill a form of property which could be passed on directly to one's children. Formal qualifications decreased the inheritability of professional standing. Therefore, Stern argues, education and training became the path of professional status achievement. Members of the new business stratum no longer aspired to their own business property and fathers could no longer pass on the

position to their sons. Thus for this group education became the path to social status.[1]

Stern's hypothesis carries some weight in the South Australian situation. Certainly, for professionals formal qualifications were essential. And for many business employees and particularly government officials and civil servants formal qualifications were replacing patronage and inheritance. In the occupations of fathers in the aggregated category 'bourgeoisie', manufacturers made up a very small percentage. There were only five fathers in this group. In occupational category 2 (see table 1) the category made up of professionals and proprietors, the vast majority were professionals, mainly clergy, doctors, accountants and university lecturers. One rural proprietor was a squatter (grazier) and another was designated gentleman. The 'old' business class of manufacturers and landed gentry was scarcely represented. Occupational category 2 contained a large number of merchants and dealers. Some of those fathers in real estate, or in stock broking may have had property to hand on to their children, particularly their sons, but in the financially insecure period of the 1880's and 1890's in South Australia the lure of education qualifications would have been apparent.

The large group of clergy is interesting. There were thirteen clergy fathers in the group. While clergy are usually considered of high social status due to their training and their calling and their class position is securely bourgeois, they were scarcely affluent as a group. Many clergy daughters attended private girls schools, assisted with clergy bursaries and scholarships but for their daughters a future of genteel poverty beckoned if they did not marry. It is not surprising that this group constituted such a large number of the fathers. University fees were beyond the reach of clergy with large families and Phyllis Lade's (later Duguid) experience might have been typical. Phyllis noted:

> If you did well at school, it seemed to be the natural hope that you might go to university. Of course I wouldn't have been able to go if I hadn't won a bursary, and so one worked very hard with the hope of getting one. This wasn't easy because in those days there were only twelve given for the whole of South

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1 Mark Stern *Society and Family Strategy: Eric County, N.Y.* chapter 2.

Australia. I was fortunate to get one of the four arts bursaries. My sister had been a part time student, while training with the Education Department.[1]

One father exemplies the middle class in its more progressive version. Cornelius Proud, father of three talented graduates Emily Dorothea, Katherine Lily and Millicent, was scarcely a typical middle class parent but he does present a marvellous portrayal, an ideal type in essence, of a progressive liberal circa 1890. Described as a shorthand writer at the birth of his first daughter, Proud was designated as a shorthand writer/broker on the birth of the second. By the time the third daughter was born he gave his occupation simply as sharebroker. Originally from York in England, Proud was an inveterate traveller who wrote copiously of his travels. Sometimes the newspaper, the *Register*, published his work. In 1881 he wrote and lectured on his travels in America, revelling in the wonders of the new world but aware of its shortcomings. He wrote in his journal

> It is the custom I know to glory in what are called 'the brave days of old' and in the seven wonders of the ancient world. But I would rather glory in these later days and in those wonders of the modern world - the locomotive, the steamship, the electric telegraph and the printing press.

Politically active in his adopted state of South Australia, Proud supported social purity and women's suffrage. He composed the petition signed by over 11,000 people, supporting women's suffrage, carrying it to the House of Assembly. He was a committed Baptist, considering himself a religious socialist. He opposed, vehemently and successfully, attempts by private companies to take over the control of the tramway system. Not surprisingly he supported the higher education of women. His second wife Emily, mother of the three graduates, had herself been at the university as a non-graduating student before women could enrol for degrees.[2]

Proud's mixture of business acumen and reform politics may have been unusual, but he was not unique. Another politically radical father

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1 Reminiscences of Phyllis Duguid (nee Lade). AFUW collection

2 Journal of Cornelius Proud. Proud family papers in possession of Magarey family, Blackwood.

was Jack Benham, father of Rosamond Benham one of the earliest women medical graduates. Jack Benham left England to go to sea as a young boy, was in California for the 1849 gold rush and sailed on ships trading between Japan, China and the South Seas. According to the family history he arrived in Australia in the 1850's and walked from Queensland to South Australia, taking three months to do so. He then joined the Ballarat gold rush, and was there for the Eureka riots. Later in Adelaide in the 1860's, he was granted a license to practice as a land agent. He renounced his wandering ways and remained in Adelaide until 1917. In 1870, J.T. Benham married Agnes Mary Matilda Nesbit, mentioned earlier, who came from a family with strong literary and radical connections. The family historian writes

> As a couple Jack and Agnes Benham were considered by some of Adelaide society as a pair of radicals, especially when they showed interest in the New Australia and Cosme colonies in Paraguay. Rumour has it that they changed their minds about joining the Utopian colony when they saw the decrepit ship the Royal Tar, anchored at Port Adelaide. Agnes Benham's writing about love and sex at the turn of the century must have shocked many a proper Adelaide matron for unfortunately she was one or two decades ahead of her time.[1]

These pen portraits of two unconventional fathers and one very different mother make no claim to being typical in any way. However, they give some indication of what Stern might call the new business class, free of ascribed and inherited social position, acquiring their own moderate wealth through their own efforts. Other fathers of course were far more conventional - doctors, lawyers, businessmen and government officials. They may have shared Proud's democratic ideals and belief in education even if the externals of their lives appeared conservative.

The occupational background of the graduates' fathers does seem to suggest that as in Stern's study, a particular concern for education was shown by the new business class, defined as professionals and business employers. For graduates mothers, education offered their daughters opportunities they had not had or the means of attaining more secure employment than the informal and frequently intermittent paid work that they had experienced.

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1 Chivers, R. *The Benham Family in Australia,* Chivers 1970.

In summary it was this new business and professional class and a small proportion of the skilled working class that was first to take advantage of the opportunities for women to gain a degree. This finding is consistent with the findings of Lynne Marks and Chad Gaffield in Canada and with the work of Barbara Solomon, quoted earlier. As in Gaffield and Marks' study the existence of a small proportion of daughters of manual workers in the university "emphasizes that a simple image of nineteenth-century university students as elites is not correct". As in Solomon's study it could be said that "what distinguished a large proportion of the fathers was their economic and social mobility".[1]

In an interesting study of graduates of the University of Sydney, Madge Dawson and others compared the social class background of four cohorts of women who had graduated by 1958.[2] The oldest cohort was comparable in age to the Adelaide university graduates in this study. They found that sixty-four percent of the oldest women came from the three top social groups, rising through sixty-six percent and seventy-three percent to seventy-six percent of the youngest women. Thirty-six percent of the oldest women came from the four bottom groups falling through thirty-four percent and twenty-seven percent, to become twenty-four percent of the youngest women. The authors conclude

> Contrary to popular belief, these figures do not suggest that university students, or at any rate women students, have been increasingly drawn from wider social groups. Rather they suggest the opposite; that the proportion from the upper status groups and the professional families has increased, while the proportion from the lower status groups and the manual worker families has decreased.[3]

It may well have been that while the elites shunned the universities in the period before the 1920's, particularly for their daughters, the door was opened slightly more widely for working class

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1 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women*, p. 66.

2 I discuss this useful study in more detail in the following chapter.

3 Dawson M *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, University of Sydney, 1965, p. 6.

women. An examination of the schools previously attended by graduates may give some indication of the way in which the door later closed.

**Table 3.** Previous School Attended

| State Schools | | Private/CorporateSchools | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced School for Girls | 49 | Methodist Ladies College | 21 |
| Adelaide High School | 18 | Tormore House | 12 |
| University Training College + Pupil Teacher School | 11 | Unley Park School | 6 |
| | | Miss Martins | 5 |
| Clare High School | 1 | Malvern Collegiate | 4 |
| Grote Street Model | 1 | St. Peter's Girls | 3 |
| Norwood | 1 | Dryburgh house | 2 |
| | | Miss Cousins | 1 |
| | | Mrs. Brown | 1 |
| | | Kyre College | 1 |
| | | Knightsbridge (Mrs. Hubbe) | 1 |
| | | Hardwicke College | 1 |
| | | Presbyterian Ladies School | 1 |
| | | Convent of Mercy | 1 |
| | | Walford | 1 |
| | | St. Dominics Priory | 1 |
| | | Mr. G.G. Newman | 1 |
| | | Claremont Girls' School (W.A.) | 1 |
| | | Girton College (W.A.) | 1 |
| | | Sorbonne (France) | 1 |
| | | Private Tuition | 7 |
| Total | 81 | Total | 73 |
| Unknown | 37 | | |
| Exempt | 1 | | |
| Total | 192 | | |

Source: University Calendars, Advanced School for Girl Registers, oral sources.

The previous school attended by graduates could be found in the University calendars. More precisely what appears in the calendar is the

school from which the student passed the Senior Public Exam. (called Matriculation before 1887). In many instances girls had, in fact attended several schools. Rosamond Agnes Benham's schooling reflects a time when a far more leisurely approach could be taken to schooling and the completion of university-qualifying examinations. Rosamond, daughter of Jack and Agnes Benham, of radical fame, was educated first at Mrs. Kelsey's Dryburgh House School. In 1891 she spent a year at the Advanced School gaining her Senior Public in English, French and geography. For the next two years she received private tuition from Mr. F.A D'Arenberg, and in the Senior Public of 1894 she passed in English, French, Latin and pure mathematics. In 1896 she began a medical course at the age of 22.[1] The late nineteenth century pattern reflects a far more flexible approach to girls' schooling and in many cases a very late decision to enrol for a degree. Helen Mayo's schooling was also eclectic. She didn't have regular lessons until she was ten, when a governess 'came in the mornings'. Initally taught by her parents she then had a brief period of schooling at a Miss Ross's school and a term at Miss Martin 's school. After some tutoring at home she went to the Advanced School for a year and passed her Senior Public examination from there.[2]

Laura Fowler's letters to her brother Jim again illuminate both the approach taken to the gaining of formal qualifications and the gradual development of an interest in university study. Seventeen year old Laura wrote in 1885:

> Mr. Tyas, the Registrar at the University told us the best place for preparation was the Advanced School for Girls, that is judging by results, for they pass proportionately many more girls than any other school here ... I have never touched algebra or Euclid, in fact they did not teach them at all at Argyle House (the school Laura attended in England). I do not think I shall attempt a degree. The passing of the Matriculation may be of use to me later on, to show that I have reached that standard, and of course the obtaining of any degree would be of still more use, but then it would for three years tie me down to a course of study which so far as I can see would not be much use to me as a girl. So that I do not see any great advantage that would be gained, except that it would

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1 Chivers, R. *The Benham Family in South Australia.*

2 Autobiographical typescript by Helen Mayo, Mayo Papers, PRG 127. M.L.S.A.

better qualify me for supporting myself in later years, if this were ever necessary. Of course anyone can attend any lectures at the University as an outsider, and can choose which he (sic) likes from any of the courses. I almost think this would be the better thing for me to do, and in this way you see I could be able to take up any subjects I care to. The only degree I could go in for would be a B .Sc., that is to say, without getting up Latin and Greek and I should not care to do that, for I know next to nothing of Latin, and nothing whatever of Greek. In the courses for B.A. and medicine, Latin and Greek are compulsory but in the B.Sc. French can be substituted and in the second and third year they are done away with altogether. What do you say Jim? I wish you could write and tell me as soon as you have made up your mind. Would you like your sister to be a B.Sc.?[1]

The fact that Latin and Greek were compulsory for the Arts degree significantly influenced the first few women to enrol and accounts for the high number of Bachelors of Science .

A month later Laura wrote to Jim again, having clearly changed her mind:

Last Monday I went to Miss Martin and enjoyed the time very much. The subjects I am to take up at first are Latin and mathematics which are both compulsory. Miss Martin thinks I could have easily passed second or third class in March but I do not think that would have been much use to me, and I am afraid would have been merely a cram. I find a good disadvantage in being away from school so long. I wanted to go to the Advanced School but I should have had to take up all subjects that are taught there, and work with a class of girls and I should have had little attention paid to my weak subjects such as Latin and mathematics ...

In November the response arrived from Jim and Laura wrote back:

My dearest Jim, Poor little (?) me. What a drubbing you give me, all on account of my thinking of going in for a degree! Never mind you need not have been so dreadfully sarcastic. My present idea is to study for the next twelve months for the Matric., not to cram, but to make it as pleasant a year in that way as possible and after that with such an adviser as you (bow) I should be able to

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1 Fowler Papers. PRG 34. M.L.S.A. (Laura's emphasis)

get and read such books as would improve the mind, widen the imagination and tend to culture generally.[1]

In spite of her mock subservience to her brother Laura persevered and gained a first class pass in her Matriculation. In 1887 she enrolled for medicine, and became the first woman to graduate in that faculty.

These biographical details warn against a too rigid acceptance of the school listed as the only one attended by students. It is however significant that just over fifty percent of the graduates came from state high schools and the Pupil Teacher College, later the University Training College. Another qualification is necessary here. In the earliest period of its existence - from 1879 to the mid-1890's - the Advanced School for Girls was a fee-paying school - its fees comparable to those of girls' private schools. It did not become a free high school until 1909 when it became Adelaide High School. It did provide a system of bursaries, increasingly generous over the years so that by the time it lost its separate existence over two thirds of the students were bursary holders - in effect it had become a free high school.[2]

It is as bursary holders at the Advanced School that girls from working class and petit bourgeois families would have been able to gain their qualifications. The number of girls who gained their Senior Public at the Advanced School was 49. This is a lower figure than a comparison of Advanced School registers and University Calendars yields. In other words some girls had attended the Advanced School but took their Senior Public examinations at some other school - or from private tuition as did Rosamond Benham. Certainly the Advanced School for Girls played a significant role in preparing a large proportion of the early women graduates. Adelaide High School, from 1909, also played a significant part. Annie Winifred Clark's reminiscences, like those of Anna Martin, show that for girls who were prepared to work and were unafraid of flouting convention, the high school offered challenging work. Annie Clark (later Wall), the daughter of a share-farmer from rural Georgetown began her schooling at Gladstone High School.

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1 Ibid.

2 Mackinnon A *One Foot on the Ladder: Outcomes and Origins in Girls' Secondary Schooling in South Australia.* pp 88-89

> My sister and I started the same year and we used to drive in, in a horse and cart, or sulky and we'd board there from Monday morning until Friday night. On Friday mother would come back in the trap and collect us.

Later Annie won a government scholarship as did her brother:

> The two of us came down to the city which was a big thing in those days, in 1913, to live away from home. It was also a big sacrifice on the part of my parents, because they were really struggling.

Annie went to Adelaide High School starting at the Junior level then progressing to the Senior public, with the intention of becoming a teacher:

> Then my mother said she thought I could, in her words, do better than that. I didn't know just what I wanted to do, so she suggested medicine. Well, as far as I was concerned, I couldn't just go and do medicine: I would need some financial help. In Adelaide High, the girls didn't study physics, chemistry or biology. So I had to start at the level of Higher Public, to do those subjects which I hadn't done in the earlier grades - and get a scholarship out of it! So it meant really hard work joining the boy's side of the school. There were no mixed classes, except for an occasional one like me who wanted to do subjects the boys were doing. And so I did physics, chemistry and biology with the boys. Fortunately I got one of the four medical bursaries that were given and was able to go to the University.[1]

Annie Winifred Clark's determination and ability and her parents' sacrifice and encouragement led to a long and successful medical career, culminating with the presentation to Dr. Wall of the order of Australia in 1979 and her distinction of being the first woman to receive the award of Doctor of the University.

The experience of having to join a boys class for science subjects was not confined to state high schools. Effie Deland (later Best) described going from Girton, a private girls school, first to the School of Mines and later to Adelaide High:

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1 Reminiscences of A. Winifred Wall (nee Clark). AFUW collection.

...When I started at Girton I went for chemistry to the School of Mines. At the time they ran a special class for the girls from private schools because none of these schools had laboratories and chemistry teaching facilities. I did Junior and Senior level chemistry at the School of Mines but when it came to Leaving Honours I had to go to Adelaide High. There I was the only girl in the class. The only funny thing about it was that I used to go up to Reggie West at the end of the term and say thank you very much for having me which I thought was necessary and polite but I think it gave him a surprise .....If I hadn't got a bursary to the University, I would certainly have been told to stay home and babysit.[1]

Effie Best is listed as having done her Senior Public at the Adelaide High School. Yet the major part of her school life was spent at Girton.

Methodist Ladies College, a corporate school established in 1902 supplied a large number of graduates. So too did Tormore House, a private school under the leadership of Miss Caroline Jacob, a school, which gained an excellent reputation in the first decade of the twentieth century and a larger number of students. Both of these schools included on their staff former students of the Advanced School for Girls and some of the earliest graduates who returned to teach. Tormore had on its staff Agnes Heyne, later Agnes Dorsch, considered by many a brilliant teacher. Having taken a degree with first class honours in classics and mathematics Agnes Dorsch taught Latin, Greek, English and mathematics to her pupils. Agnes Dorsch also coached Greek privately and Anna Martin, working as a junior teacher took Greek with her:

To be taught by Mrs. Dorsch was to enter a different world, absolutely different. It was one of those things you always remember. She was big; I mean intellectually and culturally. Many German people in South Australia who came from cities had a very deep sense of culture and to have lessons from any of the Heyne family or from the Trudinger family meant that you had entered and shared their world. We loved Agnes Dorsch; learning in a group with her was quite a treat.[2]

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1 Taped interview with Mrs. Effie Best. In possession of Alison Mackinnon.

2 Taped interview with Miss Anna Martin.

In this fashion the earliest graduates of the University of Adelaide taught the second generation, enriching many of the girls' schools and providing models of the pleasure of intellectual activity.

Many small private girls' schools run by women prepared a few students for the university. Annie Montgomery Martin's School contributed five students. This was a school which was highly respected in the period before the systematic, academic approach of the Advanced School for Girls became the dominant model. It was run on much more individual and flexible lines, as Laura Fowler suggests. That individuality and its family atmosphere suited Laura Fowler but not a later medical graduate Helen Mayo who, after a term at Miss Martin's School wrote :

> it was one of those 'do it yourself' schools and I'm sure I felt the need for discipline most of all.[1]

Unley Park School run by the Misses Thornber also was particularly strong in the late nineteenth century with 125 students in 1898. The upper school followed a curriculum based on the requirements of the university. Six students attended university and graduated. Many of the clientele of Unley Park School, as of some of the other smaller 'ladies' schools would not have considered university as suitable for their daughters. Dryburgh House, Mrs. Kelsey's School, was represented with only two students in the university calendars. Yet many of Mrs. Kelsey's students went on to the Advanced School for Girls. Seventeen appear on the Advanced School registers between 1894 and 1908.[2] Mrs. Kelsey, in a paper on women's education presented to the Australasian Society for the Advancement of Science in 1898 argued that woman's true emancipation lay in her economic independence.[3]

Hardwicke College, Mrs. Shuttleworth's School, was another school strongly favoured by the old Adelaide bourgeoisie before the growth of the larger, more systematic high schools and corporate girls' schools. Other small schools sent one pupil and two attended with a Western Australian

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1 Helen Mayo - autobiographical typescript. Mayo papers.

2 Mackinnon A *One Foot on the Ladder* p 103.

3 Kelsey papers. PRG 304 Series 1 and 2 M L S A

background. Clara Trudinger appears as exempted from Senior Public Examination under a particular regulation L.B. XXIV.[1] She graduated in Arts at the age of forty and apparently acquired comparable qualifications years before in England where she was born. She was known to many young women as an excellent teacher - as in Anna Martin 's comment above. Jane Walker, also born in England had studied at Heidelburg and at the Sorbonne in France before coming to Australia to be the headmistress of Methodist Ladies College.[2] She completed an Arts degree in Adelaide in 1908. Seven students listed private tuition. They may have had private tutors, but it is more likely that they had attended a school for a considerable number of years but had taken intensive coaching before their Senior Public examinations, as had Rosamond Benham. This route was necessary in the early period when schools did not provide the requisite subjects such as Greek, or where a girl's education had been less formally structured with no thought of possible university entrance.

A striking difference in the pattern of previous schools attended is revealed when students are sorted into two groups - the schools attended by the first cohort (or generation) and the schools attended by the second cohort.

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1 University of Adelaide Calendar, Thomas and Co 1906.

2 Twynam, P.M. *To Grow in Wisdom, the Story of the first seventy-five years of the Methodist Ladies College: 1902-1977.* Adelaide Gillingham Printers Pty Ltd 1977 p 40ff

Table 4. Previous School Attended - 2 Cohorts

| | Cohort 1 (to 1910) | Cohort 2 (1910-1922) |
|---|---|---|
| Advanced School for Girls | 41 | 8 |
| Adelaide High School | • | 18 |
| University Training College | 6 | 5 |
| University Training College + Pupil Teacher School | 6 | 5 |
| Clare High School | • | 1 |
| Grote Street Model | 1 | • |
| Norwood | 1 | • |
| Methodist Ladies College | 1 | 20 |
| Tormore | 2 | 10 |
| Miss Martins | 3 | 2 |
| Malvern Collegiate | 1 | 3 |
| Unley Park School | 4 | 2 |
| St. Peters Girls | 0 | 3 |
| Dryburgh House | 2 | 0 |
| Miss Cousins | 0 | 1 |
| Mrs. Brown | 1 | 0 |
| Kyre College | 0 | 1 |
| Knightsbridge (Mrs. Hubbe) | 0 | 1 |
| Hardwicke College | 1 | 0 |
| Presbyterian Ladies College | 0 | 1 |
| Muirden | 0 | 1 |
| Convent of Mercy | 0 | 1 |
| Walford | 0 | 1 |
| St. Dominics Priory | 0 | 1 |
| Mr. G.G. Newman | 0 | 1 |
| Claremont Girls School (W.A.) | 0 | 1 |
| Girton College (W.A.) | 0 | 1 |
| Sorbonne | 1 | 0 |
| Private Tuition | 6 | 1 |
| Unknown | 18 | 18 |
| Exempt | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 90 | 102 |

(N = 192)

Source: University Calendars, Advanced School for Girl Registers, oral sources.

In the first group by far the largest number of students attended from the Advanced School for Girls - forty-one in all. Unley Park School and Miss Martin 's School provided seven graduates between them and the pupil teacher/university training route assisted six students to a degree. Six students had taken private tuition before taking their Senior Public examination and the one exemption was recorded. A sizable sixty-six percent of the cases where the previous school was known had come via the State School system.

The picture changed considerably for the second generation. Methodist Ladies' College strengthened its academic programme at this period. The school prospectus did make the point that "the women's sphere is mainly in the home" but also pointed out that there was a growing realization that there was no more important place where a course of high mental training was more imperatively needed.[1] In this way the domestic ideology assisted a group of women to gain degrees. Tormore was also academically strong in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Miss Caroline Jacob visited Cheltenham Girls School in England, considered a model new girls secondary school and was impressed by many of its aspects. In 1898 Tormore introduced mathematics, science and Latin and aimed to prepare girls for a university education.[2] Ten young women entered from Tormore after 1910, two before. Several earlier graduates taught at Tormore - Miss Amy Burgess, Miss May Burgess and Mrs. Agnes Dorsch. Adelaide High School replaced the Advanced School for Girls as the major state route to university reflecting the transformation of the Advanced School to Adelaide High in 1908.

The decrease in the proportion of graduates from the state sector is particularly striking in this period. Compared to cohort 1 where 66 percent came from a background of state schooling, cohort 2 only contained 37 percent from a state school background. There is also an interesting difference in the types of private schools listed. In the early

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1 R.J. Nichols, Private and Denominational Schools of South Australia: their growth and development, p 190 Unpublished M.A. thesis, Melbourne, 1951.

2 Ibid.

period, 1885 - 1910, with the exception of Methodist Ladies' College all the private schools listed were small schools run by women with no corporate structure or strong church backing. By the later period, with the exception of Tormore, the numbers of students from the small private schools was matched by students from a new type of school - the large corporate girls school, which was either coming into existence or being strengthened by the backing of church or corporation and by an infusion of graduate teachers.

The South Australian schools in this group continue to this day, sometimes under different names. Tormore does not. On the eve of her retirement Caroline Jacob, the strong and effective headmistress who built Tormore's high reputation in the early twentieth century wrote:

> I have endeavoured to build a school worthy to rank with the girls' grammar schools in the other Australian states, always with the hope that Tormore might become an incorporated school with an enthusiastic board of governers, able to placed the school on a permanent footing.[1]

This did not happen, mainly because of a clash of personality between Miss Jacob and an Anglican archbishop.

The marked difference in the schools attended by graduates illuminates a major change which took place in girls' secondary schooling in the period. The Advanced School for Girls, a state-initiated and supported high school, became the catalyst for, and the focal point of, a process whereby women continued to be teachers but in a totally different setting and in a manner which required the acquiring of credentials. From small schools run by individual women on informal lines, sometimes in their own homes, the pattern for girls schools changed to larger institutions run on systematic lines in formally structured classes. These larger schools, while far more permanent, were often administered by schools councils dominated by men. They offered secure employment to women teachers, in fact to many of the earliest graduates, and made them part of a hierarchical, bureaucratic setting increasingly common in the early twentieth century.[2]

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1 Ibid.

2 This process is described in far more detail in the author's previous study *One Foot on the Ladder*

The shifting emphasis from state to girls' large private schools in this period raises the question alluded to earlier in Madge Dawson's study of the University of Sydney. Dawson, who looked at several cohorts of graduates up to 1958, argued that students were not increasingly drawn from wider social groups, but that the opposite was true. The shift from state to private schools as the dominant mode of preparation for university may well have contributed to this process - a question which certainly warrants further study of several later cohorts of Adelaide university graduates.

**Support Systems**

Although the majority of graduates were middle class and a significant minority working class, membership of a particular social class did not make university education inevitable. Far from it, particularly in the period up to 1910 when such an experience was a rarity. Financial and psychological support was essential for an intending student.

The necessity for financial support has been alluded to in the reminiscences of students such as Phyllis Lade (Duguid) and Effie Deland (Best). Both knew that without scholarships university was an impossible dream. So too Anna Martin and Dorothy Hunter (West) needed the financial security of Education Department funding. Annie Clark (Wall) knew that without a medical bursary a medical course was beyond her means. Not only was the bursary necessary for the payment of fees, approximately £25 per annum in 1895.[1] Young women needed board and lodging and money for books or, perhaps, a microscope. Annie Clark felt the need to succeed not only for herself but for her parents sake:

> I couldn't possibly expect them to keep me. At one time I wanted a microscope. We had to have a microscope for our work and I think we bought it for £14 . I remember my father saying that he didn't quite know how they were going to manage, but they'd do it somehow. And they did. My parents were keen for me to do well, so I couldn't let them down.[2]

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1 The Adelaide University Calendar, Thomas and Co 1895. The cost of a complete medical degree was calculated in this calendar as £148.0.0

2 Taped interview with A. Winifred Wall (nee Clark)

For girls of even more limited means the Education Department pathway was the obvious route to a degree. Mabel Hardy chose another route - she 'worked her way through' as she explained in her reminiscences:

> I attended the Adelaide University from 1909 - 1914, longer than most students studying for an ordinary B.A. degree, but the reason for this was purely financial. I had to earn my living while I worked for my degree and as my salary, as a full time teacher in a private school, was £20 per annum for the first year (which was paid in three instalments at the end of each school term so that £6.13.4 had to last from mid-December till mid-May) I was obliged to seek the help of a small university grant given to evening students which paid their fees. I was most grateful for this and there were several others who like me could not have attended the university without this assistance.[1]

A small group of women teachers - some graduates themselves, others early non-graduating students - inspired and encouraged countless schoolgirls to consider university. Edith Hubbe, as Edith Cook, second headmistress of the Advanced School and later head of her own school in Knightsbridge, played an important part. So too did Caroline Jacob and the Misses Burgess of Tormore and Ellen Benham, headmistress of Walford Girls School. The three Heyne sisters, Agnes Heyne Dorsch, Laura Heyne and Ida Heyne are all mentioned with love and respect by their pupils, the second generation of graduates. These women demonstrated that women were academically able and that academic work could be fun. Some of them demonstrated that an independent single life was a desirable goal. Effie Best recollected that

> I was extraordinarily fortunate in going to the school (Girton) at that time because Miss Ida Heyne was my first form mistress. She was a most astonishing teacher. I think what I gained from her was intellectual honesty. She was somebody who could teach you and make it quite obvious that she didn't know everything. The Heyne sisters were extraordinarily intelligent. Agnes Dorsch could read Greek poetry so that it really sounded like poetry.[2]

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1 Reminiscences of Mabel Hardy, in possession of Dr. Helen Jones, Adelaide.

2 Taped interview with Mrs. Effie Best (nee Deland).

As well as teachers' encouragement the support of parents was crucial if girls were to continue their education.

Occasionally a father made no distinction between son and daughter - particularly if a daughter was the only child. Phyllis McGlew's father treated her as a substitute son.

> I had a very interesting, very happy childhood. My father, of course, always wanted a boy and so tried to bring me up as much like a boy as possible. I learnt to row when I was about six and I learnt to swim when I was about five and he used to teach me to shoot and play cricket and got me horses to ride. I was such a tomboy.

Such an upbringing prepared Phyllis McGlew for such an unconventional situation as being the only woman in a class of male medical students:

> There were twenty-one of us and I was the only woman. Nobody wanted to be a partner with me and you had to work in pairs. Little Les Linn, the most inoffensive and very nice chap, didn't grab anyone else, so I was Les Linn's partner and I used to lead him a terrible dance. I never thought of men and boys as men and boys. I had no sexual interest in them at all.[1]

Aileen Ingleby (later Bond) was another whose father clearly made no distinctions along the lines of sex.

> My father always wanted me, for as long as I can remember to take up the law and follow him. I remember he used to take me for little walks by himself from the time I was about two years old and tell me about all kinds of things ... When I was at school I came up and did my homework in the office, and if my father was not in court he took me down to the Arcadia which was then a lovely cafe underneath the taxation office. I'd come to the office and do my homework, then we'd go home together at about six o'clock. I think I breathed in the atmosphere. I used to see the clients coming and going and he used to bring me in sometimes. 'I'd like to discuss this case with you', he'd say.[2]

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1 Taped interview with Dr. Phyllis Cilento (nee McGlew).

2 Taped interview with Mrs. Aileen Ingleby (nee Bond).

Others received great encouragement from mothers, such as the mother of Annie Clark Wall, who put the idea of a medical career into her daughter's head. Phyllis Lade remembers:

> I would have had strong support from my mother - father as well of course - because she felt very strongly that a girl should be given the opportunity to find some method of earning her own living and she wouldn't allow any of us just to stay home and be what was called the homegirl, until we had done something else. She hadn't had the opportunities and I think she felt the loss. I think she felt very strongly, all her life, that the economic dependence of the woman on the man was not a good thing.[1]

A few, like Agnes Juliana Hulda Grosser, were lucky to be helped by a relative, or a person of means who recognized their promise.[2] John Hartley's coaching of Agnes Heyne Dorsch enabled her promise in the classics to be fulfilled. Possibly some students entered university against strong resistance, or gradually persuaded parents to their view. Gertrude Jude, for instance was dissuaded from the study of medicine by a brother who disapproved of women studying anatomy and a very Victorian father who did not want his daughters to work.[3] Gertrude managed to gain permission to do a science degree. Without encouragement and financial support the way would certainly have been much more difficult. Mabel Hardy's financial difficulties, mentioned earlier, suggest this.

**Summary**

The earlier graduates of the University of Adelaide came predominantly from a middle class background, with a sizeable minority of 15% from a working class background. Of the middle class, professionals and business employees, the groups categorized by Mark Stern as the 'new' business class, and referred to by others as the new class, were significantly represented. A large number, almost 50%, had gained

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1 Reminiscences of Phyllis Duguid (nee Lade).

2 Hulda Grosser, a farmer's daughter from Tanunda was encouraged to continue her studies and to become a teacher by her uncle Dr. Franz Juttner. He undertook to sponsor her in her studies. Private correspondence in possession of author.

3 Private correspondence of author with Ms Mary Kither. Of the six sisters in Gertrude Jude's family only one married and the others, Gertrude excepted, were left in genteel poverty, untrained as were many nineteenth-century daughters.

their qualifying examination through the state school system, including the teacher training route of pupil teacher college or university training college. When the earliest graduates were divided into two cohorts, significant differences in previous school attended were seen. The earliest cohort, those who graduated between 1885 - 1910 were far more likely to have come from a state school background (over 66%) or from a small private school run by a woman. The later cohort, those who graduated between 1910 and 1922 were less likely to have been educated in a state school (37%) and an increasing number of privately educated girls came from larger corporate girls schools. Private tuition declined in this period. Financial and psychological support obviously was important for early graduates, embarking on what was for the first cohort at least, a new and unconventional activity.

# Chapter 4 A Demographic Vanguard?

> I had a very interesting time before I had to come home and get married. When I got back I said to Ray that I wasn't going to marry him. I had had my hair cut short, I'd got lost in Port Said and I'd done a lot... I got home intact, though.
>
> Reminiscences of Phyllis McGlew (later Cilento) c 1919.

To many turn of the century observers it was clear that women's education was definitely a factor in the decline of the birth rate and the increase in the numbers not marrying. The opponents of the higher education of women feared above all that highly educated women would be "mannish". They would "ape male attire". A new type might emerge, one who would desert the family, or intrude into men's sphere. As the *Argus*, a Melbourne newspaper, observed:

> A girl who has spent a dozen years in climbing up to the arid eminences of the mathematical or historical tripos will certainly contemplate both man and marriage with vision uncomfortably purged.[1]

These fears seemed well founded to some who gave evidence to the New South Wales Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birth Rate in 1903. The link between women's education and a declining birth rate was, however, not new.

In 1894 Walter Balls-Headley, lecturer in obstetrics and diseases of women at Melbourne University wrote "Evolution of the Diseases of Women", a work which had intellectual debts to Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Balls-Headley partly blamed a delay in age of marriage for the declining birth rate, a delay caused by increasing financial difficulties and competition for men. Drawing heavily on Spencer's work he argued that modern education places physiological constraints on a young woman and, "should she have capacity for higher mental attainments, her nervous system is apt to develop at the expense of her body". Her descendents would experience increasing difficulty in parturition "thus

1 Kelly F *Degrees of Liberation* p6

high mental culture is antagonistic to healthy sexual development and child bearing"[1]

Another Victorian doctor, J.W. Barrett, president of the Medical Society in 1901, was concerned that the "cosmic process of development has been followed by a gradual decline in the birth rate and has, since 1888 or thereabouts, been supplemented in Australasia by the voluntary restriction of families on an extensive scale". What had motivated women to use this new knowledge about contraceptive techniques? Barrett's conclusion was the "female emancipation and the extension of women's education were major factors, with simple disinclination, the difficulty of obtaining domestic servants, pursuit of a high life style and the high cost of boys' education in subsidiary roles".[2]

These remarks foreshadowed the virulent attacks on women's higher education by a psychologist on the other side of the Pacific, S. Stanley Hall. Hall's classic work on Adolescence, published in 1904, totally denounced women's higher education claiming that the result would be women who are:

> functionally castrated; some actively deplore the necessity of child-bearing, and perhaps are parturition phobiacs, abhor the limitations of married life; they are incensed whenever attention is called to the functions peculiar to their sex, and the careful consideration of problems of the monthly rest are thought "not fit for cultivated women[3].

Hall's views were published in the United States in the same year in which the report of the Commissioner into the Decline of the Birth Rate was published in Australia. In that report a group of Commissioners, men of mainly medical and business background neglected to take the opportunity of analysing changing socio-economic trends in any great detail but rather laid the blame for Australia's declining birthrate at the feet of women. The true reasons for family limitation were, in their view, unwillingness to submit to the strain and

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1 Hicks N *This Sin and Scandal: Australia's Population Debate 1891 - 1911* Australian National University Press 1978 p 35

2 Ibid p40

3 Hall S S *Adolescence : Its Psychology and the Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* Appleton 1904 p302

worry of children, a dislike of the interference with pleasure and comfort involved in child bearing, a desire to avoid the actual physical discomfort of gestation, parturition and lactation and a love of luxury and social pleasures - in short selfishness on the part of women.[1]

These highly moralistic views were the extremes and there were other more moderate voices who argued that the depression of the 1890's, unemployment and other economic factors were crucial . Nevertheless the commissioners, gynaecologists such as Balls-Headley and Barrett, and psychologists such as Hall were reacting to a very real phenomenon. Neville Hicks claims that "in the generation to 1911 Australia went through a demographic revolution".[2]

Certainly during the 1890's there was a spectacular decline in the Australian birth rate. Most of the overall decline was caused by a reduction of fertility within marriage. Between 1891 and 1911 the average size of completed families fell from 7.03 to 5.25 .[3] The major Australian analysts of the demographic revolution, Ruzicka and Caldwell, state that this fertility decline may well have been the most momentous event of our times .[4]

It certainly was momentous for women, for whom the fertility decline has had enormous implications. This leads us to ask was there, behind the moralistic inveighings of those who feared fertility decline, and even more deeply, feared women moving out of their "natural" sphere, a considerable truth in the link between women's education and a reduction in marital fertility?

The demographic transition has not received much attention from women's historians in Australia. There is a need to examine closely demographic evidence from the period of transition in order to tease out factors associated with a tendency to never marry, to marry late or to limit fertility by either "natural" means or by the use of contraceptive devices.

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1 Hicks *This Sin and Scandal* p22,23
2 Ibid p 157
3 Ibid pxvi
4 Ruzicka L and Caldwell J *The End of Demograpic Transition in Australia* Australian National University Press Canberre 1977 p1

One discrete group whose marriage patterns and fertility may well be significant is that group of women who undertook higher education at the turn of the century. Attending a university with the intention of completing a degree can in itself be taken as a radical act before the twentieth century as evidenced by the fierce opposition to women's entry to higher education in many parts of the Western world [1]. It constituted quite clearly a stepping out from the expected private world to the public world of men, for university education in South Australia was not just a liberal education for a leisured class but a necessary professional preparation for life in the civil service or the professions. Did such an experience alter women's attitudes to marriage and child bearing? As I intimated earlier, one of the ways of casting fresh light on the matter is to examine closely cohorts of early women graduates and to examine both their demographic profile and their attitudes to marriage and fertility where these can be gleaned from literary or oral sources.

**The demographic study.**

In order to illuminate some of these questions a further study was undertaken of the first women graduates of the University, that is the 192 who had graduated by 1922 [2]. By far the largest number of those women had graduated as Bachelors of Arts, a smaller number as Bachelors of Science and an even smaller group had obtained medical degrees. There were several degrees in music, three diplomas of commerce and three degrees in law. Two had taken Masters degrees in Arts.

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1 See for instance the account of the opposition to women's higher education in England in Burstyn J *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*

2 The 1922 Calendar contains a list of all graduates up to, and including, that year. This proved a useful cut-off point as I could study two cohorts, broadly divided into those who graduated before 1910 and those who graduated before 1922.

**Table 1** Degrees taken by women graduates up to 1922

| Degree | Number |
|---|---|
| Master of Arts | 2 |
| Bachelor of Arts | 126 |
| Bachelor of Science | 25 |
| MBBS and MB | 16 |
| Mus Bac | 14 |
| Ll B | 3 |
| Dip Comm | 3 |
| Master of Science | 1 |
| Not specified | 2 |

Source, Calendar of University of Adelaide, 1922

Some women later completed higher degrees, including, in a few instances, doctorates. These, however, were usually conferred elsewhere.[1]

In the previous chapter I explained the process of data collection which facilitated the reconstitution of the life histories of a large number of the first women graduates. I will briefly reiterate and elaborate on that process here.

The office of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages provided a very valuable range of information which included date of birth, place of birth, parents' address and father's occupation. By searching death certificates it is possible to establish with certainty those who had remained single and, for that group, age at death and, sometimes, occupation at time of death. For those whose death certificates were not found, excluding those known to be still living, a search was made of marriage certificates starting with age groups most likely to contain women of marriageable age and broadening out to examine most possible age groups where they could be located. This painstaking search yielded a large group of graduates who married - whose family profiles could be reconstituted.

1 For instance Dorothea Proud later completed a doctorate at the London School of Economics.

Further searching was then undertaken of death certificates, where available, to establish number of children born to these families. The birth certificates of children were then sought and date of birth of children established. This enabled a study of birth intervals to be undertaken where completed family size was known. In all, of 192 women in the study it was found that 84 definitely married and 74 remained single. Thirty-four eluded the search, no doubt because they moved interstate or overseas.[1] Of the 'known' group, several did move interstate but could be traced from biographical or oral sources where some life data could be found. For some, only scarce material is available, enough perhaps to answer one question, but not others. For instance contact with the niece of Charlotte Arabella Wright, first Arts graduate, yielded the fact that her aunt had moved to Western Australia and married, which allowed her to be placed in the 'ever-married' group. Details of any children, however, have not been established.

Nevertheless a large group of women remain, 158 in all, whose family and demographic details can be examined, providing a unique glimpse of a significant and unusual group whose lives differed from the norm by virtue of their university attendance.[2]

**Education as a demographic variable.**

Demographers consider level of education to be an important variable in relation to likelihood of marriage and age at marriage. Interestingly, and, seemingly paradoxically, is the apparent lack of association between level of education and average issue of wives, that is number of children born - although it is argued that in pre-contracepting societies age at marriage and percentage never married are crucial determinants of family size.

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1 It was beyond the scope of this study to follow up those who had moved so far afield as extensive searches of interstate records were not possible.

2 A condition of my record search was the need for confidentiality. Consequently I have avoided using names of those for whom the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages has been my source of information. Where information was obtained by literary or interview source, I have used full details.

**Family size and education.**

Ruzicka and Caldwell claim that:

> Ware's analysis of the Melbourne survey (1973) confirms that major cultural divisions in contemporary Australian society with respect to family size are religion and education.[1]

They go on to argue that religion makes a more significant difference in terms of completed family than level of education. Studying three generations they concluded that the division between wives of different educational background was less marked than the difference within each group by religion - Roman Catholic wives tending to have more children than their non-Catholic counterparts.

**Table 2** Average issue of wives by education and religion

| Generation born in | 1911-16 | | 1916-21 | | 1921-26 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educational level | R.C. | O | R.C | O | R.C. | O |
| University | 2.49 | 2.25 | 3.12 | 2.54 | 3.40 | 2.74 |
| Other tertiary | 2.95 | 2.23 | 3.16 | 2.41 | 3.49 | 2.65 |
| Matriculation | 2.63 | 2.07 | 2.78 | 2.25 | 2.95 | 2.48 |
| Intermediate | 2.68 | 2.21 | 2.93 | 2.36 | 3.05 | 2.54 |
| High school/primary | 2.94 | 2.47 | 3.09 | 2.65 | 3.17 | 2.80 |
| Nil, Not stated | 3.74 | 2.83 | 3.68 | 3.12 | 3.86 | 3.33 |
| All wives | 2.90 | 2.39 | 3.06 | 2.56 | 3.16 | 2.72 |

Source, Ruzicka and Caldwell. p237
R.C. = Roman Catholics: O. = Others

This table bears out the assertion that "the variation in the average issue of wives with different educational backgrounds did not significantly change between the generational groups for which data are available"[2].

1 Ruzicka and Caldwell *The End of Demographic Transition* p238
2 Ibid p236

They point out further that the range between the largest and smallest average issues has been a very narrow one indeed and relatively stable. Interestingly, those with tertiary and university qualifications do not have the smallest families.

**Marriage and Education**

A different picture emerges when the association between marriage and education is examined. McDonald quotes Hajnal's comment concerning "the well known inverse relationship between education and proportions married among women".[1] In his own study McDonald argues that age of marriage rises as educational level rises, claiming that among women having tertiary education in 1966, the percentage married at age 28-29 was comparatively low.[2]

A recent British study which examined a birth cohort born in the 1940's, using a complex multi-variate analysis found only three factors to be of direct importance to age of marriage of women. These factors were educational qualifications, occupation at marriage and mother's age at marriage. Although this study is located in quite a different historical period from that of the Adelaide study it is instructive to consider those factors in analysing the data. Their further conclusions are also enlightening:

> Graduates, who are only 5% of the sample, have a markedly different marriage pattern to the rest of the highly qualified women. As well as starting to marry at older ages they also marry across a greater range of ages than other women.[3]

In contrast to the distinct link between completed family size and religion, there is little evidence, according to McDonald, that religion influences age at marriage.

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1 McDonald P *Marriage in Australia: Age at First Marriage and Proportions Marrying 1860 -1971* Australian National University Press 1975 p213

2 Ibid p 214

3 Kiernan, K and Eldridge S "Age at Marriage: Inter and Intra Cohort Variation. "*British Journal of Sociology* Vol XXXVIII No 1 1986

In essence then, it is to be expected that a group of women completing higher education at the turn of the century, a unique minority group, would exhibit the patterns alluded to above - that is, a tendency to contain a higher than average group of women never married, a later age at marriage, and a wider range of age at marriage. For those who did marry, if one extrapolates from later evidence, (see Table 2) it might be expected that, in contrast to contemporary opinion, average issue of the marriage may not be very different from the general population. Nevertheless the period during which the graduates might be expected to be involved in child bearing was the period in which marital fertility was sharply decreasing i.e. 1890 to 1920. In common with their age cohorts, graduate women might have exhibited patterns of child-rearing consonant with the use of contraception, natural or artifical.

Ansley Coale argues that a very useful indication of parity-linked limitation of marital fertility (i.e. the use of contraception to limit marital fertility, a crucial aspect of the demographic transition) can be derived from records of the age of women at the birth of their last child. In a proportion of cases it is possible to establish age at birth of last child, enabling some light to be shed on the issue in the case of graduates.[1]

**Analysis of the graduate cohort.**

**Percentage ever married.**

One of the most striking aspects of the group as a whole was the high proportion who did not marry. Of the total number, 192, 84 married, 74 remained single and 34 were not known. If one assumes that 80% of the 'unknowns' married (allowing for 20% unmarried - a likelihood at that time) then 42% of the total number of women remained single. In fact, the proportion is probably much higher. If the 'unknowns' are similar to the known group then twice 20% would have remained single and the figure for those unmarried would be 47%. It is impossible to make absolutely valid comparisons with other demographic studies as method of data collection, divisions into birth cohorts and methods of analysis vary. Nevertheless, with those

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1 Coale A J and Watkins S C (ed) *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* Princeton University Press Princeton 1986 p11

qualifications in mind, the University sample can be compared in general terms to the larger study of marriage in Australia by Peter McDonald[1]. McDonald analysed the percentages never married in selected age groups in several Australian colonies (later states). Taking the age group 45-49, the age by which it is generally considered that most women will have married, McDonald's figures are as follows.

**Table 3:** Percentage of Females never married (S.A.)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1891 | 5.9 |
| 1901 | 9.8 |
| 1911 | 14.3 |
| 1921 | 17.3 |
| 1933 | 15.0 |
| 1947 | 12.5 |

Source, McDonald P. Marriage in Australia.

There is a noticeable increase in the percentage never married in the South Australian female population in the period 1891-1933 - an increase which began to subside from the 1940's on. This is precisely the period in which we would expect to find women graduates marrying - the earliest graduates (1880's) were born in the late 1860's and might be expected to marry in the 1880's and 90's while those graduating in the decade up to 1920 would be marrying in that decade or in the 1920's. The university women co-incide with, but greatly outstrip, the general increase in proportion never marrying.

In attempting to explain this 'bulge' McDonald looked to both the effect of the depression of the 1890's and to the First World War for an explanation. His analysis led him to the conclusion that the 90's depression led to severe disruptions of marriage patterns in Australia. He states that "It seems that a great number of people whose prospects of marriage were interrupted by the depression never married at all".[2] Surprisingly he concludes that while the First World War led to severe

1 McDonald P. *Marriage in Australia 1860-1971*
2 Ibid p164

fluctuations in the annual marriage rate it did not lead to significant effects on ultimate prospects.[1]

In the case of the women graduates the almost 50% remaining single seems quite spectacularly high. Could this large group be explained as a result of the depression which, McDonald argues, so severely limited marriages for several decades? In answering this question McDonald points out that the unskilled and skilled working class, and particularly the building industry were very hard hit by unemployment. This may have affected some families in the university group, but very few as the previous Chapter shows that only 15% were of working class background. Certainly the depression does not seem alone to account for the vastly larger number of unmarried graduates.

McDonald argues that "overall socio-economic status is inversely related to age at marriage but directly related to chances of eventually marrying".[2] This finding implies that university graduates, predominantly middle class with a sizeable minority of working class girls should, in class terms, have had a higher likelihood (or 'risk' in demographic terms) of marriage.

Comparative studies significantly lessen the impact of local economic factors as sufficient explanations. In her study of higher education in the United States, Barbara Solomon collected published data from nine separate surveys of marriage rates of 'college' women in this period including studies of the exclusive, 'women only' colleges such as Bryn Mawr and Wellesley and of co-educational institutions. In almost all of these studies the percentage of women remaining single was extremely high, of the order of 40-50% .[3]

Clearly there was some factor that set college or university women apart. It seems essential to consider at this point that some graduates, having gained economic independence chose not to marry. Conversely, as a radical group in this period they may not have found potential husbands. These points will be elaborated in later discussion.

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1 Ibid p159
2 Ibid p241
3 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women* . p 120.

Demographically, their propensity to remain single was quite significant. Unless their marrying 'sisters' produced much larger than average families the offspring of the university women would, overall, have been significantly less than a comparable, but not tertiary educated group. Perhaps those who feared that educating women would lead to "race suicide" were not entirely wrong.

**Age at First Marriage.**

Age at first marriage is seen as a highly significant demographic variable. Obviously those marrying later tend to have less children. As Ruzicka and Caldwell put it, "time gained by successful postponement of child-bearing promotes their lower fertility".[1] This point does need some qualification. It has far more force in a society which is characterized by 'normal' fertility, that is one in which family limitation is not practiced and factors such as numbers never marrying and age at marriage are significant limitations in themselves. In a society which does use contraceptives age at marriage is not nearly as significant as couples may marry early and postpone the birth of children for as long as they wish. Some measure of whether a group may be limiting fertility may be gained from evidence of postponement of first birth and, as mentioned earlier, the age of a women at last birth. Ansley Coale contends that statistics from many populations show that in the absence of birth limitation the mean age of woman at birth of last child will be around forty. A mean age of say, thirty-six years will give an indication of some limitation of fertility .[2]

McDonald's study of marriage reveals that age at marriage rose continuously for about 30 years from 1880 in Australia - a pattern which was common in the Western world. However, from the first decade of the century the age at marriage began to decline for both sexes. Farmers and professionals are cited as groups which married at a later age than other occupations.[3] These are significant exceptions for this study. University graduates, many the daughters of professionals, holding

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1 Ruzicka and Caldwell *The End of Demographic Transition* p296
2 Coale and Watkins (eds) *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* p11
3 McDonald P *Marriage in Australia* p161

professional occupations themselves after graduation, were most likely to marry professionals. A small group also married farmers.

McDonald's figures for median age at marriage in South Australia show an increase between 1891 and 1901 for both males and females. From 1901-1921 there was little change in median age at marriage for both sexes. Throughout the period, in Australia, age at marriage was highest in Victoria, followed by South Australia .[1]

**Table 4:** Median Age at Marriage of Females in S.A.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1891 | 23.3 |
| 1901 | 24.1 |
| 1911 | 24.4 |
| 1921 | 24.6 |

Source, McDonald. Marriage in Australia *

**Age at Marriage of Graduates**

It was possible to find the age at marriage of 77 graduates - a high proportion of the 84 "ever married" sample. Of that seventy-seven the median age at marriage was 26 years. Keeping in mind that most of the graduates would have married in the period 1890-1920, their median age at marriage was appreciably higher than their age cohort. Graduates married over a wide range of ages with two in the sample marrying in their late forties and a handful in their early twenties. The youngest, Agnes Marie Johanna Heyne, an early brilliant graduate in classics and mathematics, whose background was discussed in the last Chapter, married at twenty-one and as if to prove the demographers right produced eight children - a very unusual pattern for a woman graduate.

The graduates were separated into two cohorts in order to detect any changes in marriage patterns over several decades. The first cohort

1 Ibid p138. *McDonald believes the figure for 1921 may have been artifically heightened due to the late age of those who had postponed marriage during the first world war.

were those who graduated up to 1910, the second those who graduated between 1911-1922. The first period covers a much longer time span but in that period fewer women attended university so the groups are reasonably even in number, cohort 1 containing 90 women and cohort 2 containing 102. Median age at marriage was found for both groups. For cohort 1 median age was twenty-seven and for cohort 2 it was twenty-six. Probably little significance can be placed on this difference as the numbers in each cohort were small.

What can be stated with some confidence is that graduates married at a significantly older age than their contemporaries. This is consistent with the findings of McDonald and of Kiernan and Eldridge, cited earlier. The latter authors also noted the greater range of ages at marriage displayed by graduates, a finding also of this study.

Some explanations for the later age of marriage of graduates can be found in the demographic literature. McDonald noted for instance that "socio-economic status is inversely related to age at marriage".[1] Certainly university women did not reflect the social composition of the society as a whole - the middle class sector of the population was over-represented. Similarly professional men were noted by McDonald as a group likely to marry late - and as a later section of this Chapter illustrates many women graduates married professionals. Beyond these factors lie the explanations sought by womens historians and by the historians of gender relations who ask why individuals make particular decisions about marriage and reproductive strategies. Ruzicka and Caldwell, speaking of a later period state:

> Much more equal access to education and the use made of this access, expanding opportunities for gainful employment, increased the alternatives to the role of housewife and to motherhood.[2]

Obviously in many cases women chose to postpone marriage, or to forego it altogether in order to pursue a career. Higher education gave women more employment options than their sisters, a point which will be taken up later.

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1 Ibid p241

2 Ruzicka and Caldwell *The End of Demographic Transition* p295

**A Comparison.**

The demographic characteristics of women graduates in Australia have received little attention. A notable exception is, however, the study undertaken by a group of women graduates at the University of Sydney. *Graduate and Married* by Madge Dawson (who wrote up the study on behalf of the group) is remarkable in its timing. Begun in 1959, a period considered particularly moribund in terms of feminist ideas, it lists Simone de Beavoir's *The Second Sex* in its bibliography, and explores the changing role of women, in particular graduate women who married. This pioneering study was prefaced by Norman McKenzie, who was brought to Australia in 1959 by the Social Science Research Council to study the position of women in Australian society. McKenzie's preface noted:

> It is something more than a valuable contribution to the infant discipline of Australian sociology, and to our knowledge of Australian Society. It is one of the most elaborate and unusual enquiries available to us into the contribution university-educated women are making to the work and welfare of a society which has known such women only in this century.[1]

He noted also that policy makers would find Dawson's study "a mine of comparative material". This is certainly so for this researcher. Dawson's methodology involved selecting alternate names from the University register of married women up to 1959. Those selected were sent lengthy questionnaires to which over 1000 responded. The respondents were separated into three age cohorts, one being women aged sixty and over. This group contained ninety one women all of whom were born before 1901. It is this group which is of value for comparison with the Adelaide graduates. I have referred to the 'Sydney' group at various points in this study.

One of the variables studied by Dawson's group was age at marriage. They found that:

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1 Dawson, Madge. *Graduate and Married: A Report on a Survey of one Thousand and Seventy Married Women Graduates of the University of Sydney* University of Sydney, 1965. McKenzie's book , *Women in Australia* , was published by Cheshire in 1962, one of the first signs of a reawakening of interest in women's issues.

For the oldest women, the most frequent age at marriage was 26-30, with an average of just under 29 years; 9 percent were over forty when they married and no-one was under twenty-one.[1]

This appears to be a higher age at marriage than for the Adelaide group where the median was 26 years, and the most frequently occurring age, 26 years. Both groups were considerably older than the wider population.Other aspects of the two studies which can be usefully compared here include completed family size and social class background of both graduates and their husbands.

**Family size: average issue of graduate wives.**

It is difficult to establish with precision the number of children each graduate bore. Vital statistics do not include stillborn children and for those women who moved interstate details of child bearing are not known, even if number of children may be established.[2] These qualifications aside, for a significant group of sixty-four women number of issue could be established from vital statistics.[3] They are summarized below.

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1 Dawson *Graduate and Married* p34

2 For instance it may be established from oral or biographical evidence that a woman bore three children, but details of birth order, birth intervals or mother's age at last birth may not be found .

3 The most reliable document in this instance was death certificate which lists number of children born to a woman, both living and dead.

**Table 5** Completed Family Size of Graduates

| Number of Children | Number of Families |
|---|---|
| 0 | 15 |
| 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 11 |
| 3 | 16 |
| 4 | 8 |
| 5 | 8 |
| 6 | 1 |
| 7 | 0 |
| 8 | 2 |

Total no. of children 167 Total number of women 64

The most immediately striking aspect of this table is the large number of married women who remained childless. Fifteen of sixty-four women, almost 25%, did not have any issue. The next largest groups were those who had three children (sixteen women) followed by those who had two children (eleven women). Four had one child; few had large families. One woman bore six children, two others eight children.

A rough measure of completed family size of 2.6 children per graduate can be arrived at from this table. Division of the women into two cohorts did not result in any significant difference between the groups. This measure is unsatisfactory in some aspects given the small numbers and the difficulty of sorting them into different age cohorts. Ruzicka and Caldwell, for instance, point out that the generation born in the period 1866-1871 (parallelling the earliest of the graduates) would be likely to bear 4.70 children if married at age 20 - 29, whereas the number of children would drop to 3.31 if married between the ages of 25-34 .[1] For the generation born 1871-1876 the figures for the same age groups drop to 4.34 and 3.10 respectively. These distinctions between generations and age at marriage are blurred in the aggregate given above. The small numbers do not warrant disaggregation.

1 Ruzicka and Caldwell *The End of Demographic Transition* p164

What can the average issue of graduates, that is the figure of 2.6 children, be usefully compared with? An overall picture of marital fertility in Australia during the demographic transition is contained in one of Ruzicka and Caldwell's tables, from which I have extrapolated.

**Table 6:** Average Issue of Married Women During Demographic Transition

| | Generation (corresponding to generations of women graduates) | Children born to existing marriages |
|---|---|---|
| | 1866-1871 | 4.36 |
| "daughters" | 1871-1876 | 4.02 |
| | 1877-1882 | 3.82 |
| | 1882-1887 | 3.60 |
| | 1887-1892 | 3.33 |
| "grand-daughters" | 1897-1902 | 2.77 |

Source, Ruzicka and Caldwell[1]

Women graduates may have borne their children throughout this range - that is they were the "daughters" and granddaughters" in Ruzicka and Caldwell's terms. (The "mothers" were those women born in the 1830's and reaching a reproductive age between 1846 and 1851, whose birth rates were still at a very high level and showing no sign of decline.) The earliest graduates in this study were born in the late 1860's - the youngest in the late 1890's.

A comparison with this table reveals that the average number of children born to graduates was considerably less than that of the wider population. Over the period as a whole graduate women bore one child

1 This extrapolation is an abbreviated version of Ruzicka and Caldwell's table, based on census material, which continues to generations born 1911-1916. I have selected only the generations corresponding to women graduates. Ruzicka and Caldwell allude to three major groups throughout the demographic transition - the "mothers" (those whose families preceded transition), the daughters and granddaughters. Ruzicka and Caldwell *The End of Demographic Transition* p153

less, on average, than their counterparts. They were, in effect, in the vanguard of changes more noticeable in subsequent generations - those born after the turn of the century.

This finding is similar to that of Madge Dawson in her Sydney study. She found that the majority of women had two to three children, but that the average issue of the oldest women was 2.34.[1] How then did graduates come to exhibit lower than average fertility patterns? Two factors, at least, must be taken into account. It is interesting to consider the large groups of women who were childless; they obviously influenced the average obtained. Secondly, the issue of family limitation needs to be addressed. Ruzicka and Caldwell say that:

> There is no doubt that more women among those born in 1899-1904 and 1904-1909 remained childless by choice, not infecundity, than among any previous generations. Even postponement of marriage could not have produced such a dramatic effect.[2]

Here it appears that graduates again anticipated later trends as almost 25% were childless. Whether they were 'childless by choice', to use the modern term, is another issue. An examination of the fifteen married graduates who were childless shows that one died at the age of twenty-three years, that two married in their late forties, that four married in their late thirties. For those women, one of whom married an older widower, the issue may have been one of postponement of marriage rather than of a conscious decision not to have children. For the seven or eight who married in their twenties or thirties it is impossible to know what factors determined their childlessness. Nevetheless the women who were childless were as numerous in the early cohort as in the later one. Certainly one childless graduate for whom biographical information is available, continued to work throughout her life as a medical doctor in both Bengal and Australia.[3]

1 Dawson *Graduate and Married* p44
2 Ruzicka and Caldwell *The End of Demographic Transition* p177
3 See the account of Laura Fowler's life in Mackinnon *The New Women*

**Family Limitation.**

Age at birth of last child is taken as one indicator of the presence of family limitation, as mentioned earlier. An analysis of twenty-seven graduates whose age at last birth could be determined showed that graduates were limiting their fertility. Most experienced their last birth in their early or mid thirties, the mean age of the group being 34.7. One completed her child bearing at age twenty-nine; however, her husband's death in the first world war no doubt was the explanation. Two women who demonstrated later than average age at last birth, thirty - nine years and thirty-eight years respectively, both married late, at thirty-seven years. In their cases postponement of marriage certainly affected number of children born. Only one woman in the group of twenty-seven seemed to demonstrate a classic pre-transition pattern. She married at twenty-one and bore eight children - the last at the age of forty years.

Another indicator of presence of family limitation is postponement of first birth. Thirty-three women, whose life data provided information on the interval between marriage and first birth, provided some evidence of postponement. Of the thirty-three, ten bore children less than one year after marriage, seventeen bore children in less than two years after marriage and six did not bear children until over two years after marriage. This evidence is fairly inconclusive and it might well be the case that graduates, marrying on the whole later than their sisters, did not wish to postpone first birth to any great extent. They do not seem to have exhibited the pattern which became common several decades later - of marrying at a younger age and deferring birth for several years.

Certainly a pattern of family limitation after the birth of several children can be established. What is much more difficult to ascertain is the form that limitation took. Here literary and oral sources must be consulted. Considerable debate among social historians has added to our understanding of the groups which first began to use contraception - artifical or natural. "Innovators" are generally considered to be middle class, and, in particular, specific sections of the middle class. Some doubt remains however as to whether family limitation in this group was due to such 'natural' methods of abstinence and withdrawal or the use of

contraceptive techniques such as the condom, the diaphragm, and douches.

There were no doubts in the minds of the Commissioners into the Decline of the Birth Rate. These moralistic gentlemen, and witnesses called by them (and often carefully 'led' in their questions) claimed that there was a large recent increase in the use of all technological as distinct from natural methods .[1] Doctors giving evidence to the Commission also noted class differentials in the use of 'preventives'.

"Barrington said a 'middle'-class, earning three hundred to six hundred pounds per year, were the main users and Dr. Harris, ... reported that prevention was least common in the rural and mining population and most common in the highly educated among his patients ."[2] Moralizing doctors were frequently heard in the early decades of the century castigating women for the use of preventives. Hicks quotes a prominent Victorian Catholic doctor, Michael Ullick O'Sullivan who also asserted that preventive practices were most common among 'the well-to-do married'. O'Sullivan castigated the users of both natural and artifical means of contraception:

> When a wife defiles the marriage bed with the devices and equipment of the brothel, and interferes with nature's mandate by cold-blooded preventives and safeguards; when she consults her almanac, and refuses to admit the approaches of her husband except at stated times; when a wife behaves in so unwifelike and unnatural a manner, can it be otherwise that estrangements and painful suspicions of faithfulness should from time to time occur?.[3]

Certainly there is evidence that from the 1880's on, in Australia, both knowledge about contraception and a range of contraceptive devices were available. In the ex parte Collins judgement, Mr. Justice Windeyer held that Annie Besant's *The Law of Population* was not obscene and that the bookseller, Collins, had been justified in selling it as 'a scientific and philosophic treatise in relation to social and political economy'.[4] In 1890 Dr. Alexander Paterson wrote a book titled *The Physical Health of*

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1 Hicks *This Sin and Scandal* p47ff
2 Ibid
3 Ibid p48
4 Ibid p23

*Women*, which included a chapter on 'Limitation of Offspring'.[1] It is difficult to assess how widely this information was known and discussed but as Kerreen Reiger points out, "it does seem likely that in educated, and especially non- religious circles the acceptance of responsible family limitation was beginning".[2] In trying to assess the degree to which women responded to the information available Reiger argues that "the reprinting of pamphlets and the occurrence of public lectures, such as those of Mrs. Brettana Smyth in Melbourne" [3] do at least indicate that there were people waiting to hear the messages of reform.

Certainly contraceptive material was well advertised in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century although it was usually described coyly in euphemistic terms. Hicks catalogues materials available to couples:

> They could have bought works by Allbutt, Edward B. Foote, Annie Bessant and from Sir Robert Bear's well stocked Sydney bookshop ... or similar titles from Saunder's bookshop in Melbourne. They could even have perused Australian editions of popular overseas handbooks like Warren's *Wife's Guide* and Cowan's *Science of a New Life.* Anyone wishing to apply the knowledge thus acquired could purchase Malthus Soluble Quinine Tablets, Lambert's Improved Secret Spring Check Pessary, the 'Sanitas' sponge, or the 'Hygena' Spray Syringe in Melbourne's main shopping area; Malthus sheaths ('guaranteed extra strong'), Lambert's improved Vertical and Reverse Current Syringe, Rendell's Quinine Pessaries or the Marvel Whirling Spray in Sydney, even, if one's pharmacist dealt with the right agents, the 'No More Worry Co's Patent Pessary' mailed from Brisbane.[4]

Material contained in certain liberal-progressive papers published in Adelaide at the turn of the century bears out Reiger's contention that in educated and non-religious circles the acceptance of family limitation was beginning. I have already mentioned Agnes Nesbitt Benham and Paris Nesbitt, a brother and sister with radical leanings, who published

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1 Ibid p32

2 Reiger *The Disenchantment of the Home* p115

3 Ibid

4 Hicks *This Sin and Scandal* p124

*The Morning* which in 1901 became *The Century,*.[1] There many contentious issues concerning relations between the sexes were discussed. Another publication *Free Speech,* organ of the South Australian Free Speech and Social Liberty League, published items alluding to the necessity of putting birth control information in the hands of poor women.[2] Articles dealt with the necessity to give each generation sane and healthy instruction on parenthood, and, in a piece on abortion, the author (E.C. Walker) argued that prevention was the preferable course.

The fate of Gilbert Taylor, editor of Free Speech and husband of medical graduate, Dr. Rosamond Benham, indicates that official acceptance of progressive ideas on sexual relations and birth control was very limited indeed. Issue number two of Free Speech, published in June, 1906, declared that "Comrade Gilbert Taylor ... has been convicted of the Crime of Free Speech and sentenced to three months hard labour in jail". Taylor was arrested with two friends for distributing "Free Speech" and "Sense About Sex" which publications are deemed by the Victorian Police to be obscene." [3]

Rosamond Benham's book, or rather pamphlet,*Sense About Sex by a Woman Doctor,* and its supplement, offers considerable insight into the views of one particular woman medical graduate. Benham can hardly be considered typical in either background or in choice of husband. She was definitely part of a small socialist reform group with links with Fabianism. Yet her book offers no advice about the use of technologies of birth control. Her ideas are based on those of Dr. Alice Stockham of Chicago whose technique of "Karezza" was outlined in her book of that name [4]. This technique is described in Benham's supplement, *Circumvention,* and consists of long periods of sexual union without ejaculation. Based on the Victorian belief of 'vitalist physiology', the notion that the body had a limited amount of energy which, if used, was

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1 Mackinnon A and Bacchi C. "Sex, Resistance and Power; Sex Reform in South Australia Circa 1905 " in *Australian Historical Studies,* No 90 April 1988.

2 See Mackinnon and Bacchi for a discussion of this journal and its contributors. This specific item refers to a reply by "Psyche", probably Rosamond Benham, to a critique of her book. N.B.

3 *Free Speech* Vol.1 No 2 June 16, 1906 (This journal had a very short life)

4 Gordon L *Woman's Body,Woman's Right* Penguin 1981 p 63

gone forever, Karezza ensured sexual pleasure for both parties but reserved semen for planned and limited births .[1]

Benham's work is radical in its emphasis on the acknowledgement of women's sexual pleasure and a demand for male restraint but it does not advocate the use of contraceptive devices. Karezza is a variant of coitus interruptus, an age old technique of birth control. Her focus on natural, rather than artifical means of birth control is typical of many late nineteenth century feminists who felt that the use of artificial devices would simply make women far more vulnerable to men's sexual wishes. Above all they wished to promulgate the idea of male restraint. Also for many respectable middle class women the use of contraceptives had the taint of the brothel, where their use was openly acknowledged.

Increasingly in the early twentieth century, the new 'science' of sexology would undermine the argument for male restraint, promulgating instead the idea that women's sexuality was as vigorous as mens and should be an important part of a healthy heterosexual relationship for both partners .[2] Also the use of contraceptives was increasingly advocated by reformers and physicians who argued against the traditional methods of birth control - the use of coitus interruptus, and, if that failed, of abortion.[3]

In all, it appears that although contraceptive measures, both 'natural' and artificial, were known in the period in which women graduates were of childbearing age, it is 'natural' methods which were most often employed. The advice Jane Austen offered to a friend wishing to avoid continual childbearing, 'the simple regimen of separate rooms' was probably the most common solution.[4] In Australia many husbands

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1 Taylor R A *Sense About Sex by a Woman Doctor* (with supplement Circumvention) Adelaide 1905

2 See Bland L "Marriage Laid Bare: Middle Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s - 1914 " in Lewis J *Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850 -1940* Blackwell 1986 also Jeffreys S *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880 - 1930* Pandora 1985

3 Brookes B "Women and Reproduction 1860 - 1939 " in Lewis *Women's Experience of Home and Family* , expands on these points.

4 Ibid p156

slept on the verandah or in a 'sleepout' after a certain point in the marriage.

As the century progressed however, middle class women, wives of professionals, may have increased their use of artificial contraception. Evidence on this point is hard to obtain. However a survey undertaken by Dr. E. Lewis Faning, reported in England in 1949, demonstrated that it was not until 1925 that the use of artificial means of birth control by professional class women, began to outstrip the use of natural methods.[1] This was also most likely the case in Australia.

The issue of fertility control can be concluded by saying that it is clear that such control was exercised by a number of women graduates. However, the method of control is more elusive. It is clear, too, that wives of professional men were strongly represented amongst the 'innovators', those graduates who used birth control. Of twenty-six women whose childbearing ceased in their mid-thirties, five were married to doctors, four to clergy and four to teachers. One married a veterinary surgeon, another an accountant. Two married primary producers and five married petit bourgeois husbands, clerks and travellers. Two married business managers, one an agent and another a motor mechanic. The group is quite consistent with the work undertaken by Mark Stern, who examined differential fertility rates in Erie County. Stern found that in 1900 the professional groups had the lowest fertility, with several other business class groups close behind. Government employees, masters and manufacturers, dealers, semi professionals and business employees all demonstrated fertility limitation. Only merchants and agents remained high in family size among those in the business class .[2]

It is not surprising then to find university graduates limiting their fertility. Considerable evidence throughout the western world points to the professional class as leading innovators in this regard, followed

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1 E Lewis Faning, Report on an Enquiry into Family Limitation and its Influence on Human Fertility During the Last Fifty Years. *Papers of the Royal Commission on Population,* Vol1 London H M S O 1949 p52 - quoted in Seccombe W Starting to Stop: Working Class Fertility Decline in Britain

2 Stern M *Society and Family Strategy : Erie County N.Y.* p51

closely by government and business employees.[1] These were the major groups which provided the grooms for women graduates. A closer look at husbands of graduates is necessary at this stage.

**Husbands of Women Graduates**

Graduates chose as husbands men who were from professional and 'new business class' backgrounds.

**Table 7** Occupations of Husbands

| Recode number | Category | Number of Men |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | Professional/Administrative | 25 |
| 02 | Agent/Dealer | 5 |
| 03 | Manager/Clerk | 14 |
| 04 | Govt. & Institution employee | 13 |
| 05 | Seller of Services/Semi-professional | 7 |
| 06 | Manufacturer | 1 |
| 07 | Skilled Worker/Artisan | 2 |
| 08 | Transport Worker | 0 |
| 09 | Labourer/Unskilled Worker | 0 |
| 11 | Primary Industry Proprietor | 9 |
| 12 | Primary Industry Worker | 0 |
| 15 | Unknown | 3 |

Number of husbands = 80.
Source - marriage certificates of brides and grooms.

Categories 01, 04 and 05 - the professionals and semi-professionals, contained well over half the husbands. Those in categories 03 constitute the business employees - the other constituent part of the group Mark Stern refers to as the new business class. Together the professionals and business employees make up almost 75% of the grooms of graduates. The

1 J A Banks *Prosperity and Parenthood, A Study of Family Planning among the Victorian Middle Classes* 1954

remaining 15% are predominantly primary industry proprietors and business employers.

It is interesting to note that graduates experienced a degree of social mobility if father's occupation is compared to husband's occupation. Of the known husbands of graduates only two were skilled workers and none were unskilled workers. This is considerably less than the 15% of graduates fathers who were working class.

This accords with Madge Dawson's findings. In her Sydney study she demonstrates that marriage brought "a considerable upward movement in status and this was further enhanced during marriage by husbands moving up the occupational status scale".[1]

**Discussion**

In sum, women graduates displayed demographic behaviour which was markedly different from the female population at large. They married less (well over 40% did not marry), they married at a later age than their contemporaries and they tended to have smaller families. A significant number of those who married (over 25%) remained childless. Those who bore children appear to have practiced family limitation in some form as families were often completed by the mid thirties. In many ways they were the precursors of the late twentieth century woman. Arguably they were a new type - for significant numbers, their lives were not constrained by the exigencies of childbearing. The apparent use of family limitation and the ambivalence of many about marriage pointed to a desire to control their lives in ways that opponents of women's education had feared. Those women who were able to exercise choice in matters which so intimately concerned them, did so in significant numbers.

Were they a small and insignificant group - a small elite which had little effect on the lives of the mass of women? The experience of Adelaide graduates was echoed in the same demographic patterns shown by the American College women described by Barbara Solomon.[2] It

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1 Dawson *Graduate and Married* p40
2 Solomon *In the Company of Educated Women* p120

appears that the first generations of early graduates throughout the western world shared this tendency to be different.

The demographic distinctiveness of this group is significant not only to historians of women's education but also to those seeking explanations for the vast demographic change known as the demographic transition. Explanations of the causes of the demographic transition have until very recently, tended to focus on structural factors in the society. In particular economic explanations have been put forward which stress mode of production as the all important variable. Lesthaeghe and Wilson sum up the classic position in the following terms:

> The gradual decline of the familial mode of production, the rising aspirations with respect to intergenerational mobility, the role of education in a situation where parents can increasingly afford it, and the increasing degree of independence between the generations all lead to much faster diminishing returns from children.[1]

Two aspects of this account need amplification, as they are germane to the case of university educated women. Lesthaeghe and Wilson, and others claim that in a society characterized by a family mode of production, children represent a labour source which can enhance the family enterprise (agricultural or small artisanal) thus bringing 'wealth flow' in the direction of parents. Even where children work outside the household in wage labour the family mode of production would ensure that parents would benefit from some or all of a child's wage. In this situation the presence of large families makes economic sense.

With the change in occupational structure and a concomitant tendency for parents to work for wages and not in familial settings education becomes an important factor in gaining access to better waged work. Increasingly parents in urban, and rural bourgeois society chose to send their children to school to improve their access to better paid, waged work. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Caldwell, the

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1 Lesthaeghe and Wilson "Modes of Production, Secularization, and the Pace of the Fertility Decline in Western Europe, 1870 - 1930" in Coale and Watkins *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* p11

demographic historian who has given most emphasis to education as an important motor of fertility decline, argues that education reverses the 'wealth flow' from children to parents so that parents must invest' in children for increasingly longer periods thus incurring direct opportunity costs.[1]

Another factor mentioned in Lesthaeghe and Wilson's summary is the increasing degree of independence between generations which follows the break up of the family labour-intensive mode of production. In particular they stress that the role of the father, as manager of a small family work unit, is undermined as children stay at school for longer and choose their own vocations. This latter aspect - part perhaps of the changing social structure, reminds us that as Lesthaeghe and Wilson also point out - the classic explanation for fertility decline is incomplete - it cannot explain the variation between rates of fertility decline in different societies, or even within societies in small sub-cultures. The missing ingredient, they claim, is cultural.

Several authors, American and European, have recently begun to study cultural aspects which mediate between social structural factors and the choices made by individuals about their fertility. Caldwell asserts that in the history of fertility there is "a great divide" - a point where the compass hesitatingly swings around 180 degrees. He also emphasizes that after that demographic swing of the compass there is no purely economic reason for parents to have children. Yet:

> fertility often falls slowly and even irregularly ... for social and psychological reasons - the extent to which alternative roles are available to women, the degree to which child - centredness renders children relatively expensive, the climate of opinion, ...[2]

Stern, in his recent work on Erie County, U.S.A. argues that Caldwell, in articulating a general theory of fertility, has overlooked the impact of social class and ethnicity .[3] Knodel and van de Walle also argue that the cultural group played an important independent role in

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1 Caldwell J C "Mass Education as a Determinant of the Timing of Fertility Decline" in *Population and Development Review* 6, 2 1980

2 Quoted in Stern *Society and Family Strategy* p15

3 Ibid

promoting fertility decline finding "long standing patterns of regional fertility variation in nineteenth-century Europe that paralleled those of other cultural differences, including the status of women, language and political attitudes".[1] Lesthaeghe, whose work was quoted earlier, believes that when economic development is controlled, the chief variation in fertility is the result of the effectiveness of the old moral order in marshalling its social control.[2] Thus he chooses to examine secularization as an important issue affecting rate of decline.

All of these analyses illustrate the shortcomings of the economic theory of fertility decline. Quite clearly a multitude of cultural and regional factors affect the rate of decline. Interestingly, although several accounts refer in passing to changes in woman's economic and social status, it is rare to find a specific elaborated reference to the issue. One exception is found in the contribution of Barbara Anderson to the Princeton European Fertility Project.[3] Anderson asserts that the European Fertility Project studies and other research demonstrates that the reasonable interpretation of socio-economic variables is not always straightforward. She argues that the link between female education, for instance, and fertility decline has been thought to be obvious. Female education is typically expected to have a negative relation to fertility. She argues:

> Education is expected to increase the extent to which all activities, including childbearing, are planned and also to lead to an increased emphasis on child quality rather than on child quantity. Higher income-producing opportunities also are thought to lead to reduced fertility because of an increased taste for market activity over child raising.[4]

Yet this is not always the case. Anderson points out that in many Moslem countries the welfare of women is dependent on the support and protection by men, hence women rationally may wish to have many children. Also education "will lead women to higher-paying jobs outside

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1 Ibid p19

2 Lesthaeghe and Wilson in Coale and Watkins *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* p290

3 Anderson B "Regional and Cultural Factors in the Decline of Marital Fertility in Europe" in Coale and Watkins *The Decline of Fertility in Europe*

4 Ibid p295

the home only if it is possible for women to hold such jobs". Factors such as particular cultural beliefs about women's role clearly mediate the obvious connections between women and education, as does the availability of paid work.

What then can a case study of Adelaide graduates contribute to an understanding of factors shaping the demographic revolution? It can increase the force of some of the recent explanations put forward and, perhaps, question others. It is useful here to recall Ansley Coale's suggestions that for a fall in marital fertility three conditions must pertain. Fertility must be "within the calculus of conscious choice", perceived social and economic circumstances must make reduced fertility seem advantageous to individual couples and, lastly, effective techniques of fertility reduction must be available .[1] The first two are perhaps the most important as they concern "moral acceptability and perceived advantage".[2]

I will deal with the second condition first. Those groups who first limited their fertility, the professionals and "new business" strata, clearly had much to gain by limiting their childbearing. These were the groups who valued education for their children as a high priority and for whom education was an essential step to employment.

The memories of an early graduate, Annie Rita Ellis (later Welbourn), contained in her diary, give some insight into a business employee's family. Rita Welbourn's husband was a bank clerk and Rita wrote after years of marriage:

> It was madness for Will and me to marry on £200 per year - and worse madness to have had so many children.

Will and Rita married in 1912 and had four children. It was important for both parents to give the children the best schooling. Rita wrote:

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1 Coale and Watkins *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* p261
2 Ibid p262

I do hope that his father and I shall be able to manage a complete college education for both boys; but sometimes I wonder, as life is so increasingly difficult, and we have sacrificed all amusements, and luxuries, however small, for ourselves.

Rita also wanted the same educational opportunities for her daughters and wrote after her daughter Barbara had gained her degree:

It is very satisfying for parents who have foregone much (too much?) to give their children chances they themselves have not had, or have had to forego, to find those children making good and making definite places for themselves in the community.

A further comment illustrates very clearly the new emphasis on the psychological development of children - the emphasis on children as individuals, which ultimately fostered intergenerational independence:

And I have tried to help each boy and girl to develop along the lines he or she has chosen. A small house, holding four very individual characters, four children of good intelligence, each of whom has a distinct goal, means that very often the house has not been quiet, nor always harmonious![1]

Rita's family was larger than that of the average graduate in the study yet her attitudes to the importance of education for her children was typical of graduates interviewed.

Rita's focus on her children as individuals draws attention also to Coale's first condition for marital fertility decline - the fact that fertility must be within the 'calculus of conscious choice'. Lesthaeghe and Wilson argue that as well as change in form of household production, a change must occur in the cultural domain, legitimizing new forms of fertility behaviour. One of the major cultural changes they postulate is secularization which, in its initial form:

1 Mackinnon *The New Women* pp108 - 111 passim

> involved an elaboration of a fundamentally individualistic philosophy, one which drew more and more facets of a person's life into the realm of personal decision making, leaving a dwindling number in the field of social compulsion.[1]

Further they hypothesize that in areas marked by high degrees of secularization:

> fertility served as yet another aspect of life that is under individual control, while in areas where traditional moral codes remain strong, fertility decisions will not be allowed to come into the sphere of the 'calculus of conscious choice'.[2]

Certainly South Australia in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century could be categorized as a secularized society, one in which no strong state church existed and a variety of dissenting religions flourished. A strong set of cultural conditions existed favourable to the questioning of traditional moral codes. Moreover women as a group had begun to assert their political rights by demanding the vote, by choosing to undertake higher education. The development of the challenge of this particular group may be seen as a further instance of secularization, in Lesthaeghe and Wilson's terms - an attack on a prevailing Christian worldview of women's allotted place.

Cultural circumstances certainly existed to bring the limitation of fertility into the "calculus of conscious choice". What, then of economic circumstances which might make family limitation advantageous? As has been pointed out by Stern in the United States, the professions and the business class decreasingly relied on family membership and social ties for their recruiting methods and increasingly relied on formal training.[3] Thus the education of children became an important financial inducement to limit families. This pattern could be seen in South Australia where the new university prepared students for the professions and schools prepared students for entry to clerical jobs in both the growing public sector and in commerce. Anderson argued that women will only seek jobs outside the home when such jobs are available.[4] In

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1 Coale and Watkins *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* p270
2 Ibid p273
3 Stern *Society and Family Strategy* pp36 - 7
4 Anderson in *The Decline of Fertility in Europe* p295

South Australia from the 1870's on relatively well paid jobs were available to women in both private and state schools providing an incentive for women to undertake training and postpone or forego motherhood.

Thus two of Lesthaeghe's conditions for the lowering of fertility were met in South Australia - the existence of fertility control as within the "calculus of conscious choice" and the existence of social and economic circumstances to encourage such a choice. The third condition - the knowledge and availability of contraceptive techniques - was also present, as I have discussed earlier.

It is not unexpected then that Adelaide University graduates, often from the professional middle class and often marrying into that class, would demonstrate patterns of family limitation. Surprisingly absent, however, from the various accounts and interpretations of the fertility decline is an approach giving priority to the agency of women in bringing about the decline. Choices appear as choices taken by couples, assuming a harmony of views between man and wife on this issue. Yet surely one of the major changes in women's lives at the end of the nineteenth century was the enhanced options for seeing themselves as having a useful part to play in society in ways other than childbearing - as educators, healers and public servants in the growing state bureaucracy. This option may have only been open to middle class women but for that group a life of independence, both financially and emotionally, became possible. Confronted with other options educated women chose low fertility or none at all.

In a later Chapter I will argue that higher education for women was a significant factor in subtly altering the relations between men and women, enabling women's contribution to the fertility decline to be viewed as important and central. Before doing so I will consider in more detail those who did not marry. Some of the new ways of living independently are illuminated in the following analysis of the high percentage of women graduates whose vision of marriage may well have been, as the *Argus* leader feared, 'uncomfortably purged'.

## Chapter Five   Independent Women

When Elizabeth Jackson thought about her place in the world as a recent graduate her thoughts inspired the following journal entry:

A Spectacled Philosopheress.

*Circa 1914. Scene opens to reveal a philosophy student, an M.A. She is a young woman, about twenty - five, brown hair and grey eyes, spectacles, plain, with a sense of humour. Alert and moderately practical, discussing future with elderly, kind professor.*

M. A. : Well now, I've got to get my own living - I don't feel particularly fitted. I might go into a shop if I were stronger, or be a housemaid.

PROFESSOR: Oh, but surely not! Isn't there something else - teaching?

M.A. : (*Chuckles*) People don't want their children taught by a spectacled philosopheress and I don't particularly want to teach them elementary things; and as for advanced things, the subtleties of French grammar, and mathematics, I couldn't teach them without a great deal of personal effort.

PROFESSOR: Private secretary?

M. A. No, anyone in this colony who wants an M.A. private secretary is in a social position to which I am not equal. I haven't the elements of polished manners. No, I think the only things I'm really fitted for by my course are out of my reach.

PROFESSOR: And they are?

M. A. : Retired leisured life and motherhood! Haven't the money to adopt children - but I've any amount of patience for the home part of their training.

PROFESSOR:Writing?

M.A. : No. Can't manage characters in fiction, satire too bitter, be ashamed for it to be read. Do no good. And I'm not the sort of person to have anything to tell the world. I'm just a mediocre woman philosopher. I want the world to tell me things. No, I just guess I'm not fit to live and my pastor, if I had one, would say I'm not fit to die.

PROFESSOR: (*After prolonged pause* ) Good morning.[1]

Elizabeth Jackson wrote this wry and self - mocking dialogue in her journal at the end of a long period of study. In 1911 she graduated

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1 Papers of Sarah Elizabeth Jackson Special Collections Barr Smith Library University of Adelaide.

Bachelor of Arts, winning the Tinline Scholarship in English History, and in 1913 she gained Honours in philosophy. She had been allowed to do her honours work at home away from other students, a fact she noted in her diary in 1911:

> As we grow older words of praise have the power to shake us from our lethargy, altho' they have less effect. Thus today Prof. told me he would recommend me to do Honours alone in the country, although he wouldn't advise or hadn't so far, anyone else. But I am a sufficiently good student, etc.[1]

Following her Honours work Elizabeth spent another period again mainly at home, writing the thesis for which she was awarded a Master of Arts degree. During that time she filled her diary with short, descriptive pieces about McLaren Vale, with brief stories and with some reflections on her own feelings and thoughts. Her entries express the same characteristics of irony and self - mockery, with an undertone of deep yearning, that were present in the opening dialogue:

> I manage to get in about eight or nine hours thesis most days and two hours good housework. So you can see I too am living the life of a lady. Are the tennis people interesting? Don't be cynical about fashion... I hope the true success is to labour for I don't seem to have arrived anywhere. I have travelled as hopefully as I could.

Her brother Canning often provided a point of reference for her own situation:

> January 1913. Canning's breezy bonhomie makes me feel mean and small. I haven't really travelled far from my early traits. Always as a child rather whiny and tell tale, a prig, gradually growing up into a snob. Still small - minded and cramped without the wide culture that the outside world gives. I have longings for the man's world of genial jokes, hard hitting and good comradeship.

Elizabeth seems to have been particularly hard on herself in these entries. Her friends' view of her was quite the reverse of her own estimates. They spoke of her generosity of spirit, her leadership, her

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1 Ibid

sympathy and, above all, her sense of humour. The year 1913, living at home with her family and still working on her thesis, seems to have been a low point. After a brief meeting Elizabeth felt she detected pity in Canning's eyes:

> But when I came home and took off my hat before the glass, my dress was dun, yes, but well cut: and my face was spectacled - but the eyebrows are good, the colour clear and the chin cleft. But the whole effect is saddening - the primness and staidness of the student. People educated like me are the opposite of geometrical points, for we have size but no position, our whorls radiate in space mocking at aristocracy and suburbia and feeling above artisans and labourers. One has nowhere to plant the sole of the foot.

In 1913 Elizabeth also pondered her future, writing in her diary:

> October 1st, "Educated woman, plain, poor, wishes meet man, same qualifications - must have sense of humour - view matrimony. This office." Composed after worrying how I'll get my living four years hence... and how lonely I'll be someday.

This entry anticipates the dialogue between the student who had just completed her M.A. and the unhelpful, elderly professor. By 1914 Elizabeth had won the David Murray Scholarship for a philosophical essay and had been awarded her M.A. Recognizing her abilities she confronted the future. Was there a place for her in Australian society as she knew it? Would her undoubted abilities preclude the possibility of a loving relationship with another? Could those abilities lead to the life's work she desired? In common with intelligent women of subsequent generations she did not relish the compromise inherent in accepting the narrow range of opportunities open to her.

In many ways Elizabeth Jackson was typical of the new young women who increasingly attended universities in the early part of this century. In other ways she was quite idiosyncratically herself. Her words, however, provide a very human introduction to this chapter as they exemplify the dilemmas and aspirations of a particular group. Elizabeth Jackson, like almost 50% of the early women graduates, did not marry. But we cannot always tell if staying single was a conscious choice made by a

particular woman. In Jackson's case it seems clear from her diary entries that she would have happily contemplated marriage. Curiously, she also mentions adopting children, suggesting that she probably realized that her life would not be shared with a man. Illness and subsequently early death from tuberculosis meant that Jackson remains in our records as single.

Martha Vicinus quotes a distinguished Girtonian who claimed that higher education meant the right of a large class of women to an honourable independence; it opened out another possibility of a respected and self - respecting life.[1] In this chapter I intend to examine that group of early women graduates who did not marry and to attempt an assessment of their quite distinctive demographic behaviour. I will explore the material realities of their lives through an examination of the options open to them in the paid work force and the options that they created for themselves. I will also seek to illuminate their notions of themselves as conscious beings, as subjects in the process of being 'produced' by a changing set of circumstances. Following Henriques , I wish to argue that subjective transformation is a major site of political change.[2] Thus I want to go beyond viewing higher education as offering "another possibility of a respected and self- respecting life." I believe it can also be seen as a challenge to the gender order.

**The Options**

Elizabeth Jackson's social location was typical of many women graduates. She was 'a daughter of the Manse' and like so many of her peers she attended Methodist Ladies College, no doubt assisted by some form of clergy bursary. Thus she would be classified as middle - class, a term which gives little indication of the range of students it would encompass. In her schoolgirl diary she spoke longingly of the University but did not expect to go there. Her excellent results in her Senior Public Examination where she gained top credit in History and next to top in English Literature, ensured her the scholarship essential for her continuing education. Although she does not talk of her family's financial situation it was probably quite similar to that of Phyllis Lade's

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1 Vicinus M *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850 - 1920* Virago 1985 p 162

2 Henriques J, Hollway W, Urwin C, Venn C, Walkerdine V. *Changing the Subject:Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity.* Methuen and Co. 1984

family. Phyllis Lade, fourteen years younger than Elizabeth, and also the daughter of a Methodist Minister, whose reminiscences I quoted in Chapter 3, spoke of the academic aspirations of M.L.C. and of the critical importance of a bursary.

A later comment of Phyllis Lade's indicates that some early graduates were ambivalent about the meaning of university education. "I don't think I considered university education important," she reflected, " I think I considered it extremely attractive." To many of the Adelaide graduates, university study was a glorious interlude in which they could indulge themselves in the luxury of time of their own, to explore their favourite subjects and to revel in the companionship of other women in various clubs and social settings. Phyllis Lade sums up that view;

> I felt that whatever I did in the way of earning, my university degree would be a help. I wasn't clear in my mind what I wanted to do beyond the four years of university. I hadn't felt any strong urge to be a teacher. I lived one year at a time and I felt that to have a university degree was a thing worth going for... And I always enjoyed study so looking back on it now I often think how marvellous to have had all those years of study, of being able to go to a library or to a private place and read and read and read and think.[1]

Elizabeth Jackson had also revelled in her university days, enjoying the challenges and rewards of intellectual endeavour. She, like Phyllis Lade, valued the experience highly but did not appear to see it in any directly vocational sense. Her imaginary dialogue makes it abundantly clear that she did not really know what direction to take after completing her Master's thesis. The options were limited as she clearly recognized. For a woman graduate in Arts or Science the obvious choice was secondary school teaching in either state secondary schools or in the growing number of girls' elite private schools. A handful might take some private secretarial work or other clerical work in the public service. In the inter - war years one or two could undertake the new "science " of psychology and gain positions in the school psychology and testing service.

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1 Interview with Mrs Phyllis Duguid (nee Lade) A F U W collection

For graduates in medicine the choice of a career was not difficult but the area in which to work, whether in general practice or in one of the newer areas opening up to women such as "mothercraft" or paediatrics, led to difficult decisions. For the handful of law graduates there was initially a problem of acceptance. Women were not able to practice law until the Female Law Practitioners Act of 1911 was passed. Even after Mary Kitson graduated in law in 1916, the first woman to do so, she could not become a public notary until the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1921.[1] For women graduating in music there was the risky area of performance, or, for most, the prospect of teaching.

**Teaching**

Vicinus says of England that teaching was the most important occupation for single middle class women throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This remark is equally true of South Australia. Of seventy-four women graduates known to have remained single throughout their lives, over half were teachers. This is almost certainly an under-estimate as many women died in their late eighties and even nineties and their occupation was listed on their death certificates as home duties. Teaching careers completed twenty or more years before may well have been forgotten or overlooked by younger relatives. It was impossible to determine if all women for whom no marriage certificates could be found in South Australia had actually remained single. They may have married and moved interstate, or remained single and moved away. Although I am not dealing here with married women it is significant to note that a large number taught for varied periods before marriage and sometimes after it. On the whole it can be said that teaching was the major career avenue for women graduates.

Some assessment of the significance of that career choice is necessary at this point. In chapter 1 I pointed to the differing interpretations of Gardner and of Solomon regarding graduate women's teaching activity. Gardner argues that the wholesale move into teaching (mainly secondary) by women graduates was "probably the first real

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1 Jones H *In Her Own Name: Women in South Australian History* Wakefield Press 1986 p 264

evidence of wider social horizons for their sex".[1] Solomon, writing of the United States, asks why college women still turned to what was the most traditional option.[2] She partly answers that question by pointing out that for women of lower class background teaching was a vehicle of upward social mobility: for women of wealthier backgrounds teaching offered independence while continuing to study. It is also true, particularly of boarding schools, that teaching offered graduates a place in a community of women, united by bonds of intellectual endeavour and ideals of preparing the next generation of independent women.

In her account of the reformed boarding schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Vicinus encompasses both Gardner and Solomon's perspectives. While recognizing that the new large, age-graded girls' secondary schools contained elements of the domestic focus of their predecessors, she also acknowledges their new features. She describes a shift in the self-identity of teachers and quotes Sara Burstall, the headmistress of Manchester High School for Girls who confidently asserted:

> Parents have to realise that the teacher is an expert professional and is entitled therefore to the deference shown to the skilled professional opinion of the doctor, lawyer or architect.[3]

As teaching began to adopt the more bureaucratic values of the outside world - hierarchy, punctuality, adherence to rules and regulations - the separation of public duties from personal life shaped the teaching career. As Vicinus explains:

> teaching for women became defined in modern male terms as an occupation, rather than a vocation that was part of a larger move to purify and uplift the young, the poor and the sick.[4]

The chance for prestige and effective reform among those of one's own social class, she argues, changed teaching from a last resort to a

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1 Gardner W *Colonial Cap and Gown* p107
2 Solomon B *In the Company of Educated Women* p127
3 Vicinus *Independent Women* p175
4 Ibid p175

natural choice. In effect, an activity with which women were traditionally associated was transformed, in keeping with changes in the broader society. Joyce Senders Peterson has argued that the creation of new types of educational institutions for women can be placed against a background of general cultural change - a change which encompassed more bureaucratic forms of organization, meritocratic principles and changes in scale and organization of institutions.[1] She argues that new normative standards were required for women not only to enter new employment areas but also to " carry on effectively activities already commonplace for their sex in the new institutional settings", such as large scale philanthropic organizations, large public schools and large department stores.

In other words, the new schools which prepared women for such changes were not challenging women's traditional role: they were modernizing it. Pederson's analysis is perceptive and warns against the too eager acceptance of a "revolution" in women's education, a judgement which was much more prevalent in 1979 when she was writing. However, such an analysis also points to a strikingly different feature of the "modernized" schools and teaching force which, I believe, had much more revolutionary implications for women. By accepting the new bureaucratic norms women were separating their work life from their family life. They were able to view themselves as autonomous individuals. This had not been the case in the small private schools run previously along family lines.

The contradictory nature of the changes taking place in middle class women's lives is also discussed by Pavla Miller who argued that they sought not to break down the distinction between the domestic and public spheres but to extend and professionalize the charitable concerns of the perfect ladies of a previous generation.[2] Thus, Miller continues:

> in seeking to become the professional guardians of the welfare and morality of working class and other families as doctors, psychologists, teachers, nurses or officers of charitable institutions, these women maintained their class and gender role. In helping to generalize professional jurisdiction across social

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1 Pederson J S "The Reform of Women's Secondary and Higher Education: Institutional change and Social Values in Mid and Late Victorian England" in *History of Education Quarterly* 19, No. 1 Spring 1979 p86

2 Miller P *Long Division : State Schooling in South Australian Society* p88

classes, they helped to mount a profound challenge to the autonomy of the bourgeois family itself.[1]

And, it must be added, in choosing not to marry they mounted another significant challenge to the bourgeois family, striking at the keystone of gender relations.

The schools which employed the new South Australian women graduates included state high schools and a large number of private, and later, corporate, girls' schools. For the earliest graduates, (those who graduated in the 1880s and 90s) the major sources of employment were the state Advanced School for Girls and, after 1898, Tormore House School run by Caroline Jacob, herself a former teacher at the Advanced School. A handful of women also described themselves as 'university coach', reflecting the varied routes of preparation undertaken by students before the putting into place of a systematic system of secondary education. While women were denied Classics in schools, a small band of coaches made up for that deficiency. The obituary of Mary L Langman (1886 - 1919) describes the preparation of one such university coach.

> She graduated in 1906, taking a Double First in Honours Classics. The brilliance of her gifts in language was already evident, and besides her proficiency in classics she spoke French and German. Reading in phonetics she prepared for a trip to Europe, which she took with friends in 1907, and with the opportunity of travel she became quite fluent in both these languages. On her return she became a university coach with a very striking success.[2]

The Advanced School, described earlier, played a pivotal part in girls' secondary education in South Australia. This school claimed thirteen of the fourteen women who had graduated by 1898 as its old scholars. Many of those graduates returned to their old school to teach, strengthening its academic offerings and providing encouragement to a new generation of girls.[3]

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1 Ibid

2 Obituary of Mary L Langman written by E A Allen in *Adelaide University Magazine* Vol 1 no 2 1919 p79

3 For a detailed description of this school, its curriculum, its clientele and its significance see Mackinnon *A One Foot on the Ladder* and Jones H *Nothing Seemed Impossible* Chapter 2

Edith Dornwell, the first woman graduate and graduate in science taught Latin, mathematics, physiology and physics 'besides the ordinary English subjects' at the Advanced School. Her former headmistress, and later employer, Edith Hubbe, noted that as well as her considerable academic skills Edith 'has a good practical knowledge of domestic management, and is a most sympathetic friend and counsellor to her pupils'.[1] Edith was twenty-one when she graduated and was a friend as well as teacher to many of her students some of whom would have been only one or two years younger than their gifted teacher.

The headmistress's report of 1899 notes that "under Miss Holder's tuition in classics we hope shortly to have candidates in Greek, which subject has this year been added to the curriculum".[2] Thus after twenty years of the school's existence, a former student, Ethel Holder, who had gained an M. A. in classics returned to make up an earlier deficiency in the school.[3] These young teachers received salaries of between £85 and £95, two-thirds of the male wage at the time, with a bonus for successful teaching in addition.

An analysis of a small group of ten former Advanced School students who obtained degrees and taught in the state system reveals several different strategies used by women to enhance both their education and their independence. [4] Only two of the students, Annie Trehy and Dorothea Proud, gained their degrees before becoming teachers. Annie Trehy, one of the earliest graduates (B Sc 1890) first appears in the teachers records in 1904, fourteen years after the completion of her degree. She was an assistant at the Pupil Teachers School for a year, then taught at Sturt Street and at Burra in 1904-05. She resigned in 1905 and comments

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1 Dornwell papers in possession of Mrs Raymond, daughter-in-law of Edith Dornwell Raymond

2 South Australian Parliamentary Papers ( S A P P ) 1900 Volume 3, No. 44 p25

3 As the regulations made Greek a compulsory subject for an arts degree until 1915 and girls schools did not teach Greek, the earliest graduates tended to do science degrees. Those who did enter for arts had to undertake private coaching in Greek. This coaching, often taken by both men and women, provided opportunities for several gifted women such as Agnes Heyne (later Dorsch) and Mary Langman.

4 Ten former Advanced School students who had obtained degrees were located in the records of the state teaching service. Many other Advanced School students went on to University but did not teach in the state department. Teachers Classification Board, Teachers' History Sheets G R G 18 167 Nos 1 & 2 PRO S A

in the notes seem to imply that she was not suited to a teaching career in a large school setting. Her salary for the years of teaching was £100 per annum.[1]

Dorothea Proud's experience with the state system was very brief. After completing her degree in 1907 Proud was appointed as an assistant at Goodwood School on a salary of £72. She resigned in July of that year and began teaching at an independent school, Kyre College, later Scotch College. Clearly for her the position in the state system was a stepping stone, a first job in a career that was to be varied and illustrious.[2]

The eight remaining teachers of the group of ten all gained their degrees through the Education Department. The usual pattern was to spend two or three years as a pupil teacher in an elementary school after which they were selected to spend two years at the University Training College. The two years enabled the women to gain six or seven university subjects as well as teaching qualifications and they completed the remaining subjects throughout their teaching careers. Clearly the phenomenon of mature - age, part - time, women students is not new.

Laura Heyne managed to complete a Bachelors degree in 1913 and a Masters degree in Arts in 1917 while teaching at Adelaide High School.[3] She served the Education Department for many years, becoming a Senior Mistress and retiring in 1933. Anna Laffan spread her degree over almost twenty years, gaining the first subjects in 1903 and 1904 and completing in 1922. She also enjoyed a long career in the Department, and was Senior Mistress at Adelaide High School from 1929 until her retirement in 1942. Several of the women who gained their degree in this protracted way married and left the teaching force, at least as far as the official records show. They tended to marry late ( aged 30 - 37 ), an aspect which invites consideration . In the next chapter I will discuss the possible effect on

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1 In 1907 Annie Trehy married the Government Astronomer. She was very active in several women's organizations and wrote several books under her married name, Mrs Dodwell.

2 For an account of Proud's achievements see Mackinnon A *The New Women* pp126 - 131

3 It is interesting to compare her career path with that of her sister Agnes Heyne (later Dorsch), the second woman to gain an Arts Degree . See the introductory pages of chapter 3.

spousal relations of women's later marriage and their involvement in lengthy and responsible careers.

As well as teaching at the Advanced school and, after 1909, at other Government high schools, many graduates taught at the new, or newly academic girls' private schools. Typically, after two years at the Advanced School, Edith Dornwell left to become a resident teacher at Methodist Ladies College, Hawthorn in Victoria. Her salary was £125 per annum with a bonus of £25. Apart from the bonus the salary is very similar to those received by women in government schools. Three years later she moved to Sydney and became headmistress of a private girls' school, Riviere College.[1] In the 1890s this career for a young woman in her mid-twenties certainly represented "an honourable independence - a possibility of a respected and self - respecting life", in Vicinus's terms. Yet, in terms of Pederson's analysis, referred to earlier, it was a modernization of women's traditional role, an importation into the girls' schools of the new normative standards and meritocratic criteria of the broader culture of the time.

And, in the event, it did not provide Edith Dornwell with lifelong independence, as, at the age of twenty-eight, she left Riviere College to marry Lionel Charles Raymond, an event which marked the end of her public life. The independence which teaching provided and which appeared so attractive to some women looked, however, more like a trap to those who wanted the same opportunities as a man. Elizabeth Jackson was one such woman. In 1916 she drafted a letter in her diary.

> The sky has fallen and I also have gone ker - splosh. The seven devils appear: independence, avarice, national necessity of utilizing economic factors, vacillation and general cussedness and contrariness. (All of which) have prodded me into the furnace of the Methodist Ladies College. Feel stunned? Offer Wednesday, accepted Thursday, teach Tuesday. English and history for four public exams, algebra ( me!) and Latin for infants. Bait is £110 per year (Mother thinks an assistant lecturer should have 120) and I can lecture per usual. I'm already ill at the thought of 6 lessons per day, 5 days per week x 40 weeks for £120 per year. But that way madness lies. Take a day at a time.

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1 Dornwell papers

> Is my turmoil undignified? I feel like a cockroach on his back, twittering helpless legs, why was I such a fool? Father and Mother both offered me leisure and when I think of my beloved philosophy all interfered with, I feel as if there had been a death in the family - just the same sudden gap left by the tearing away by the roots of a whole interest. Howsomedever (sic) for one year only. And if I break down before - heigh for philosophy. Think what an understanding friend I'll be. Only somehow I don't think my friends will love me as much.[1]

### University teaching

Elizabeth Jackson's real desire was to teach at university level. This was not really a permanent option for women at this time although several women occupied part - time and marginal positions. It appears that Jackson held a position as assistant in the Department of Philosophy from 1914 until her death in 1923. She acted variously as assistant lecturer and tutor for an annual honorarium of £30.[2] Her position must have entailed very little teaching if she could contemplate full time schoolteaching as well and most likely involved evening classes which the university offered at the time. A letter written to her brother Canning in 1917 clarifies her situation and her ambitions:

> I have been made tutor in psychology and philosophy at the W.E.A. The appointment is from the University and small as the pay is, it is in addition to the teacher's salary and I hope it will lead to enough advanced work to make school unnecessary in a year or two... It seems unfair to dwell on a feminine career in these days when men find theirs scattered to the winds, but mine is a very insignificant one, and is at the expense of no man, or at any rate of no South Australian, for I have done more in these subjects than any other South Australian student.[3]

Shortly before, she had written to her brother, "I would like to furnish a house, and live as a man might, but Mother doesn't much encourage the idea". The notion of an "honourable and independent life"

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1 Jackson diary Barr Smith Library

2 Woodburn S "Women at the University of Adelaide 1874 - 1985 and some significant dates in higher education for women". Pamphlet prepared for University of Adelaide by its archivist, 1985. Published as an appendix in Mackinnon A *The New Women* p215

3 Jackson papers. W E A refers to the Workers Educational Association

held little reality for Jackson as both her dearest wishes in that regard were thwarted. Nevertheless in her short life ( she died at the age of thirty - two) she managed to make a considerable impact on her society and, as she boldly declared, "A short life and a contentious one is better than a prolonged placidity".[1]

Several other women preceded Jackson in attaining university appointments. In 1900 May Burgess, B.Sc. (1899) was employed as junior demonstrator in chemistry. She held this position continuously as a part time appointment up to 1911, at an annual salary of £30, reduced from 1904 to £15. This was clearly a fairly minor appointment. She also coached students preparing for university entrance, as did her sisters. The Burgess sisters frequently appear in the reminiscences of the next generation of graduates. A former student recalls:

> I hated Maths: old Miss Amy Burgess was the only one who could ever teach me that. There were three Burgess sisters, all teachers, whom we used to call the Burgi![2]

In March 1902 Ellen Ida Benham, B. Sc. (1892 ) was appointed lecturer in botany to replace Professor Tate for whom she had lectured in 1901, during his illness.[3] She held this position as part - time lecturer and examiner, on a "fees less 10% basis" continuously to 1912.[4] Benham can be considered the first female academic staff member of the University of Adelaide. Yet, as Helen Jones points out, she is not mentioned in the university's centenary history.[5] Benham's career warrants detailed attention as it demonstrates very clearly the links between the Advanced School for Girls, the University of Adelaide and the private girls' schools. It also epitomizes the opportunities open to women graduates in science and arts and the limitations imposed on them.

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1 Ibid

2 Interview with Dr Phyllis Cilento, nee McGlew, former student of Tormore House School and, after completing school, of Amy Burgess.

3 University of Adelaide, Education Committee, *Minutes* 14 February 1902, letter from E.C. Stirling

4 Mackinnon *The New Women* p218

5 Jones *Nothing Seemed Impossible* p 91

Ellen Benham was the daughter of a well to do Kapunda lawyer. She was educated first at the Kapunda Model School and then at the Advanced School for Girls. After graduation she became headmistress of the Christ Church ( Kapunda ) Day School, resigning in 1895 to travel overseas. On her return she taught science at Mrs Kelsey's Dryburgh House School leaving that position to teach at Tormore House School from 1900.[1] She remained on the Tormore staff until 1911, concurrently taking lectures at the university, physiology classes at the Advanced School and other lessons at the Unley Park School. It is clear that a well qualified teacher who was repected for her abilities was in considerable demand in the small circle of secondary girls' schools in turn of the century Adelaide.

Benham maintained her interest in study, gaining a First class pass in the new subject, psychology, in 1906. Two years later she travelled overseas to study teaching methods. She taught briefly at Winchester High School for Girls, spent a fortnight's observation at Bedford Training College in London, and visited the famous Cheltenham Ladies College. She then went on to Oxford for the summer vacation training course in the theory, practice and history of education. Taking a shorter time than was usually required, Benham passed the Oxford Diploma in Education and returned to Adelaide in 1909 where she resumed teaching at Tormore and the University.[2]

The trip to England had awakened in her the desire to own a school of her own and in 1913 she purchased the goodwill of Walford School in Malvern. There she introduced academic subjects and ideas she had acquired in her travels, such as the introduction of tennis and hockey, of school prefects and the beginning of a school uniform.

During her Tormore and university teaching days Benham introduced field visits, extending the study of native plants. An authority on the identification of plants, she was appointed to classify a major collection presented to the University herbarium by the South Australian government.[3] Yet, strangely, her term as a lecturer was not extended.

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1 Chivers R R *The Benham Family in Australia* Chivers 1970 pp 21-22

2 Ibid

3 Jones *Nothing Seemed Impossible* p91

During her years as botany lecturer concern had been expressed at the inadequate provision for the teaching of botany at the university. The solution to this problem was found in the appointment of Professor Osborn to the Chair of Botany. He took up his appointment in 1912, allowing Ellen Benham to finish her lectures for that year.[1] She did not apply for the position.

In many ways Benham's short life ( she died at the age of 46) typifies the life of the turn of the century independent woman. She could live singly in economic independence. Vicinus stresses the importance for women of being able to live separately from family or spouse.[2] This was certainly possible for Benham. Her professional abilities also gave her the reason, and probably the means, to travel purposefully. She gained respect as a teacher, lecturer, botanist and headmistress.[3] She enjoyed the company of other like - minded women and was elected president of the Advanced School Old Scholars Association and of the Women Graduates Club. The latter, enjoyed by many graduates, held meetings, debates and social activities including an annual dinner. At one of these dinners Benham was said to have been seen smoking - a very advanced practice for the time and one which would have led to her being designated a 'bluestocking' or perhaps a 'new woman'.[4] Margaret Rossiter points out that smoking and organized "smokers"( dinners at which smoking was taken for granted), were an important and often deliberately intimidating part of the male professional culture at the turn of the century, often signaling to women that their presence was not desired at professional meetings. A few 'advanced' women made sure that by smoking themselves they would not be excluded on this pretext.[5]

Yet for all these freedoms Benham's life was circumscribed by the fact of her sex. Welome in the university as a part - time teacher when help was needed, she was nevertheless not viewed as a serious contender

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1 Chivers *The Benham Family* p23

2 Vicinus *Independent Women* p149

3 One of her students, Stella Bowen, wrote of her: "I acquired a respect for hard facts and straight thinking from a certain Miss Benham, who was the first teacher I had ever met who would not put up with a blur or a wobble in answer to a question, and who insisted on speed." Bowen S *Drawn from Life* Virago 1984 p20

4 Ibid p22

5 Rossiter M *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* The Johns Hopkins University Press 1982 p 92

for a permanent academic post. Nor did she probably see herself in that light. The world of the university was very much a man's world. Elizabeth Jackson described herself as 'a splinter of the staff', a description which applied equally well to Ellen Benham and to the handful of women who followed her into academic posts in the first decades of this century. They did not have the benefit of the opportunities for women's employment offered by the women's universities of North America. Rossiter has described the way in which the departments of women's colleges provided the avenues for "the entering wedge" of women who sought full careers within the scientific profession.[1] Without such avenues women's participation in academic teaching remained marginal in the early decades of this century.

In 1917, the year of Benham's death, Marjorie Isabel Collins, B. Sc. (Sydney 1915 ) was appointed to a full - time position as demonstrator in botany at a salary of £200 per annum, a position she held for two years. Mary Dawbarn, B. Sc. (1928 ) was appointed in1927 to the Animal Products Research Foundation as a chemist at a salary of £400, and Effie Deland, B. Sc. ( 1926 ) as full - time demonstrator in zoology at £200.[2] Effie Deland's reminiscences illuminate the haphazard way in which women sometimes 'fell' into university work - and Phyllis Lade's the way they fell out again. Effie Deland relates that:

> In my fourth year, the year Professor Harvey Johnson went south to the Antarctic, we had students for the first time doing a third term of zoology for science. The old man was busy so he said, "Well, you can lecture to them in third term". He didn't even tell me what to talk about. I remember including in first year zoology a comparison between the development of writing in Egypt and our own industrial revolution in the development of man's intellect. I enjoyed that tremendously. Later I had a lovely time with W.E.A. classes because then I had a pretty free hand.[3]

Deland was in fact carrying out research for a Master's degree in Science during the time she was a demonstrator and acting lecturer in zoology. In 1930 she married Rupert Best and retired from zoology to raise

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1 Ibid p25
2 Mackinnon *The New Women* p219
3 Interview with Mrs Effie Best (nee Deland)

five children. Nevertheless during the war her talents were called upon and she went back to demonstrating in the Zoology Department.

Phyllis Lade had her appointment as a tutor in the English Department cut short by the Depression. Women, she recalls, were not really supposed to be interested in a salary (or perhaps academics were supposed to be above pecuniary matters):

> When the Professor offered me the job he seemed almost shy about mentioning such a thing as a salary. He said the salary would be £200 a year. That was the recognized salary for a tutor in those days... I thought to have £4 a week of my own was marvellous. In addition to that I did quite a lot of coaching. I had a number of students. I would go to their homes privately, referred by the Professor. That helped my salary and my interest. It was a very happy year. I had a little place downstairs in the old Prince of Wales building ... I thought it was just marvellous to have a place of my own. I enjoyed the tutoring immensely, the person -to person contact with students...
>
> At the end of that year the staff was reduced from a professor, two lecturers and one tutor to a professor and one lecturer. Of course the tutor went. This was the beginning of the Depression. I felt very disappointed, and I think really I was not given sufficient notice about it either. They didn't tell me until very close to the end of the year. It was difficult then to think about looking out for another job.[1]

In 1930 Hope Crampton B. A. ( 1924 ) was the first woman to be appointed to a lecturing position on a permanent basis. Yet this came about almost by chance and was not the result of any particular académic ambition on Hope's part. As soon as possible after graduation Crampton went to Paris where she studied for three years at the Sorbonne. Interestingly she had no thoughts of preparing herself for an academic career by gaining additional qualifications: such a vocation was rarely considered appropriate for women in Australia even in the 1950s, as Jill Ker Conway's recent biography attests.[2] Like other women contemporaries Crampton was delighted to have the opportunity to

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1 Interview with Mrs Phyllis Duguid (nee Lade )

2 Conway J K *The Road from Coorain: An Australian Memoir* Heinemann 1989

develop her talents and interests, in this case in languages, for their own sake:

> I didn't do a degree. I wanted to do a lot of other things. You had to have four certificates to be a licencee. I just did the French certificate; I thought that would do. I could at that stage, before I had forgotten too much, have got the Greek and Latin certificates without too much effort but I wanted to do Spanish, Italian and German and things like that. You see we could teach each other. The women students clustered together rather and had their own hostel, on the Boulevard Saint - Michel, where there were twenty - seven nationalities all living together... I began learning both Italian and Spanish from fellow students and then at the Sorbonne you could go into any lecture you liked. So I began going to lectures there, just listening in and picking something up. I used to walk everywhere and got to know the streets of Paris pretty well. Everything was nice and cheap and you went to a lot of theatres.[1]

From this eclectic immersion in things French, Crampton was recalled by the University of Adelaide.

> While I was in Paris the Council wrote and asked me if I'd like to join the staff. It was rather handy for them to make a family affair of it because they took £100 from (my father's ) salary and put it on mine. So I began a thirty - one year career on the staff of the French Department, beginning as assistant lecturer and ending as senior lecturer. I hadn't the faintest idea of what I was going to do. Just an accident; a happy one on the whole.[2]

The total lack of planning for a career, and the enjoyment of study for its own sake and the accompanying freedoms of university life, characterize the accounts of the lives of many of the earliest graduates, particularly those in the arts and science faculties. Does this mean then that they shared with Elizabeth Jackson the feeling that there was " nowhere to plant the sole of the feet"? I wish to argue, and will develop later in this chapter, the notion that these women were experimenting with a range of newly found freedoms; freedoms from the expectation that they would marry, or that they would be a part of the family household. Education gave them an autonomy of movement, they could travel independently, some could set up independent households, or

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1 Interview with Miss Hope Crampton, Stirling 1985

2 Ibid Hope Crampon's father was the first lecturer in the French Department.

households with other women. Furthermore their notions of what it meant to be a woman were changing.

**Medicine**

Laura Fowler, the first woman to graduate in medicine at the University of Adelaide, originally contemplated the idea of studying science. I described in Chapter 3 the gradual development of her urge to study, an idea she tried out in her letters to her brother Jim - and was summarily rebuffed. Laura clearly felt the need to reassure her brother by writing in December 1885:

> After matriculating (which I shall doubtless?) I have no present intention of becoming a regular student at the University, I mean of studying for a degree. There are regular courses of lectures at the University on physiology which I shall attend.[1]

A new activity may have prompted the interest in physiology.

> Received the St John's Ambulance Certificate - certificate of ability to render first aid to the injured... the second course of lectures on nursing has begun. We could not go to the first but the last was on infectious diseases and disinfection, really we hardly learnt anything. Dr Campbell insults us by giving us such childish information.

In 1886 two events occured which influenced Laura's next move. The university established a medical school and Laura passed her Matriculation examination with first class credits. In 1887 she enrolled in medicine at the university of Adelaide, and in 1891 she graduated with high honours. She did not discuss her reasons for wanting to become a doctor in her earlier letters to her brother Jim. However, she did say that a degree would be useful to her later if she had to support herself. A generation later medicine was still an unusual choice for a woman and, in 1913, Phyllis Mc Glew made the decision to study medicine after an earlier ambition, to be an artist, was reluctantly relinquished.

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1 Fowler papers PRG 34 MLSA

> When I left school my father said, " you must get your arts degree before you can go to Europe and learn to become a painter".[1]

During her arts degree McGlew continued to attend Art School for a day a week but soon realized that her talents did not lie in that direction. She was also a keen member of the Student's Christian Movement and was inspired, as were many of her friends to do some 'dedicated work'.

> I decided, as I'd been so good at physiology - and I loved it - that I would do medicine. I had to make that decision then, because it meant six years hard work, since I had to do first year science as well, before I started. I felt I would have to work very hard but I had an idea that I'd do social work in the East End of London as I'd heard the Oxford university students did. That's what I felt I'd like, to work among girls. I was determined to do something that was useful in society. So I thought, I'd be much more use as a doctor.[2]

Helen Mayo, on the other hand, claims that she always knew that medicine would be her life's work, although she had never heard of women doctors. She was advised that she was too young to start medical studies so she did two years of an arts course before starting her medical course in1898.[3] Mayo remained single, sharing her life with Constance Finlayson, and fulfilled her early wish to dedicate herself to medicine. She enjoyed a long and distinguished public career.[4]

Of the seventy-four single women in the study four were medical doctors. The majority of women doctors married. This does not preclude them from being categorized as independent women, in one important sense, as a number of them continued to practice medicine after marriage. Frequently they married doctors and were able to pursue careers intermittently allowing for the demands of child - bearing by withdrawing from the practice, often shared with their husband, at intervals.[5] For

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1 Interview with Lady Phyllis Cilento (nee Mc Glew ) Brisbane 1984
2 Ibid
3 Autobiographical notes of Dr Helen Mayo in Mayo papers P R G 127 M L S A
4 For a short biography of Helen Mayo see Mackinnon A *The New Women* pp60 - 72 also Helen Mayo in Radi H (ed) *200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology* Women's Redress Press 1988 pp 113 -4
5 See for instance the biographies of Phyllis Cilento, Rosamond Benham and Winifred Wall in Mackinnon *The New Women*

them, marriage did not necessarily mean making a choice between home and career.

**Law**

Nor did the first law graduate, Mary Kitson, Ll B (1916) choose between marriage and career. After graduation she practised as a barrister with the law firm of Poole and Johnston, becoming a partner in 1919. However she left the firm on her marriage in 1924 to Julian Tenison Woods, a fellow barrister and solicitor, as her partners preferred not to work with a married woman.[1] In 1925 she joined Dorothy Somerville, the third female law graduate, establishing the state's first female law partnership.

Her son was born in 1927, mildly disabled, and in the same year her husband's name was removed from the roll for misuse of trust funds. The couple separated and Mary Tenison Woods, as the sole support of her son, sought more lucrative employment. From then on , her career was that of a single woman and her law degree, coupled with a strong sense of urgency in gaining social justice for women and children, led to an active career culminating in an appointment as Chief of the Office of the Status of Women in the Human Rights Division of the United Nations, a position she held from 1950 to 1958.

Her former partner, Dorothy Somerville, remained single, explaining recently to a journalist, who asked her about marriage, that "nobody ever asked me ". She qualified the remark with the comment that she wasn't the marrying kind anyway![2] Somerville, the state's oldest practising legal practitioner at the age of 91, worked largely in estate law as " it has always been my favourite part of the law because of the contact with people." Underlining one of the major arguments for women's entry into the professions in the early part of this century, Somerville reflected that so many of the older people in those days were frightened of going to a male solicitor, but felt they could talk to her. Women were seen as more approachable.

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1 See Tenison Woods M in Radi *200 Australian Women* pp197 - 9
2 Adelaide *Advertiser* 21. 12. 1988 "Lawyer Dorothy, 91 , courts a new Career"

## Music

Two at least of the single women were musicians and enjoyed long careers which mixed teaching, performance and composing. Maude Puddy graduated with a bachelor of music in 1905 and won several prizes at the Elder Conservatorium. The Adelaide University magazine noted in 1920 that she had studied piano in Vienna for the last few years and had played and taught in London.[1] In 1920 she was on the staff at Adelaide University.[2]

The daughter of a bootmaker and a music teacher, Ruby Davy was encouraged to play the piano, to improvise, and to compose from an early age. In 1907 she gained her Mus Bac and in 1909 was composing, giving recitals and participating in ensembles.[3] As a temporary replacement, she taught theory and counterpoint at the conservatorium in1912 and in 1918 she was awarded a doctorate in music, the first Australian woman to do so. She was also the first Australian woman to become a fellow of Trinity College of Music. Davy enjoyed a long career as a teacher, founding the Davy Conservatorium of music at her South Yarra home, as a performer and as a composer. The Australian Musical News described her as a "pianist, musical historian, elocutionist, actress, raconteur, singer, poet and enthusiast."[4]

For both Puddy and Davy, a university degree enabled them to turn a discipline which had originally been seen as a woman's accomplishment into a professional training, a means to a satisfying life's work.

## Other Careers

Two single women were rather curiously designated occupation - Ph. D - on their death certificates, reflecting perhaps the novelty of such a qualification for women in 1937 and 1963 respectively. One of the women,

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1 Adelaide University Magazine Vol 2 No 2 p78
2 Ibid Vol 3 No 1 p15
3 See Davy R in Radi *200 Australian Women* pp139 - 140
4 Ibid p140

Constance Davey, pioneered a career path which has come to be seen as particularly appropriate for women in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The daughter of a bank manager from Nuriootpa, a small town in the wine - growing district of South Australia, Constance Davey attended Clare High School and graduated Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Philosophy in 1915 and Master of Arts in 1918.

Davey was a schoolteacher at St Peter's Collegiate Girls' School for several years, taking an active part in the Women Teacher's Association.[1] In 1922 she went to England, the second recipient of the Catherine Helen Spence Scholarship, awarded to scholars who undertook enquiry and study abroad into social problems.[2] She studied psychology at London University, and was awarded a doctorate in 1924. While in London, Davey was approached by the South Australian Director of Technical Education, Dr Charles Fenner, and asked to prepare herself for an appointment as psychologist to the Education Department. Accordingly she visited schools and education units using new psychological approaches to test and sort children in British and American schools.

In 1924 Davey was appointed psychologist to the Education Department and was attached, significantly, to the medical branch. This was the period during which older explanations of children's failure to succeed in school, such as 'vicious and immoral' parents or poverty, were gradually replaced by explanations based on medical and psychological factors which could be 'cured'.[3] Central to this new psychology was the notion of the Intelligence Quotient, believed to be a fixed characteristic of the child on which safe predictions about possible levels of attainment could be based. Recent research has been particularly critical of this faith in I Q testing, and the unfortunate results of such an approach for working class and non-Anglo-Saxon children. [4]

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1 Davey papers P R G 104 M L S A

2 Jones *In Her Own Name : Women in South Australian History* Wake field 1986 p176

3 Miller P *Long Division* p170

4 See for instance Cashen P "The Truant as Delinquent: The Psychological Perspective, South Australia, 1920-1940" in *Journal of Australian Studies* No 16 May 1985 and Miller Ibid

Nevertheless for women such as Davey, who shared her generation's faith in science and its application to the betterment of the 'race', psychology offered a challenging new field and a very worthwhile occupation. Whereas women as philanthropists had usually been the agents who attempted to mitigate the worst effects of poverty on children, women psychologists and doctors felt they now had science on their side and could suggest the appropriate place for children in their society, based on 'objective tests'. Davey enjoyed a long career in the Education Department introducing 'opportunity' classes for less able children and broadening the use of intelligence and aptitude testing, vocational guidance and psychological counselling.

Davey's interests were wide and her public contribution significant. During the early part of her career, the young psychologist was asked to take the evening lectureship in psychology and logic at the University of Adelaide for which she was paid £300. She served on a government enquiry into the treatment of delinquent children in 1938. On her retirement from the Education Department she became a senior research fellow at the university and wrote *Children and their Lawmakers.* [1] She was an active member of many women's clubs - the Women Graduates' Club, the Women Teacher's Association, and the League of Women Voters for instance. In the latter organization she twice led deputations seeking the right for women to serve as jurors.[2]

Amongst the other single women's occupations were listed a bank clerk and three typist-secretaries. The latter four seem to bear out the truthfulness of a comment made by a Melbourne university woman who claimed in a paper read to the International Federation of University Women, and reported in the Adelaide *Register,* that " from the point of view of most business men the three years spent at university were wasted".[3] She reported that it had been found on making enquiries from bankers and leading business men in Melbourne, that few, if any,

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1 Davey C *Children and Their Lawmakers: A Social-Historical Survey of the Growth and Development from 1836 -1950 of South Australian Law Relating to Children* The author 1956

2 See Davey C in Radi *200 Australian Women.* Evidence has not been found about the career of the second woman Ph D. Eleanor Allen also moved away from Adelaide to gain her qualification and may well have spent her working life in another state or country. She did, however, remain single.

3 Mackinnon *The New Women* p189

openings were available for highly educated women who desired to secure positions of higher standing than those occupied by stenographers and ordinary clerks.

It is not clear where these women practised their secretarial skills. However a certain type of secretarial career was considered highly desirable in the United States in this period. Emilie McVea, dean of women and assistant professor of English at the university of Cincinnati, spoke favourably about women using their interests in government and political science to fit themselves for "higher secretarial positions to governors and state officials."[1]

**The Context**

If one looks at the careers of the women above it is relatively easy to make a case for the significance of university education in opening up new opportunities for women in the workforce. Many individuals found long and fulfilling occupations. Yet, as Joan Kelly - Gadol reminded us several years ago, in order to chart women's progress in any area we need to see how they fared in relation to men at a particular period.[2] As I have demonstrated, the majority of single women became teachers and for women teachers in the state teaching service, any notion of progress was profoundly contradictory. Although by 1902 almost 70 per cent of teachers were female, the number of female head teachers had been halved and teachers tended to occupy subordinate positions.

As Pavla Miller has shown for the period from 1911 to 1921, the period in which most of the women in this study completed their degree, the statistics of women's participation in post - compulsory schooling and in some white collar occupations were quite remarkable.[3] In 1911 and in 1921, a significantly higher proportion of girls than of boys was staying on at school past the compulsory leaving age. By 1921, the predominance of women was evident in both state and private schools, a trend which continued during the 1930's depression in private schools.

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1 Clifford G J *Lone Voyagers: Academic Women in Coeducational Institutions, 1870 - 1937* The Feminist Press 1989 p 36

2 Kelly - Gadol J The Social Relation of the Sexes in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Summer 1976

3 Miller *Long Division* p144-145

Furthermore women were making significant gains in professions. They put their schooling to good use as a starting point for careers in education. A 1916 survey of school leavers from metropolitan high schools found that over 40 per cent of girls proceeded to teaching or the professions and about 20 per cent to clerical work.[1] Miller demonstrates further that women's involvement in a range of occupations such as architects and engineers, doctors, dentists and accountants was greater in 1911 and even more markedly in 1921, proportionately than at any time over the following fifty years. In 1921, for every woman architect or engineer there were 24 men; in 1971, there were 83.

From the vantage point of the late twentieth century the decade to 1921 was a watershed for women's professional advancement and it must have seemed to many young women studying at the university or recently graduated that a new world was opening up, a world in which so much more was possible. Miller argues that it was probably no coincidence that it was shortly after this time that women lost the impressive foothold in both the education system and the professions they gained in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[2]

It has been argued that this period was one in which there was a significant weakening of direct personal control by men over women's labour.[3] By 1911 in Adelaide and the suburbs 27.2 per cent of all women over fifteen and 46.5 per cent of women between the ages of fifteen and twenty - five participated in the workforce. This participation contrasted markedly with public rhetoric concerning women's appointed place within the home. More worrying for those who supported that view was the decline in domestic service and women's preference for factory and commercial work.[4] Added to that concern was the decline in the birth rate, viewed by many as a sign of selfishness on women's part.

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1 Ibid p145

2 Ibid p159

3 See for instance Beasley C *Educating Rita's Grandmother: The Social Relation of the Sexes and South Australian Curriculum Reform, 1875 - 1915* M.Ed. thesis Flinders University 1984

4 Miller *Long Division* p87

These factors were all addressed by the social efficiency movement, a movement in which graduate women took particular interest as women were given a key role within it and it apparently rested on scientific premises. Miller argues that the social efficiency movement, in its efforts to reshape the family, pointed to some ways in which the loss of personal control of women by men could be replaced by social control over women's labour. She suggests that three key themes of the movement seriously limited the real progressive potential of many of the reforms its adherents proposed.

Those themes include an acceptance of the ideology of separate spheres which assigned women the task of looking after men and children, the assertion that institutions such as schools had to intervene directly in the production and reproduction of femininity and thirdly, the justification of the role of the 'expert' who "having redefined femininity scientifically, had to work to produce it, since both nature and the working class family had failed to equip women adequately for their 'natural' role."[1] Graduate women willingly embraced several aspects of this way of thinking as it provided them with possibilities for new career paths and validated women's special contribution to the wider society. Unfortunately it frequently led to their becoming perhaps more subject to the wishes of their social class than to the needs of other women.

The success of the social efficiency movement led directly to the introduction of domestic science to the school curriculum on the assumption that well trained wives and mothers would arrest the social problems attributed to women's 'desertion of the home'. Although this was initially resisted, by the late 1920s the teaching of domestic subjects was well accepted.[2] This can be seen as a definite setback to the acceptance of girls' equal abilities in education and to their chances of competing on equal terms. On the other hand, for some women it represented an advance in that it raised the respect accorded their 'natural calling'. The views of graduate women on social efficiency issues can be found in the topics of debates and discussions of organizations in which they played a prominent part.

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1 Ibid
2 Ibid p159

In June 1921, for example, fifty-two members of the Adelaide Women Graduates Club attended a mock parliamentary evening where a bill for controlling and regulating the marriages of men and women was introduced, discussed and accepted. The establishment of a marriage board was suggested, aided by district committees. Each committee was to consist of three legally qualified medical practitioners, an advanced psychological student, three other persons skilled in letters and science, and two other residents of good repute. People who wished to marry had to satisfy the committee on several counts including compatibility and freedom from hereditary or transmissable disease.[1]

The debaters argued the relative merits of heredity and environment in leading to undesirable social features, such as venereal disease and mental deficiency. Their solution reflected their strong belief in science and the emergence of psychology as well as medicine as a panacea for social problems. Their 'expert' committee would have been heavily loaded with university - trained professionals and represented a potential intrusion into working class life.

Yet it can be argued that precisely such an intrusion did occur in the case of the labelling of children from Aboriginal and working class homes by the testing and classification procedures of the psychology branch headed by Dr Constance Davey. On the other hand their status as educated women and professionals gave graduates the chance to exercise control over problems such as venereal disease, which had been the cause of much misery for women in the past. The notion of some sort of control of marriage and the circumstances of women within it was a major plank of feminist reform. Sheila Jeffreys believes that the period 1880 - 1930 witnessed a massive campaign by women to transform male sexual behaviour and protect women from the effects of the exercise of a form of male sexual behaviour damaging to their interests.[2] If we focus only on the regulatory aspects of women's involvement with the social efficiency movement we overlook their very real challenges to male sexual hegemony, a point I will explore later.

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1 University Clippings book Union Archives University of Adelaide

2 Jeffreys S *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880 - 1930* Pandora 1985 p1

In June, 1920 the Girl's Welfare Committee, a group with which the women graduates had links, asked them to appoint delegates to a deputation seeking increased facilities in domestic training. Mrs Dodwell, (the former Annie Trehy), Dr Cilento and Miss Constance Davey were appointed. A characteristic trio - a married woman, a doctor and a psychologist - aligned themselves with those advocating a scientific approach to domestic work. Their support was based on several factors; many women genuinely wished to raise the status of housework and to value more highly the role of women in the home. In keeping with their high evaluation of science, they saw scientific housework as a means to gaining that recognition. Others wished to see middle class standards of domestic life spread throughout the working class.

One of the curious contradictions of this period was the fact that many of the women who were able to have a significant input into the debates about the nature of home life, of domestic training and of the rearing of children were themselves single. They were able to step outside the structures of domesticity and adopt the role of 'expert', a situation which offered many women new freedoms. I have argued that women graduates gained more opportunities for meaningful work as they emerged from university with their new won degrees. However, the nature of that work, with the exception of that of the few medical and legal women, was not qualitatively different from that engaged in by previous generations of middle - class women. Certainly it had been redefined and the setting was very different. Most significantly, the new institutions differed markedly from family settings. This I believe was one of the most potentially radical aspects of women's higher education.

**Independent Women - A Changed Consciousness?**

In the previous chapter I cited Ruzicka and Caldwell's belief that the fertility decline " may well have been the most momentous event of our times."[1] Similarly Carl Degler, the American historian, calls the decline in family size " the single most important fact about women and the family in American history".[2] The fertility decline, as I have argued,

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1 Ruzicka L and Caldwell J *The End of Demographic Transition in Australia* p1
2 Degler C *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* Oxford University Press 1980 p181

certainly played a major part in both determining women's access to education and in their reproductive decisions after marriage. Two other demographic factors, however, played an equally vital role in the lives of graduate women. One was the tendency to later marriage, the other the growth of a significant cohort of women who chose to remain permanently single.

The radical nature of this group was summed up by Martha Vicinus in her statement that:

> For the first time in history a small group of middle class women could afford to live, however poorly, on their own earnings outside heterosexual domesticity or church governance.[1]

For that group, Vicinus adds, significant work was essential as was the opportunity for emotionally satisfying friendships and morally charged freedom. I wish to argue further that the cohorts of single women who were characteristic of the university - educated in all Western countries in the period 1880 - 1920, significantly challenged the gender order, in ways which eventually called forth a virulent reaction which, for a time, made 'voluntary spinsterhood' a most unattractive option. Many women demonstrated that, given economic security, they would rather spend their lives with women than with men. These cohorts pioneered a way of life, which has certainly fluctuated dramatically over the last six or seven decades but has nevertheless remained viable, allowing a core group a visible existence outside patriarchal structures. This group has influence proportionately greater than its numbers, symbolically challenging the gender order and providing a large proportion of the women who hold significant public office.

As well as examining the material structures which shaped the lives of women in the past feminist writers have introduced the necessity of understanding consciousness as "something produced or constructed rather than as the source of ideas and the social world".[2] This understanding was a specific result of the notion recognized by feminists that personal change is essential to political change. Feminists were not, of

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1 Vicinus *Independent Women* p6
2 Henriques et al *Changing the Subject* p8

course the first to make this discovery; Gramsci wrote much earlier that the transformation of consciousness was an inseparable part of structural change.[1]

Oppositions between the individual and society are seen, from this perspective, to be unproductive and misleading. Through this understanding much feminist theoretical work has developed. An important aspect of this work is the examination of subjectivity - of individuality and self - awareness. Following psycho-analytic models, theorists such as Henriques set out their understanding of 'subjects' as dynamic and multiple, as positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by them.[2]

I have found this approach helpful in attempting to illuminate possible changes in the consciousness of university women during the period. Was it a change in their way of viewing themselves in the social world which led many graduates to choose single lives? It is instructive here to take into account the various discourses available to them and to speculate on the accommodations particular women made to potentially contradictory situations. The acceptance of the idea of potentially contradictory discourses allows for an explanation of social change as women make choices between the various positions available.

A reading of literary and oral sources points to two major sets of discourses or discursive practices available to university women both as students and as graduates. On the one hand they could position themselves within the prevailing intellectual climate as **rational intellectual beings**, as those for whom the major defining aspect of their lives was their ability to engage rationally in mental debate and to bring that understanding to the social world. This is reminiscent of the Mary Wollstonecraft, J S Mill, model of the rational intellectual 'exceptional' woman. A crucial part of that position for women was access to what Gouldner calls the 'culture of critical discourse'.[3] On the other hand women could position themselves in a set of discursive practices which

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1 Boggs C *Gramsci's Marxism* Pluto Press 1976
2 Ibid p3
3 Gouldner A *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* Here Gouldner is using the term discourse in its traditional sense, that is as a particular form of speech.

centred on their role as **women.** These varied practices included notions of femininity, of mothering and of their solidarity as women. Often contradictory, sometimes mutually reinforcing, this range of discursive positions offered women new opportunities for self - definition and, sometimes, agonizing new choices.

Gouldner's work on the 'new class' is particularly useful in relation to university - educated women as it offers a way of conceptualizing the changing position of educated women and their demands to play a larger part in civil society. The new class, according to Gouldner, encompasses both technical intelligentsia and intellectuals, those people who are highly dependent on the public education system. It is not unified and seamless but internally divided with tensions between technical and humanistic elements. He argues for a general theory of capital within which the new class's human capital and the old class's moneyed capital are special cases. The human capital element referred to is that acquired through relatively advanced education. This, then, is a form of capital which a small group of women can acquire.

Gouldner also defines this class as a "cultural bourgeoisie whose consciousness is not economistic but committed to producing worthy objects and services and to the development of the skills requisite for these".[1] Two elements of his analysis are particularly helpful here, the central role he ascribes to education and his notion of 'the culture of critical discourse'. The new class is characterized by its access to the culture of critical discourse which is based on a specific speech act - justification. No appeal to authority is allowed, the appeal must be to argument. The implication here is that what is said may be wrong and can be challenged; it is more reflexive .

Access to this critical discourse seems to be a crucial factor in graduates' lives and in their interaction with the public sphere. The potential freedom from 'authority' and the appeal to argument, indeed the ability to question and demand proof, is a central aspect of women's rebellion against perceived and age - old 'wisdom'. Through such discourse the possibility of the challenge to women's 'natural ' role was established, the challenge to notions of intellectual inferiority. The

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1 Ibid p20

activities of a group of brilliant women social scientists in America, who demonstrated in the 1920s and 30s that women's 'disadvantage' was social, not biological, is an excellent case in point.[1]

The important point here is Gouldner's contention that:

> the culture of critical discourse de - authorises all speech grounded in traditional societal authority, while it authorises itself, the elaborated speech variant of the culture of critical discourse, as the standard of 'all' serious speech. From now on, persons and their social positions must not be visible in their speech.[2]

For Gouldner the necessary institution for the mass production of the new class and its special culture of critical discourse is the historically unique level of public education whether at secondary or tertiary level. As it takes the student away from parental supervision, and is mediated through new class teachers, this educational experience leads students to take the standpoint of the collectivity and to train students to believe that " their discourse does not depend on their differing class origins - that it is not the speaker but the speech which must be attended to."[3] Furthermore, in Gouldner's analysis, the costs of such tertiary education are 'socialized', removed from the private sector, and increasingly dependent on the state. With such socialization the private sector loosens its control over the reproduction of the new class and increasingly this becomes vested in the new class itself.

I will return to the broader discussion of the new class and its usefulness as an explanatory tool in the following chapter. In the meantime I believe that Gouldner's notion of the culture of critical discourse is a helpful concept in an attempt to locate changes in university women's consciousness. It is a useful corrective to earlier approaches which stressed only the reproduction of social norms and values.[4] It does however, have significant flaws. For instance, the challenge to traditional

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1 Rosenberg R *Beyond Separate Spheres : Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* Yale University Press 1982

2 Gouldner *The Future of Intellectuals* p29

3 Ibid p44

4 See for instance Deem R *Women and Schooling* Routledge and Kegan Paul 1978 p 95

authority is not unqualified and may lead to the privileging of an alternative form of authority, for example, scientific authority, with quite mixed results for women.

**Rational, thinking beings**

The documents, both literary and oral, of Adelaide university women provide considerable evidence of women's self-definition as rational thinking beings, as capable and equal intellects. Indeed they were usually treated as such by their professors, adding weight to Gouldner's contention on the influence of new class teachers. Winifred Wall, an early medical graduate wrote, "We were treated exactly as the others and expected to do exactly the same ."[1] An early science graduate spoke of the value to her in later life of her degree, " You've got to accept the evidence, you can't go on believing something if the incontravertible ..evidence contradicts it."[2] Phyllis Duguid wrote that one had to be "analytical and critical".[3] This experience of stretching themselves in new ways, of reading, thinking and debating was described by so many students as a joyful experience, as 'fun', as marvellous and to be treasured.

Elizabeth Jackson, an early member of the University Women's Union and a keen member of its offshoot, the University Women's Debating Club, outlined some of the aims of that club, aims which underline women's interaction with the culture of critical discourse. The club aimed for:

> The awakening of dormant sympathies, learning to honour if we cannot sympathize, to defend a principle with enthusiasm but with moderation, to value adverse criticism, to aquire broad tolerance.[4]

A later item in a university magazine elaborated on those aims which had been first set down on the formation of the club in 1911. The writer explained that at some future time most students of a University would play an active part in society. Therefore there was a great need to be

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1 Interview with Dr W Wall (nee Clark) A F U W collection
2 Interview with Mrs N Jones (nee Winnall) A F U W collection
3 Interview with Mrs P Duguid (nee Lade ) A F U W collection
4 *Adelaide University Magazine* Volumes 1 number 1 University of Adelaide Archives p 65

able to express thoughts clearly, without hesitation and, above all, simply; to be able to defend a principle or an opinion with all the weapons at their disposal with enthusiasm, but with moderation. The qualities mentioned earlier by Jackson were all endorsed. These were the qualities of a rational, thinking individual. In the hands of a social group to whom these skills had previously been unavailable such training could be potentially dangerous to the social order.

Many of the women who later played a significant part in public life gained their skills at public debate in such groups as the university debating club and the women's union. Constance Davey, Helen Mayo, Phyllis Lade, Hope Crampton and Elizabeth Jackson were all prominent members. They, of course, only represent a visible and identifiable sub - set of women who in their day-to-day activities, in lectures, in the laboratory and in the library were in constant interaction with the processes of scientific thinking or of the political, literary and economic thinking of the period.

Gouldner's notion that the acquisition of the culture of critical discourse lessened social barriers, (" its not the speaker but the speech which must be attended to") gained some support in one graduate's account of her life. Reflecting on what a degree had meant to her, Dorothy West (nee Hunter) the daughter of a railway worker, commented:

> There was a very big distinction between the schools, the government and private schools. I can't say much to this day about the private schools - I don't know very much about them. But I do know that people who came on from the private schools and mixed on at the university - that all fell away and you then were just university students. Not in your first year, but in your second and particularly in our third year.[1]

### Notions of Womanhood

Another equally compelling set of discourses which impinged on university women, as on all women, centred around their definition of themselves as women. They were confronted by nineteenth-century notions of femininity and by newer more feminist concerns which often

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1 Interview with Mrs D West (nee Hunter ) A F U W collection

manifested themselves through a sense of solidarity between the women, by an immersion in a world which was very female-oriented though rarely consciously feminist in a late twentieth century sense.

The acceptance of traditionally feminine pursuits and obligations can be discerned in the letters of Laura Fowler to her brother Jim, letters from which I have quoted earlier. Laura was in many ways a typical daughter of a well to do Adelaide family in the late nineteenth century. Her days were full with family visits, church-going, jam-making, letter writing and solicitous care for her parents, particularly if there was any illness in the household. She deferred to her older brother's wisdom and affectionately asked his advice about studying. (See chap 3) Yet, at the same time she went ahead with her study and her gradually evolving decision to enrol for a medical course in spite of his apparent opposition.[1]

Laura Fowler's life illustrates in a fascinating way the mixture of traditional and new elements in the lives of many early women graduates. Her life is extraordinary in many aspects. The first woman to graduate in medicine at the University of Adelaide, she married a fellow doctor, Charles Hope, and with him served throughout their lives as independent medical missionaries in Bengal and India. During her work , Laura, the stronger partner, as Charles suffered constant ill - health and appears to have had a cripplingly reticent personality, undertook large responsibilities for many patients, travelled alone through lonely jungles and organized their domestic life. During the first world war she and Charles served with a Scottish Women's Hospital unit in Serbia and were taken prisoners of war.

Yet Laura's letters to her family from the 1880s to the 1930s retain the same sense of the dutiful daughter and sister and, indeed, of wife. Her married life was entirely shaped by the circumstances of her husband's life and she went to considerable pains to present herself as ordinary in every way possible. Like so many of the women graduates she belied the radical nature of her professional life by appearing as conventional as possible in her demeanour. Perhaps she would have agreed with Constance Maynard, a Girton graduate who wrote of the early student days, "the

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1 Fowler papers PRG 34 M L S A For a brief biography of Laura Hope (nee Fowler ) see Mackinnon A *The New Women* pp44 - 60

conventionalities of the age ... were the best possible shelter for the new aspirations, and firmly we kept to them..."[1]

For other women university study provided an opportunity for challenging the small and ordinary conventions of femininity. Several mention that the alternative to university was to accompany their mothers to tea - parties, considered a fate worse than death. Hope Crampton remembers the glee with which she dispensed with her obligatory hat, as soon as she entered the university grounds.[2] Phyllis Mc Glew (later Cilento) recollects high kicking in a frilly ballet outfit in a university concert before the first word war, remarking of herself, 'when I think of the cheek I had in those days!"[3]

While the superficial aspects of femininity were frequently mocked and challenged by university women, the central tenets of wifehood and motherhood were not. The dominant beliefs of the period, that marriage meant for most the abandonment of paid work, support for husband's career and dedication to the bearing and rearing of children were very rarely publicly questioned by graduate women. University debates and interviews with former students make abundantly clear that marriage was in itself an avocation and one which graduate women embraced with zest and a total disregard for what would be seen in our generation as careers cast aside. As Phyllis Duguid remembered

> I think in those days you would need to have been extremely keen about your career to have postponed marriage, or put it aside altogether. I think the alternative was pretty clear then; career or marriage. We regarded marriage as a career.[4]

The attitude to bringing up children articulated by Winifred Wall was typical of most graduate women :

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1 Delamont S *Knowledgeable Women* p73
2 Interview with Miss Hope Crampton conducted by writer
3 Interview with Lady Phyllis Cilento (nee McGlew )
4 Interview with Mrs P Duguid

There's still such a lot of things that women have to do and I think there's a place for women... they must do the mothering. I don't care who or what they are. That is their job.... Its a very special thing, I think.[1]

## Women - centredness

As well as the discourse of woman's place, a discourse which pervaded the entire society, university women, both as students and as graduates also had access to the society of other women in groupings which engendered a strong feeling of solidarity. From those groups a discourse of 'woman - centredness' can be discerned. Unlike women in many American, Canadian and British universities, Adelaide undergraduates did not have a women's college until the 1930s. The majority appear to have lived at home or, if from the country, in boarding houses. Nevertheless for a great number the companionship of other, similarly placed women was a vitally important aspect of their education.

Although the university was co - educational, in the period up to the mid 1920s, men and women spent a great deal of their time in the company of their own sex. The earliest women students were delighted to be given a common room where they could gather to cook toast, discuss work and gossip. Elizabeth Jackson wrote of that period and of the beginning of the debating club;

> One's mind goes back to the old meetings in the Common Room, with its disorderly, dusty shelves, the smell of toast, of crumpets, the cocoa, the salmon and parsley source that had formed the jolly, higgledy-piggledy meal... I have seen the team seated, with some attempt at dignity, on a platform formed by two tables, the chairman, clad in scarlet, presiding in their midst with judicial gravity. We debated on "Honours versus a Pass Course", we put the case for Charles against that for Cromwell... And once Adela Pankhurst honoured the Common Room at lunch hour, and the debaters were there, and they argued and remonstrated with Adela, for her logic was not such as passed muster at our Society, be her prestige what it might.[2]

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1 Interview with Dr Winifred Wall A F U W collection
2 Adelaide University Magazine Volume 1 N o 1

Later, in 1917, the women students were given a cottage in the university grounds and there they met for lunches, discussions, meetings and debates. One of their number described them thus:

> Lunch time is the great hour of the day at the Cottage. Sitting out in the sun on two long forms, on fine days, or in winter grouped round the gas stove in the kitchen , we forgot for sixty blissful minutes that lectures and terminals exist. Laws, Arts, Science, Massage (physiotherapy), Training College, all join up into one happy party and laugh and talk 'world without end'. Among our number are Rosalind, the merry; Lady Macbeth, the ambitious; Katherine the shrew; Cordelia, the gentle; Hermione the wronged; Beatrice the witty; Portia the learned; and all the galaxy of modern women from the blue stocking absolute to the modernist of modern flappers.[1]

By 1920 women were admitted to some men's clubs, such as the Arts Association. The Student Christian Movement had always welcomed both male and female members. The Law Society, however, refused to admit women long after women were able to study law. However in the period up to the mid 1920s when the cottage was reluctantly abandoned and a mixed union building, the Lady Symon Building, erected, women enjoyed the company of their own sex as a welcome haven and support. The solidarity engendered in the cottage and in women's friendships extended beyond the university into women's clubs such as the Women Graduates Club, the Lyceum Club and the Women's Non - Party Political Association, later known as the League of Women Voters.

In the university women's clubs women valued and enjoyed each others' company and abilities.They formed friendships which for many lasted throughout life. They also practised useful political skills such as debating, organizing meetings, lobbying and arranging delegations to conferences. Affiliation with larger bodies such as the Australian Federation of University Women and, in 1922, the International Federation of University Women, enabled many members of the Women Graduates Club to travel overseas with other members to conferences where the feminist issues of the day were debated.

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1 Article by Mary Frost in Adelaide University Magazine

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Winifred Wall's recollections illustrate the continuity of a relationship begun at university between two medical women a generation apart.

> I was in medicine and really so busy... Dr Helen Mayo was a close friend of mine - Dr Helen Mayo and Dr Constance Finlayson (with whom Helen Mayo lived). I saw a great deal of them in later years and I was very fond of Helen. I admired her career and I saw them when they were sick and old. Although I wasn't the official medical attendant of either of them, I still saw a great deal of them. I know I gave Dr Mayo several blood transfusions in her home - sticking things up on a broom.[1]

Helen Mayo was a member of the University of Adelaide Council for many years and on her retirement asked Winifred Wall to stand in her place as a woman candidate. Dr Wall subsequently served on the Council for eight years. Helen Mayo, founder of the Women Graduates Club and the Lyceum Club was a pivotal member of the women's networks for several generations. Elizabeth Jackson, writing in 1916, described to her brother a weekend spent with her friend;

> I shall be very sorry when Dr Mayo's interest in me evaporates, as it must. She is the only person whom I meet on equal terms who is at once my superior in knowledge and ability and estimation. To argue with her is not to meet a man (sic) of straw, nor someone who can say little from knowing little. And then she sees a joke so quickly. [2]

Although it is difficult to find direct and quotable evidence on the subject, as older women are often understandably extremely reticent about their private lives, it is abundantly clear that for many the choice was not simply between marriage and career. For those women who chose to live with other women, whether in relationships of companionship, of homo-erotic love or in lesbian relationships as they would be understood today, education and economic independence provided the key. In many instances the girls' schools provided networks for women to find employment for their equally qualified friends, and to live in environments which were female oriented. The environment of

1 Interview with Dr Winifred Wall
2 Papers of Elizabeth Jackson

women's clubs, conferences and the means to share holidays, to purchase holiday retreats, provided for women-identified women, then as now, a life remarkably free of male influence.

My concern here is not to multiply examples of women's friendships and associations but to underline the significance for university educated women of the bonds formed with other women and the existence of enclaves of 'woman - centredness'. Many women married and moved away, both physically and emotionally, from the women's groups of their student days. A surprising number rejoined such clubs as the Women Graduates and the Lyceum Club after the demands of their families lessened.[1] However for those who did not marry the existence of such women - centred groups were crucial. Did they perhaps influence some womens' decision not to marry? Or, conversely, did such groups provide a focus for the social and intellectual life of those who defined their lives outside traditional marriage?

### 'Investment' in remaining single

As Hollway explains, the notion of 'choice' between discourses is not entirely accurate , implying as it does a rational, unitary subject, a concept that neglects the complexity of causes for action, both conscious and unconscious.[2]

To overcome this difficulty Hollway proposes the term 'investment'. She explains:

> By claiming that people have investments (in this case gender specific) in taking up certain positions in discourses, and consequently in relation to each other, I mean that there will be some satisfaction or pay - off or reward (these terms involve the same problems) for that person. The satisfaction may well be

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1 See for instance the interviews with Dr Winifred Wall, Mrs Dorothy West, Mrs Phyllis Duguid, Mrs Aileen Bond in the A F U W collection. Also the diaries of Mrs Annie Welbourn in Mackinnon A *The New Women* p108

2 I have followed here the theoretical structure suggested by Wendy Hollway in her chapter titled "Gender difference and the production of subjectivity" in Henriques et al *Changing the Subject* Ch 5

in contradiction with other resultant feelings. It is not necessarily conscious or rational. [1]

There is, however a reason for the investment and Hollway theorizes it in terms of power and the way in which that power is inserted into individual's subjectivity. Hollway argues that discourses do not mechanically repeat themselves or indeed there would be no way in which change could take place. She argues that "by showing how subjects' investments, as well as the available positions offered by discourses, are socially constituted and constitutive of subjectivity, it is possible to avoid a deterministic analysis of action and change."[2] I have argued that two main sets of discourses were available to early women students and graduates - the first concerning conceptions of themselves as rational intellects, the second concerning their place in the world as women. The latter set contained several strands, including what might be termed traditional womanhood, its corollary, mothering, and, finally, 'woman - centredness' with its potential for solidarity and feminism.

Clearly women did not want to abandon either set of discourses or sources of self - definition. Acknowledgement of themselves as rational beings, as the intellectual equals of men was newly won and fragile, not to be lightly put aside. On the other hand notions of womanhood could not be rejected; they were an essential part of women's identity. What could take place was a choosing of certain aspects of womanhood which were more congruent with the notion of the rational individual. The combination then of an educated individual engaged in meaningful work, perhaps work which aimed to better the lot of women and children, had a compelling attraction to many women. Thus women became part of the construction of the realm of the 'social', of the 'rationalization of the domestic world' described so well by Kerreen Reiger.[3] If that work could be combined with a satisfying emotional and social life in a predominantly woman - centred environment then choosing spinsterhood was a positive resolution of the contradiction between discourses.

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1 Ibid p238
2 Hollway in Henriques et al *Changing the Subject* p237
3 Reiger K *The Disenchantment of the Home*

For some women the self - identity provided by a profession was sufficient reason to remain unmarried. Helen Mayo, working as a young medical graduate in India, recalled being questioned by Indian women about her unmarried state. She replied with amusement, " We don't go in for that we doctors as a rule".[1] For Mayo, as for several other early medical women, the profession was ample self - definition. Mayo's life was women - centred in many ways. She founded and was central to several women's clubs as I have mentioned above . She fostered the talents of other younger women and she enjoyed a long professional and domestic relationship with another medical woman, Constance Finlayson. She specialized in medical work which added to the well - being of mothers and babies. The power gained by remaining unmarried was to be able to work gainfully and effectively in the public sphere, yet to be able to enjoy a fulfilling relationship with another woman.

Hollway believes that people must gain some 'pay - off' or 'reward' by investing in certain positions. For many women, adopting a single lifestyle avoided the conflict between motherhood and career. For others it provided the opportunity to work in the public sphere as a man might do. Yet the latter could not always avoid the difficulties occasioned by the contradiction inherent in the liberal notion of a rational intellectual being. As many have pointed out the rational individual is usually supported in "his" daily activities by a spouse who takes care of the mundane necessities of life. For single women such a support was missing, or in some instances, another women assumed the role of housekeeper.

We do not have evidence from women like the American M. Carey Thomas who made plain that in her generation "marriage and an academic career was impossible ". She, in fact, had the option of an academic career and could make the decision, stating that "I knew myself well enough to realize that I could never give up my life's work".[2] Nevertheless from the 1880s until after the first world war the gaining of a degree provided a small group of women with the option of choosing between marriage and career. A minute and hardy few, such as Laura

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1 Mayo Papers

2 Dobkin M H (ed) *The Making of a Feminist: Early Journals and Letters of M Carey Thomas* Kent State University Press 1979 pxv

Fowler, managed to combine the two, although her situation was never complicated by the presence of children. Her medical degree and its application to missionary service in an exotic land removed her from the conventions of most women's lives.

From the 1920s the situation became more complex as in many Western countries middle - class women began to investigate the possibility of combining paid work with marriage and even motherhood. Once that combination was achieved women would not, theoretically at least, have to choose between marriage and career. It was at that point that the percentage of women graduates who married began to approximate those of the wider population.

### Summary

In this chapter I have examined the lives of the very significant percentage of women graduates who did not marry. I have examined both material and non-material aspects of their lives in an attempt to identify the major shaping variables of their life patterns. My starting point was an examination of work opportunities. It is clear that the majority of single women became school teachers in both state and private schools. A small number taught in the new context of the university, some outside the institution as university coaches, others as part-time and junior members of the academic staff. A handful became doctors, lawyers and musicians, one a psychologist and three or four women worked as secretaries and clerks.

Considerable debate surrounds the situation of women teachers at the turn of the century. Some historians argue that teaching was a vital new career path for women, others that it merely redefined a traditional women's activity in order to fit a changing, bureaucratically - organized world. I believe that both of these positions are valid and can be sustained. For my purposes, the crucial aspect of teaching careers, in the new 'systems ' of education, whether state or corporate, was their settings which differed in many respects from the small family-type institutions of the past. Women were placed within a hierarchical organization which emphasized their individuality rather than their family situation, which judged them on impersonal criteria of skill and merit. For all the

shortcomings of such a system, and there were many, it did provide a well - defined career path with security, for many women, outside the family setting.

I have also argued that women's consciousness of themselves as subjects was undergoing profound transformation. I outlined several discourses or discursive practices available to university women. One significant set of discourses concerned their identity as rational thinking individuals; a second set, containing several strands, focused on their identity as women. One of the most powerful strands was that of the domestic ideology, the identification of self with wifehood and motherhood. For many women this could only be reconciled with the notion of themselves as rational and active in the world through a radical redefinition of their lives within the family. Until that redefinition was in place, for many women remaining single continued to be their best option for self - development. Furthermore, another strand within the discourse of womanhood, that of woman - centredness and female solidarity provided a milieu of social and emotional support, seldom before found outside the family or religious settings, for women who chose a life away from the confines of heterosexuality.

Viewed from this perspective,'voluntary spinsterhood' makes a great deal of sense. It enabled women to step outside the structures of patriarchy until the structures changed, a process to which they frequently applied themselves, or until a more insidious, 'scientific' ideology rendered that spinsterhood suspect.

# Chapter 6  Awakening Women

> But the widely - opened eyes of awakened women are fixed upon men who sit in the places of authority.   Mrs J Booth  c 1915 [1]

The theme of the 'awakened woman' provided an important strand in the thinking of several Adelaide women. In 1895, in her pamphlet of that title, Lillian Mead had argued for the necessity of women's higher education on the grounds of their equal but different abilities.[2] No one, she argued, could decide what is a woman's place. Nevertheless, she believed that the awakened woman would choose the home and the world, in that order, for woman's special endowments were her capacities to inspire and purify, to mother, to comfort and to beautify - in effect the entire galaxy of domestic virtues.

Twenty years later, Mrs J Booth also wrote a pamphlet titled *The Necessity of Woman Awakening*.[3] The emphasis in her argument had shifted. Although she still saw women as having an important role as mothers she claimed that it was irrational to look upon a woman only in her capacity for motherhood. The fact that a woman was a potential mother was no reason why her "every faculty, every function" should not be trained to its best. She deplored the lack of opportunity for worthwhile work which led to the development of the "parasitic woman".

The writer was well aware of the demographic changes taking place claiming that:

> In these days of the limitation of the family - even where it is not approved it is practised - a woman's whole life cannot be fully employed in the care of two or three children.

Finally, she argued in the words which opened this chapter, that the widely - opened eyes of awakened women were fixed upon men who sat

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1 Booth J *The Necessity of Women Awakening* Pritchard Brothers Adelaide c 1914 p15

2 Mead L *The Awakened Woman* Hussey and Gillingham 1895. Mead's work is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

3 Booth J *The Necessity of Woman Awakening* . I have not been able to establish any details of Mrs Booth's life so I cannot determine if she was a graduate.

in the places of authority. Women were asking themselves if "with all their inexperience they could do worse, and might they not with a portion of the training men have had, do better?"

In another pamphlet Booth argued for equal payment for women's work, for the right of married women to work outside the home and the right of educated women to refuse to marry.[1] Quite clearly her notion of the awakened woman went a great deal further than Mead's. This escalation of demands and expectations in a period of about twenty years embodies many of the themes in this study and provides an entry point for an evaluation of the place of women's higher education in the social transformation taking place in the period. In the following pages I will draw together the various themes which have informed this study: the demographic changes, changes in women's work, the redefinition of the middle class and the question of the timing of the beginnings of higher education in the West.

**A Demographic Vanguard**

Without doubt the period 1880 - 1920 witnessed a major decline in the birthrate, a decline which was clearly manifest in the lives of women graduates of the University of Adelaide. What remains to be established is the centrality of women's part in that decline. As I demonstrated in chapter 4, women graduates either remained single, married and remained childless or married and bore, on average, one child less than might have been expected of their contemporaries. As a group their issue, to use the demographers' term, was considerably lower than a comparable group in the wider community. They were, in effect, a demographic vanguard.

There are several questions to be pursued here: we need to know why some women remained single, why others married and remained childless and finally, why married women bore less children. And, overall, we need to consider the significance of these facts. Did individual women exercise a new influence , a new sense of control over their lives? Some answers can be found by a study of the women's biographical details

1 Booth J *The Payment of Women's Work* c1915 - 16

but a complete answer is not possible without some discussion of wider changes which affected the whole society.

Both Folbre and Seccombe suggest that one fruitful avenue for exploration would be to examine any changes in bargaining power between men and women at this time.[1] Whereas demographers have tended to assume a mutuality of interest between men and women, feminist explanations distinguish between the experience of men and women and ask how social changes affect them differentially. Folbre argues that the transition to capitalism was a crucial turning point as it diminished patriarchal control over adult children, therefore reducing the economic benefits of large families. This contributed to a decline in desired family size which weakened resistance to women's demands for control over their own reproduction and modified the traditional sexual division of labour.[2] Seccombe has suggested that the declining birth rate in British working class families in the late nineteenth century was due to married women's conscious decisions to curtail fertility.

One of my major tasks in this study has been to establish if higher education for women was a significant factor in the fertility decline. If it can be demonstrated that it was, then, I believe, some of the main explanations for the demographic transition can be shown to be inadequate. In a recent study Pat Quiggin addressed a similar question. She asked if, in the Australian colonies, women initiated the nineteenth century decline in fertility.[3] Although her focus is different, ( she is not concerned with university-educated women) and her study mainly deals with Victoria and New South Wales, the questions she raises are directly comparable to those of this work.

Quiggin argued that in order to demonstrate that women had the initiative in fertility control one must prove one of two propositions. Either women used methods of birth control without their husbands' knowledge or cooperation, or if such methods as coitus interruptus,

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1 Folbre N "Of Patriarchy Born: The Political Economy of Fertility Decisions" in *Feminist Studies* 9, No 2 Summer 1983
Seccombe W "Starting to Stop: Working -Class Fertility Decline in Britain" in *Past and Present*

2 Folbre p 261ff

3 Quiggin P *No Rising Generation : Women and Fertility in Late Nineteenth Century Australia* p2

periodic abstinence or condoms, were employed men must have wished for fertility control or women must have been able to influence their husbands in a manner not seen previously.[1]

I argued in Chapter 4 that university educated women were unlikely to use artificial methods of birth control and that coitus interruptus and abstinence were most likely the methods used before the 1920s. Quiggin claims for the late nineteenth century, using evidence from the N S W Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birth- Rate, that coitus interruptus, supplemented by abortion was the principal method of fertility control.[2] On these grounds it seems reasonable to accept that women needed the cooperation of their husbands in order to practice fertility control.

It remains then to determine if men themselves desired smaller families, if women exerted a new influence or if some combination of the two led to the phenomenon of the fertility decline. As I pointed out in Chapter 4, most explanations of fertility decline assume a harmony of interest between men and women, and assume that fertility decisions were made by couples. Hence they argue that factors such as modernization led to a different family structure with differing labour needs, or with a differing relationship with the labour force mediated by education. There is certainly evidence in South Australia to support the changing nature of the mode of production and of the increasing role education came to play in many families in the period to 1930.

I wish to argue that higher education did increase women's bargaining power in quite significant ways but before I do so some further exploration of the changes taking place in the class structure of Western societies is necessary. In particular I wish to focus on the middle class, particularly on that stratum which became highly visible at the end of the nineteenth century, the professional - managerial group which several commentators have labelled the new class.

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1 Ibid p 105
2 Ibid p111

**Changing Class Relations**

Davidoff and Hall, in *Family Fortunes,* ably demonstrated the way in which the middle class family plays an active part in the internal organization of the class. In particular, they argue, the work of women in the family has been central and important in organizing and reorganizing the internal structure of that class, enabling it to maintain its dominance.[1] Women manage "the social construction of the class transgenerationally", in Dorothy Smith's words.[2] The tension which lies at the heart of middle class thinking between a belief in a free market economy and a commitment to the importance of maintaining ties of belonging to the social order is a tension managed by women, whose role it is to maintain those ties.

In an important extension of Davidoff and Hall's thesis of the centrality of the family to class transformation and maintenance, Smith outlines the changing role of women within the family as the corporate forms of ownership and economic agency "increasingly separate the spheres of economic relations of the family and household unit."[3] Her argument is an important one and I will outline it in some detail. In particular she traces the progressive transposition of economic functions from individual enterprises locally organized to corporate forms of organization at a national and international level, the movement which created the salaried middle class.[4]

As the dominant classes are progressively detached from particular localities and regions, Smith continues, the organization of class changes, its internal relations are modified. Household and family are increasingly tied to the individual man's career and less to an interlinking of family relations and enterprises. Further "as the professional, government and corporate apparatus becomes consolidated as a ruling apparatus," Smith believes that forms of action in words and symbols become a "fully

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1 Davidoff L and Hall C *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780 - 1850*

2 Burstyn V and Smith DE *Women, Class, Family and the State* Garamond Press 1985 p22

3 Ibid p 12 ff

4 Ibid p15 ff

differentiated form". Language becomes central as a mode of action.[1] There are links here with Gouldner's notion of 'the culture of critical discourse' which I discussed in the last chapter.

In relation to these changes the home then becomes an essential unit in organizing the "abstracted modes of ruling" in the local and particular context. In order for this to happen, Smith contends, the home is subordinated to the educational system. This change has crucial implications for mothering.

> The work of mothering in relation to the work of the school becomes an essential mediating process in the production and reproduction of class relations among the bourgeoisie and the working class.[2]

In contrast to an earlier period where sons were groomed to take their place in carrying on family enterprises and political alliances and daughters to consolidate alliances which linked together economic and social relations with kin networks, children now become "the object of parental work, particularly the work of mothers". Smith sees that work as:

> aimed at creating a definite kind of person, with distinct communicative skills in speech and writing and with capacities to take advantage of an educational process through which boys will have access to career - structured occupations and girls will have access to men with career - structured occupations.[3]

A further step in Smith's argument elaborates the new type of persons necessary to fill positions in the new "ruling apparatus". Following Weber's analysis of the bureaucratic type of authority, she sees such positions as separable from particular individuals. Access to positions is no longer clearly differentiated on sex lines but calls for technical knowledge and qualifications. The mode of thinking required is that of technical rationality. From this perspective barriers to women's entry to such positions are weakened. However, in response to this weakening, Smith argues that the barriers are "artificially and actively

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1 Ibid p16
2 Ibid
3 Ibid p17

reinforced" and that ideological forms come to shape the organization of middle class women's work.[1]

Smith's argument is compelling and suggests fruitful lines of explanation for the analyst of women's higher education. It is consistent with the arguments of others, such as Stern, who have delineated the rise of the professional - managerial class and its attachment to education to ensure transgenerational class maintenance.[2] However it goes much further in that it renders women and women's work central to the process of class formation and change. It is also consistent with Gouldner's contention that the new class is highly dependent on education and that education brings about a distancing from localistic values.[3]

Arguing along similar lines, Kerreen Reiger has demonstrated the relationship between the rise of the professional-managerial class and the tendency to apply the ideology of technical rationality to the home.[4] In common with Smith and with Davidoff and Hall, she has demonstrated that any notion of separate spheres, of separate domains of activity in the home and the world 'outside' are merely illusory. The home, and women's lives, are saturated with the values of the dominant economic mode. This in effect implies that the same principles of means-end relationships, calculation and rational control, essential features of commercial and industrial activity, were increasingly applied to the home. Such an application, Reiger contends, has deeply contradictory outcomes for women. On the one hand woman's domain, the home, was 'invaded' by an army of experts who shaped the demands of mothering and housekeeping in accordance with the needs of a modern society: on the other the link between women's work as eternally 'natural' was irrevocably broken, with enormous significance for women.

The usefulness of these arguments in the South Australian context depends on the degree to which the changes described can be observed in the specific situation.

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1 Ibid p22

2 Stern M *Society and Family Strategy : Erie County, New York 1850 -1920* See my discussion of Stern's work in chap 1 and chap 3.

3 Gouldner A *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of The New Class*

4 Reiger K *The Disenchantment of the Home*

South Australia, in the period 1880 - 1920, was in a transitional phase. As I argued earlier, class transformation was taking place and a significant professional - managerial stratum can be observed.[1] Furthermore this was the group which, on the whole, was availing itself of state - provided education, whether at the university or at the Advanced School for Girls and the new high schools of the second decade of the twentieth - century. Yet that process was far from complete, and small local industries continued to be established and to flourish. Large rural holdings continued to play a part in the economy and landholders exerted considerable power in both political and social settings. Thus the older forms of family 'work', in the sense that term is used by Davidoff and Hall and by Smith , continued to flourish. Sons followed their fathers on to the land, regardless of their educational achievements and daughters were 'presented' at Government House and society parties in the hope of contracting the right alliances in the' best circles'.

Some families demonstrated aspects of both 'old entrepreneurial' and 'new professional' behaviour. Laura Fowler, for instance, the first woman medical graduate, came from a family of wholesale grocers whose enterprises flourished and gained international links during the years of Laura's girlhood. D & J Fowler's was a family business and Laura's brothers were expected to follow their father into the business and to carry it on. The children were sent overseas for the latter part of their education and mixed in 'good' circles. Business and family matters were so intertwined that Laura's sixty year correspondence with her brother James is contained in the records of the family business.

Laura's father, George Swan Fowler, settled on Laura on the occasion of her marriage, the money a wealthy businessman might have expected to give a daughter, in spite of the fact that Laura had qualified in medicine and intended to practice that profession, at least in the short term. His hopes for the style in which his daughter and her future husband, Doctor Charles Hope, would lead their lives is nicely expressed in the following letter:

> My own loving Laura... I made it a condition of the engagement that Charles should settle upon you and your children (if any) £5000 and I would do likewise

1 See discussion in Chapter 2

understanding that he had at least that amount coming to him under his father's will, this I have never had the chance of corroborating. *If this is all clear* , Mrs H. is ready to help in the initial start in a suitable home in a good situation, say, in North Terrace for as a matter of policy I believe in a good bold starting and not beginning 'very humbly' as you suggest. I wish the marriage to be deferred in any case until my return which I will accelerate... I want to see you comfortably settled and in a fair way to earn enough to be perfectly independent of everybody... If the preliminaries are satisfactorily fixed up I have no doubt but that after marriage you would be able to get into a joint practice and income and I would assist in securing a good site and building on North Terrace.[1]

I have reproduced this letter in some length as it raises several interesting points. A benevolent and caring father in South Australia, in 1893, ten years after the passing of the Married Women's Property Act, could ensure some economic independence for a daughter. A wife could own and conduct her property in her own name, although clearly she was dependent on the goodwill of her father to make such a settlement. In this instance ruling class economic relations could be maintained irrespective of Laura's education. Two wealthy South Australian families, the Fowlers and the Hopes, made provision for their children to maintain a style of living which their parents thought suitable for their place in the social structure.[2]

In fact, as independent medical missionaries in Bengal and India, the Hopes relied very heavily on Laura's money. Their profession did not, in those circumstances, allow them to earn sufficient income to support themselves in even a frugal existence and certainly would not have made possible the extensive travel the couple undertook. The situation of Laura and Charles Hope illustrates very clearly the difficulty of differentiating between an entrepreneurial set of family relations and practices and a professional set. As ideal types they are useful but in the transitional period and beyond, the uses made by individual students of the

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1 Letter from George Fowler to Laura Fowler 17 February 1893 George Fowler's Letterbook Fowler Papers P R G 34 M L S A

2 Charles Hope, a distinguished medical graduate of Adelaide University, was the son of a wealthy landed family. In spite of his academic brilliance relatives recall that he was so painfully shy that he had great difficulty in building up a practice in North Adelaide. Interviews with relations of Laura and Charles Hope, conducted by reseacher in 1984.

education system, both secondary and tertiary, remain saturated with social class factors.

Not only were members of the 'old' middle class availing themselves of opportunities to join the professions, but petit bourgeois and skilled workers' families also provided candidates for the education which would lead to membership of the new class. Anna Martin, daughter of a Brompton pottery worker, whose story is told earlier, became a secondary schoolteacher through dint of hard work and judicious use of the state school system, a course which was also taken by many men. Thus the professional- managerial group must be seen as containing both sections of the old entrepreneurial middle class and aspiring members of the petit bourgeoisie and the skilled working class. The lifestyles of these groups would, no doubt, have been significantly different.

Nevertheless, with that qualification made, I believe that Smith's argument in relation to the changing nature of the work done by mothers, and Reiger's account of changes within the middle class family, are entirely pertinent to South Australia in this period. With the decline of craft - based production and the decreasing viability of small family operations, many farmers and others turned to white - collar jobs, which required at least some education. From 1875 to 1920 elementary schooling became compulsory and post elementary schooling became increasingly necessary for the professional class as a means to entry to positions in the growing state public service.

During this time the ideology of 'scientific femininity' became dominant, proclaiming women's crucial function as saviours of the race, as preservers of the morality and efficiency of the coming generations. Mothering acquired almost religious overtones and schools expected mothers to prepare their children for learning in ways which significantly affected the family economy. Babies were to be scientifically observed, weighed and measured and the household routine to be rationalized to ensure new standards of hygiene were met. Children were to attend school regularly and to have suitable clothes and footware. Middle class mothers were to ensure children had been suitably provided with reading materials, with a love of books and with a home education which

provided basic communicative skills. An Education Department directive of 1912 asserted that:

> No woman is properly trained for life unless she is properly trained to do, to know, to think and to feel those things which are part and parcel of right motherhood, right mothering of children, and right carrying out of the domestic side of life.[1]

In Smith's terms, children became the objects of parental work, particularly of mothers, aimed at creating a definite type of person. Smith views that work of mothers as a process of "constructing a social relational basis of a class ... on the basis of modes of identifying persons in terms of performance in social occasions, knowing how to behave, how to dress, how to appear and therefore upon behaviours that can be learned even though access to opportunities of learning may be restricted."[2] This behaviour, common among the ruling class, now became imperative for a wider group.

Interestingly, some of this class function of 'mothering', previously the work of ladies' academies, was also extended to the work of women teachers in the new state schools. Caroline Sells was a teacher at the Advanced School for Girls and later, at Adelaide High School. A former student remembers her for the way in which she taught the country girls "how to be ladies", encouraging them in some of the finer points of deportment and poise.

One or two brief exerpts from accounts of early graduates' lives give some indication of the changing nature of middle class mothers' work. Ida Kearney, nee Dorsch, daughter of Agnes Dorsch, nee Heyne, the second arts graduate of the university of Adelaide, reflected on her mothering role and that of her own mother. Agnes Dorsch was in effect the breadwinner for her family of eight children and two step - children as her clergyman husband suffered a lengthy illness. She taught at both Tormore House school and later at Presbyterian Girl's College as well as coaching private pupils in the evening. Ida Kearney remembers that:

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1 *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* ( S A P P ) 1912 No 44 p21
2 Smith *Women, Class, Family and the State* p22

> We saw very little of her, although she saw to it we always had the right books to read, like books on classical mythology. But she did not have the time to read them to us. I couldn't read to my children either. I get very sad when I hear my daughter reading to her children...
>
> She wanted to have children and she got great pleasure out of having children. She fed them, but she didn't have time to look after them, didn't have **the normal motherly contact.** She had no time to join clubs or associations, but was proud to have coached the children of five Governors including the grandchildren of Alfred Lord Tennyson. [1]

Ida Kearney's reminiscences are clearly a reflection of her own, 'psychologized' views of what constituted 'normal motherly contact', obviously an activity that included being widely available to one's children, providing them with the appropriate books, in this case books which provide access to the dominant culture, and reading to the children. This may well have become the desired mode of motherly activity in the period in which Ida Kearney was raising her children, in the 1920s and 30s. It had not necessarily become so rigidly constructed in the time of her own mother's child rearing ( around the turn of the century). Agnes Dorsch was in many respects a new type, a brilliant woman scholar, for whom contemporary society had no place. We do not know if she regretted her lack of time with her children or if she enjoyed the opportunity to use her degree in several teaching contexts, for which she was widely acclaimed.

The diaries and baby books of Annie Rita Welbourn, nee Ellis, an honours science graduate of 1905, offer many insights into the world of 'scientific' middle class mothering from the time of the birth of her first son in 1914 to her reflections on a 'modern grandmother' in 1941.[2] The young mother kept a baby book for each child in which she meticulously recounted each step of her child's progress. She wrote for example, of Roger, her second son:

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1 Interview with Mrs Ida Kearney, 1985 (my emphasis)

2 For a fuller account of Annie Rita Welbourn's life see Mackinnon *The New Women* pp 96 -114

> The third month marks a distinct period. It has been marked by distinct signs of teething: greater activity ( baby has twice sat up, propped with pillows) waking during the night for food (so far he has slept through the night not waking even once) exuberant delight in his bath, and discovering of his hands.[1]

Later, when Roger was approaching secondary school age, his mother wrote that he was sitting for intelligence tests for entrance to St Peter's College:

> So long as he is accepted I mind not how low in the school he starts. I do hope that his father and I shall be able to manage a complete college education for both boys; but sometimes I wonder, as life is so increasingly difficult, and we have sacrificed all amusements, and luxuries, however small, for ourselves.[2]

Many entries make abundantly clear the ambitions of a middle class couple, ( Will Welbourn was a bank employee), to obtain the best possible education for their sons and their daughters, as this would be the way they would make their way in the world. To this couple, the best education implied private schooling and both parents were prepared to sacrifice their own personal pleasures for that end. The diaries and babybooks also illustrate the work of a mother in this situation. Not only did Rita Welbourn cook, clean, mend and care for sick family members in a time - honoured fashion, but she was intensely interested in each child's individual development and progress in school. She 'invested' much psychological work in each, wanting "each child to be something worthwhile, to make some definite impression on the part of the world in which he finds himself, (sic) whether it be in achievement, or merely by fine character". They were not , she hoped, to be satisfied with being merely one of a " colourless crowd".[3]

There is much evidence in the South Australian context to support Smith's analysis, outlined above, and Reiger's contention that technical rationality was gradually imported into the home. Amongst the professional and 'new' business stratum, education was a much desired means of access to class position for children and mothers' work

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1 Welbourn family papers. Baby book of Roger Welbourn in possession of Mrs D Shepherd, Adelaide

2 Ibid I have quoted further examples from the Welbourn papers in chap 4

3 Rita Welbourn's diary 1937

increasingly came to include much psychological work in order to produce the desired individuals who would interact effectively with the school system. This was a crucial aspect of 'scientific motherhood'. Well educated mothers such as Rita Welbourn were extremely sensitive to the demands placed upon them, particularly where the financial situation of the family precluded any privileged access to the dominant class. Yet, crucially, the development of scientific motherhood was shaped in many ways by some of the early graduates themselves, a point I will return to later.

Having discussed the social class transformation evident in South Australia, and its implications for the work of women as part of class maintenance, I now return to the discussion of demographic change.

**Demographic Change**

University women's refusal to marry at the rate of their less educated contemporaries can be attributed to an appreciation on their part of the changes described above and an awareness of the nature of the alternatives available. I do not wish to overstate the nature of the refusal. Obviously the greater prevalence of illness, particularly of tuberculosis, in that period, meant that a few women did not live long enough to contemplate matrimony.[1] In spite of McDonald's statistical evidence to the contrary, (see chapter 4) a few others did not marry as their potential spouses were lost in the first world war. These qualifications aside, the group who did not marry is still significant enough to warrant explanation.

I argued in the last chapter that there was a change in university women's consciousness, that many became aware of alternatives that previously had been less attractive or unavailable. Further they gained a new confidence in their ability to determine their future both within and outside marriage. But for those who married, was the experience any different in the period? Contemporary literature can offer insights into

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1 In one case the illness of a fiance with tuberculosis meant the end of marriage plans for a graduate. She then taught for several years, travelled to Canada and enjoyed a three year teaching stint at a Canadian university, returning to find her erstwhile fiancé cured. They married at a considerably later age than would probably have been the case if the man had been in good health and had no children, probably as a consequence of the late marriage. Interview with Mrs J Leslie, nee Sharman, A F U W collection.

the way in which women viewed certain institutions. Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* is an interesting example of a 'modern' set of attitudes to marriage for a late nineteenth century woman. Martin, a South Australian writer, was not a university graduate but had obtained an excellent classical education when she wrote the book in 1890, a book dismissed by one critic as "a bluestocking romance". [1]

Martin's heroine, Stella, has considerable doubts about marriage, "the most foolish, faulty old institution going", and the author misses no opportunity to satirize those who marry for money or for social position. Noting women's economic dependence she claims:

> But we sometimes forget that the freedom of choice in marriage, which is permitted to women of the Anglo - Saxon race, has the effect of making some of them regard the institution on cool business principles. It is an 'arrangement' made by themselves, instead of by mothers, as in France. Indeed, no French mother could go to work in a more disenchanted way in this respect than a certain type of Australian girl.[2]

This was one of the major aspects of marriage which women rejected, the need to marry for security. Martin's sentiments are in accord with the young Canadian woman, one of the first in her country to become a doctor, who confessed to her diary, " I am preparing myself for independence to be able to marry for love and not for mercenary motives."[3] Rejection of marriage for many was not necessarily an outright rejection of the institution but of the demeaning need to acquire a 'meal ticket' at all costs. This was one of the most important arguments used in the 1860s and 70s by the English women's movement to gain entrance to higher education and to a significant extent it was successful. Emily Davies, foremost campaigner for women's higher education in England, had argued:

> Half the misery of life to women is caused by their having no specific end to follow... and the other half caused by making marriage an end in itself to be

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1 Martin C *An Australian Girl* Pandora Press 1988, first published in London 1890. Introduction pvii

2 Ibid p 183 - 184

3 Strong - Boag V (ed) *A Woman with a Purpose: The Diaries of Elizabeth Smith 1872 - 1884* University of Toronto Press 1980

pursued professionally for its consequences if it cannot be gained by the natural path of falling in love.[1]

Like Davies and her fellow campaigners, Martin did not endorse the Victorian ideal of womanliness, embodied in the character of Stella's sister in-law:

> If anyone sang or played, Dora always begged for one more song or a little more music... When anyone spoke, she always listened with the most reverential attention. When Cuthbert spoke, she would often murmur one of his sentences over to herself, as if better to impress it on her memory. She was, in fact, what is known in England as a very sweet girl. In Australia, unfortunately, the species is so rare that no specific name has had to be invented.[2]

Martin's Stella has much in common with the girls described by an American visitor twenty years later. Jessie Ackerman, self - styled colonial evangelist, campaigner for temperance and for women's rights, described young Australian women as free, independent and unconventional, as "next of kin" to American girls.[3] Her book also contains some interesting observations of married life in Australia. She reflected that Australian women and girls had changed a great deal since her previous visit twenty years before.[4] They had become more independent. They no longer needed to consult their husbands before agreeing to take office in the temperance society.

However, Ackerman decried the Australian woman's tendency to 'manage' her husband. This , she explained, occurred because women had more views and opinions than before and to avoid open conflict with their husbands, who viewed themselves as heads of the household, they resorted to the practice of 'management', an apparent mixture of flattery and deception, to achieve their ends. Ackerman found this practice demeaning and out of keeping with Australia's boast of being a country

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1 Davies E *The Higher Education of Women ( 1866 ) A Classic Argument for the Equal Education of Women* republished by The Hambledon Press 1988 pxxxvii

2 Martin *An Australian Girl* p ix

3 Ackerman J *Australia from a Woman's Point of View* Cassell Australia 1981, first published 1913 p 207

4 Ackerman visited Australia four times as an organizer for the W C T U between the early 1890s and 1911.

with equality of the sexes. While scarcely representing a greater bargaining power for women, such 'management' does point to a determination by women to achieve their ends.

She endorsed the view that Australian women were "royal" mothers, commenting particularly on the importance of the "Children's Hour", that sacrosanct hour before bedtime when the children were read to and the day's "sins" were discussed, forgiveness sought and prayers said together.[1] This observation lends credence to the concern of women like Ida Kearney, who regretted being unable to take part in the ritual. Ackerman also noticed the considerable decline in the birth-rate and was at pains to reject explanations which focussed on women's selfishness and shrinking from the responsibilities of motherhood. These explanations had often figured largely in the minds of many witnesses and commissioners into the decline of the birth-rate, as I noted in Chapter 4.

The American visitor differed in her observations. She noticed that the decrease in the birth-rate "prevails chiefly in the families of the high middle-class - among women of culture and refinement." These women were acutely aware of the magnitude of responsibility of rearing a family in the prevailing social conditions. They realized that a considerable investment in education was essential for both sexes. " Girls, as well as young men," Ackerman stated, "are less and less inclined to marry, but are generally disposed towards business pursuits, for which they must be trained."[2]

Ackerman painted a grim picture of the consequences of attempting to raise and educate several children until they were "properly launched in life." She described increasing sacrifice on the part of the mother, who would reach the point of giving up all extras for herself, of doing without help and of reaching a point of nervous prostration. The truth of her observation is apparent in a despairing item in the diary of Rita Welbourn, written after many years of hard work and much family illness, the brunt of which had fallen on her willing head. She wrote:

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1 Ackerman p86
2 Ibid

> I am about to record today, what I have been tempted to write of , many times before - namely the utter loneliness and unhappiness of my life... After all the long years of hard work and service (which I would as willingly give again under similar conditions) and self sacrifice, the fact remains that I have no leisure, even after serious illness and the advent of the miseries of middle age, no money (having used very largely from the small amount left for my own use in old age by my parents, using it to pay doctors and hospitals and to clothe the children and myself) and no companionship in the home.[1]

Ackerman made use of one of the major arguments available to women in the first decades of this century in her explanation for the decline in the birth-rate. Claiming that women in Australia had an advanced knowledge of scientific motherhood, she used eugenic reasoning to conclude that women had decided, in the interests of the future race to rear three or four "physically sound and mentally fit citizens".

Therefore, she concluded, women were beginning to see that there was one sacred right which they as life-givers must demand. That right was "to decide when they are mentally, spiritually and physically able to take on the conditions of motherhood, and carry them out to the highest betterment of the human family". "No railing or wailing, no groans or moans, or abuse," Ackermen contended, would change Australian women's determination to safeguard the future of the human race.[2]

The instances I have mentioned above, from Catherine Martin's novel, from Jessie Ackerman's acute observations and from women graduates' experience, all point to factors which led to an increase in women's bargaining power in relation to marriage and motherhood. A more sceptical attitude towards the choosing of marriage partners, a determination to marry only for love and not for security, and the possibility of worthwhile alternatives provide sufficient explanation for the lower marriage rates of university-educated women. The cool appraisal of Martin's heroine, the disenchantment, implies a critical approach on the part of many young women. They did not necessarily

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1 Rita Welbourn's diary 1936
2 Ackerman *Australia from a Woman's Point of View* pp98 - 99

reject marriage *per se* ; they were prepared to wait for a form of marriage which met their needs and, often, high ideals.

A further level of possible negotiation is suggested by Ackerman's observations on the decreasing birth-rate. Several factors coalesced to lead highly educated women to consider limiting their fertility. The expense of educating children in keeping with the expectations of middle class society increased steeply, emphasis on ensuring the future of the race focussed on a higher level of child care and an increase in the 'work' of mothers in terms of psychological investment as well as physical work and, relatedly, the notion of scientific motherhood presented women with an opportunity of valuing themselves more highly.

As Reiger points out, middle-class mothers adopted the tenets of rational motherhood and housekeeping with zeal. Not only did it give them, as educated women, rational arguments on which to base their needs, including the desire for fertility control, but it provided for them a new range of careers in which they could shape the lives of other women, both middle and working class.[1]

Such factors bring us back to the position argued by Folbre, who insists that we should examine the nature of changes in relative power between marriage partners if we are to provide sufficient explanations for the demographic transition and, in particular, for fertility decline. The re-evaluation of the role of children in many middle class families must have led to discussions between spouses about their ability to meet the demands of childrens' education at the very least. Evidence on discussions of such issues as family limitation is scarce but the willingness of university women to discuss and debate such issues as the need for control of certain family types means that they were no strangers to the issues and could probably hold similar discussions with their spouses.

The issue of language is important here, a point made by both Smith and Gouldner. Families, children were not always treated as eternal verities but as topics for discussion, for serious reflection and for possible change. As Gouldner has argued authority was no longer sufficient, a social practice required justification, could be put 'into discourse.' As

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1 Reiger *The Disenchantment of the Home*

Phyllis Lade's mother said to her daughter about sex education, " Now you girls are fortunate. You can read. You had the words. We hadn't."[1]

Modern research emphasises the importance of communication between a husband and wife if a decision is to be made to use contraception.[2] As Quiggin points out, the wife's ability to participate in any such discussion implies that she is regarded as a person of some standing, if not an equal, by her husband.[3]

University women were not only the beneficiaries, or in some instances the sufferers, of the changing attitudes I have described. They were frequently active in the process of shaping the new ideas of ideal marriage and scientific motherhood. And, at an important level, the first generation of graduates provided many role models of independent women, happily engaged in fulfilling work and a satisfying social life outside the bonds of marriage.

**Graduates as agents of change**

I have already discussed in some detail the writing of one early medical graduate, Rosamond Benham, MB BS (1902), who directly challenged several of the patriarchal aspects of marriage, claiming for women greater control of sexual relations and of physical pleasure.[4] Benham's work went to the very core of the institution of marriage, challenging contemporary beliefs about women's sexuality and exploring a feminist model of an ideal marriage. Benham also wrote passionate love poetry, some of which was published in the *Bulletin* under the pen name Lalage.

One of the major themes of her poetry and of her book *Sense about Sex, by a Woman Doctor* , was that woman was a passionate sexual being, whose sexual response must be sought by her husband if a happy marriage

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1 Interview with Mrs Phyllis Duguid, A F U W collection

2 Hollerbach P E "Power in Families, Communication and Fertility Decision-making " in *Working Paper No 53* Centre for Policy Studies, The Population Council, New York 1980, quoted in Quiggin *No Rising Generation*

3 Quiggin *No Rising Generation* p5

4 See Chapter 4

was desired. Her exposition of this idea placed a considerable responsibility on a wife to educate her husband as to her needs and rights:

> The wife must make her husband understand that her body and soul are not handed over to his keeping because she has signed a certificate with him. She must realize and make him realize that for the healthy satisfaction of his sexual appetite her own responsiveness is absolutely necessary, and that to secure this he must put her feelings first right through their life together. He will have unspeakably greater satisfaction and comfort himself in this way, even though the number of occasions on which his passion is fully exercised be much fewer than would otherwise be the case. He will further ensure to himself the lasting love and responsiveness of his wife, instead of, as is the rule, finding that he has worn out her capacity for passion in a year or less, and has henceforth to be content with the passive, though unprotesting, yielding up of a weary, satiated victim.[1]

This constituted a direct blow to the notion of conjugal rights and placed the husband in a situation where his self-restraint was an essential part of the bargain. He was to put his wife's feelings first. Benham thus challenged an important Victorian idea, that of ungovernable male passion, a force seeking release, substituting for it a more equal, negotiated form of sexuality between wife and husband. She deplored the idea of a man's right to his wife's body, claiming that rape was commoner in marriage than outside it.

She also cleverly used another Victorian belief, that of 'vitalist physiology', to limit the number of times couples would engage in full intercourse, providing, in effect, for limitation of fertility. Adherents to the notion of vitalist physiology thought that the body had a limited amount of energy and that, once used, it was gone for ever. The educated class in particular felt that excessive indulgence in sex could drain the resources away from the brain.

As I noted in Chapter 4, in the supplement to her book, titled *Circumvention*, Benham advocated the practice of long periods of sexual union without ejaculation. This practice thus offered men and women

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1 Taylor R A *Sense About Sex, by a Woman Doctor* Adelaide 1905 p ( Benham wrote under her married name)

sexual pleasure divorced from procreation, and requiring male control. Benham believed that intense and prolonged coition would provide the circumstance for the development of the "magnetic and spiritual sides of married love, thus aiding the natural upward growth of our manifold being". Others were not convinced of its spiritual nature. Fred Binns, an Adelaide publisher printed an outraged response to Benham's work, pointing out his abhorrence at the idea that we ought to "toy" with each other simply "because there is pleasure in making ready to plant the seed".[1]

Benham shared many of the beliefs of her contemporaries, including the idea that a small number of "wanted" children, well nurtured and loved were better for the future of the race than many children born to a worn and overworked drudge of a mother. She was as much a believer in the dominant population ideology, the belief that a large, healthy and 'racially pure' population was essential to moral and economic progress, as were many of her class.[2] Such a notion provided a rationalization for the higher education of women, who would become better 'mothers of the race'. Equally importantly it provided an acceptable underpinning for the limitation of fertility and a consequent enhancement of women's value within marriage.

It is hard to gain a true impression of the effectiveness of works such as Benham's. Admittedly she came from a fairly radical sub-culture and, as I noted earlier, her husband was prosecuted for disseminating her work, well ahead of contemporary social values, in Melbourne.[3] Nevertheless, she used her education and her status as a doctor to put forward important demands for women, to marshall the arguments of the day and support them with 'scientific' claims, giving other women the words and the will to make demands of their own within their marital relationships. She 'named' such previously unmentionable issues such as women's right to the acknowledgement of her sexual response. Realizing

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1 Binns F *The Religion of Common Sense* Adelaide n. d. p3 For a more detailed treatment of Rosamond Benham, her milieu and her ideas see Mackinnon A and Bacchi C "Sex, Resistance and Power: Sex Reform in South Australia, c 1905" in *Australian Historical Studies*

2 For a discussion of "population ideology" see Matthews J *Good and Mad Women:The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia.* George, Allen and Unwin 1984 chap 5

3 *Free Speech* Vol 1 June 1906

that for most women economic vulnerability meant the likelihood of marriage , she argued strongly for a reformed version of marriage , which would be to women's advantage. Her arguments, and that of her mother Agnes Benham, were similar to those espoused by women members of a radical group in England, The Men and Women's Club, described by Lucy Bland.[1]

While Benham manipulated the current ideology to challenge the heartland of Victorian marriage, another medical graduate challenged the notion that knowledge about motherhood was innate, timeless and natural. Benham's contemporary, Helen Mayo, began medical work in hospitals for women and children, although she also worked in bacteriology. She was typical of the new women professionals who used their position to reshape the family and women's work in keeping with the new canons of technical rationality.

Her professional interests were many but one in particular is significant here, her lifetime dedication to the field of infant health. Mayo was very much a woman of her time, concerned with the vital importance to the state of healthy babies and a low infant mortality rate. This attitude is encapsulated in a report of the Mothers and Babies Health Association, an organization that Mayo founded:

> The work of helping mothers to keep themselves and their babies well is of the greatest importance to the State. It reduces infant mortality, the number of inmates of hospitals, homes for the blind, the deaf and the dumb,etc and helps to build up a strong and healthy race. The Government statistician states that at birth boys are worth 794 pounds to the State and girls 491 pounds, and in eighteen years they both treble the amount.[2]

It would be easy to interpret the wording of this report as only an example of the wholesale importing of the language of 'technical rationality' into the home. It is, certainly, an example of rationally calculated, goal-oriented, and means-ends thinking. It exemplifies the

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1 Bland L "Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s-1914 " in Lewis J *Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850 -1940* Blackwell 1986 Agnes Benham wrote *Love's Way to Perfect Humanhood* Adelaide 1904

2 Annual Report of Mothers' and Babies' Health Association 1923 in Mayo Papers PRG 127/7 M L S A It is intriguing to speculate on the basis for this calculation.

movement to change patterns of reproduction by placing contraception, pregnancy and, in this instance the care of children, under conscious, usually professional control. Mayo was typical of that group of professionals in Western society who energetically set up babies' hospitals and clinics, neighbourhood health centres and educational programmes for mothers. Such professionals insisted that infant care was a skill which could be learned and that motherhood as an occupation would be more highly valued if women themselves became more efficient and 'scientific' at their trade.

As Kerreen Reiger has very ably demonstrated, the work of such professional experts is profoundly contradictory, particularly for women.[1] Nevertheless, from the perspective of my current concern, demographic change, the infant health movement, with its accompanying concern for maternal health, was a central aspect of women's negotiation within marriage. It legitimated a focus on infant and maternal health which enabled women to challenge a view of themselves as tied to a constant round of pregnancy, child-bearing and lactation.

Seccombe has argued that the routine intervention of doctors in working class pregnancy and birthing in the early twentieth century was a catalyst in dispelling women's fatalism about childbearing.[2] While doctors usually failed to inform their patients of the means of preventing further conception, they often provided strongly worded warnings as to the medical consequences of further births. This medical talk "provided working class women with a vocabulary of scientific authority to better envisage the inner workings of their bodies, and to assign terms to their pain and maladies."[3]

The medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth, and of the rearing of babies, provided an even stronger impetus to middle class women to limit births. Many of those who had experienced secondary and tertiary education had studied physiology and had some idea of their bodily processes. They had also internalized a respect for scientific and medical

1 Reiger K M *The Disenchantment of the Home*
2 Seccombe W "Starting to Stop: Working -Class Fertility Decline in Britain" *Past and Present*
3 Ibid p25 (typescript in author's possession)

opinion and applied the newest dicta to their family lives. Medical and science graduates happily contributed to the growing body of knowledge about mothercraft and child development and disseminated it where ever they could. In this capacity they contributed to the power to negotiate for better 'conditions' for women within the marriage relation.

The debate about infant care and the transformation of childcare practices provides another interesting site of contradiction for women in the early decades of this century. For many, the introduction of new and often rigid standards of child feeding, such as the three or four-hourly routine imposed by Dr Truby King, represented a gross intrusion into a time-honoured, 'natural' practice of demand feeding. Yet for some women such as Effie Best (nee Deland), an early holder of a Master's degree in zoology, the application of science to the home was welcome. Best enjoyed the opportunity to broadcast the new ideas on mothercraft on a local Adelaide radio station. As she understood and was fascinated by the scientific challenge inherent in the debate about what constituted the 'correct' food for an artificially fed infant, she was not unduly caught up in the rigidity of the new system.

Best spoke on radio on "trying to make substitutes for human milk from a biochemical point of view." Also she described Truby King's basic principle as one of order; "it wasn't good for babies to overstimulate them." She descibed the fanaticism of the Truby King movement as due to a few rigid nurses in clinics who applied King's methods too enthusiastically. Defending the new movement Best claims:

> We didn't see it as inflexible and that's one of the things I talked about on the air. It did give mothers a chance to plan their day. Quite candidly I'm worried about the demand feeding that I come across.[1]

Best provides a perspective which focusses on advantage to the mother, particularly the advantage of being able to plan. This ability to plan one's life, whether for a day or for several years, is, as David Allmendinger has argued, an essential benefit that education has brought

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1 Interview wih Mrs Effie Best

to women.[1] Arguably, not only middle-class women, but working class women, who needed to fit their babies' feeding into their busy days, could benefit from this intrusion into the 'natural'. I do not wish to romanticize here, but to support the point also made by Reiger that the application of technical rationality to the home had mixed results and for some women, particularly university graduates, it often appeared to be eminently sensible.

I have claimed that middle class women in general, and university educated women in particular, had certainly made the necessary gains to increase their standing and ability to negotiate within their marital relationships. The dominant population ideology which stressed the vital role of mothers and the new emphasis on infant welfare and maternal health increased a mother's 'value ' within the marital relation. Changing labour markets and the increasing importance of education, rendered large families economically unsuitable, thus enhancing women's demands for limitation of their fertility. Finally I have demonstrated that women were increasingly able to discuss the issues, to put into words the previously immutable facts of childbearing and rearing and to subject them to the scrutiny of other social ideas.

Medical knowledge began to dispel the fatalism of earlier generations, as did increasing secularization, as I argued in Chapter 4. Education for women exarcerbated both of these tendencies and women graduates, in medicine and science, helped to shape the circumstances which gave some women at least more control over their reproductive lives.

I referred earlier to Quiggin' proposition that cooperation between husband and wife was essential if certain natural methods of birth control were used. A further point needs to be clarified if we can claim that women played a significant part in fertility decline. Were women following their husband's dictates or were they making choices for themselves? Certainly a case can be made that middle class men, and particularly professionals, were every bit as aware of the rising cost of children as education came to play a larger part in their lives. There was

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1 Allmendinger D F "Mount Holyoke Students Encounter the Need for Life-Planning, 1837-50" in *History of Education Quarterly* 19 Spring 1979

considerable motivation for them to wish to curtail births. As Quiggin points out, Monsignor Brown, of the National Birth-Rate Commission was correct when he stated that it was a new motivation to reduce family size, not new knowledge that was responsible for the decline in the birth-rate.[1]

Quiggin concludes that the cooperation of husbands was gained not only by their desire for smaller families, although this may have been a factor, but from a changing attitude to women, " including a belief that they should not be subjected to an unremitting cycle of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation."[2] Part of that change in attitude was brought about by the gradual realization that a woman's goals no longer needed to be limited to marriage and motherhood. Education for women, although initially resisted, demonstrated that women were intellectually able and that they could play an independent and useful part in society, although the opportunities to do so were hedged with limitations and qualifications.

Quiggin is not prepared to say categorically that women played a central role in the fertility decline. She concludes that:

> Over a longer time scale, changes in the status of women probably had an impact. 'Domestic feminism' resulted in middle class women, at least, having a greater influence in their households, particularly in matters related to children. Although their perceived sphere of influence probably was a rationalization of their economically inferior position to men, it gave them a moral force which could be used to support their opinions about family size and the wish to avoid excessive childbearing.[3]

I believe the analysis of university women enables us to go further, to argue strongly for a link beween higher education and fertility control. Women graduates in all Western countries in the period 1880 - 1920, as a group exhibited much lower fertility than their contemporaries. Part of that lower fertility was caused by a much lower rate of marriage, part by later marriage and part by curtailment of births leading to smaller

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1 Quiggin *No Rising Generation* p 111
2 Ibid
3 Ibid p 19

completed family size. University women were not typical but their very atypicality highlights changes taking place, albeit at a slower rate and in a less exaggerated manner, in the wider community. They were a highly visible group whose demographic behaviour was keenly observed by contemporaries as an object lesson in social change. Both those who approved women's actions and those who heartily disapproved agreed that women were taking definite steps to control their reproductive lives.

Those who feared social dislocation used the same population ideology to oppose the education of women. Their arguments are often illuminating as a means of assessing the inroads academic education had made on public perception. Mrs A Scott Broad, for example, in her book, *The Sex Problem*, (1911) revealed in her discussion the fears, shared by many, of the class and gender upheavals of her time. She saw her era as one in which there was the possibility of Australia being "swamped by a cosmopolitan tide of humanity."[1] She deplored the dislocation between classes claiming that "the present salaries of the better class are disproportionate to their attainments or their worth." In her view the only persons able to spend money freely were boilermakers, masons, miners," whose tastes are elementary and whose calling and acquirements require no expensive maintenance", while:

> The professions, Government officers and clerks labor (sic) under many subtle difficulties; solicitors, doctors and architects find life a heavy struggle, and temptations many. They pay heavily for everything, and hired help is essential to them. [2]

This obviously biased view underlines the reality, at least, of the rising cost of living for the middle class and the belief that large families were too expensive. Yet the real butt of Scott Broad's invective was the academic education of women which she saw as a central reason for her country's malaise. An arch exponent of the complementary nature of men and women, she pleaded for a reform of women's education, a reform which would make domestic economy central. In her view, "The State deliberately turns out, in increasing numbers, smart, shallow, hard, calculating women, who are never taught that a woman's first duty is the

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1 Scott Broad A Mrs *The Sex Problem* Adelaide (Century Type) 1911 p32
2 Ibid p46

care of the home and family." Further, "the State has surely learned already that a thousand clever single women are not as valuable as one kind, intelligent mother."[1]

"Look at the tired eyes, greying hair, and lined face of your young lady Bachelors of Art" (sic), she declared, "The hand of Death is already upon them , and they are not yet thirty." Worse, in her view, they were teaching other "poor creatures" to be the same in "high class colleges".[2] Education was clearly to blame for the retreat from marriage in Scott Broad's opinion and in the opinions of many others, both men and women, who using the same 'race suicide' scare and national efficiency arguments fought, with eventual success, for the inclusion of domestic subjects in girls' schools and for a dilution of academic education for girls.[3]

Women graduates, in their adoption of 'voluntary spinsterhood', were clearly challenging the gender order in ways which contemporary observers saw correctly as qualitatively different. The outcry against race suicide, directed to those who limited their families as well as to those who remained single, attests to their success. In England feminist writers of this period such as Cicely Hamilton, Lucy Re-Bartlett and Christabel Pankhurst all sought a change in men's sexual behaviour and an end to the double standard of sexual morality both within and outside marriage.Their work has much in common with that of Rosamond Benham, described earlier. They had no doubts that women's new demographic behaviour was a protest against unacceptable standards of male sexuality in marriage. These three writers all declared that many women were forcing change already by refusing to marry, to cater to men sexually, or to bear their children.[4]

Lucy Re- Bartlett wrote that:

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1 Ibid p36

2 Ibid p57

3 See for instance Dyhouse C Girls *Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981 chapter 3

4 Bland L "Marriage Laid Bare" p138

> In the hearts of many women today is rising a cry.... *I will know no man and bear no child until his apathy be broken through - these wrongs be righted.....* It is the "silent strike " and it is going on all over the world.[1]

Celibacy was seen as temporary, as a means to calling out the "new man" who would be a fit companion to the "new woman" whose life was shaped by educational opportunities, by the experience of dignified paid work and by a sense of self-direction.

I do not intend to explore the factors which, in the period after the first world war, undermined this proud assertion of independence and resulted in the labelling of single women as deviant, of celibacy as abnormal and unnatural. The development of the 'science' of sexology and its resultant attack on those who spurned 'normal' sex has been described by Sheila Jeffreys and others.[2] With its supposedly 'scientific' basis, sex reform as advocated by Havelock Ellis and others was difficult for graduate women to counter.

To return to my previous argument, I believe that women's agency in fertility decline has been proved; that the case of university women makes it clear that women were active agents, taking advantage of their education and their relative independence to shape their lives in ways consistent with their demands for greater autonomy. It cannot be claimed from this study that women necessarily initiated the decline, in fact it began in most western countries before women's admission to university was achieved. However, it is clear that relations between the sexes were changing. Both the fertility decline and the admission of women to higher education can be viewed as linked responses to wider changes which were overturning old patterns of class and gender relations.

Nor can it be seen as divorced from wider factors such as modes of production and social class transformations, all of which provided a new set of circumstances which were favourable to middle class women's needs. Nevertheless women seized the opportunities when they arose. Women graduates, as a group, amplified and greatly exacerbated the

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1 Ibid (original emphasis)

2 Jeffreys S *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880 -1930* Pandora 1985 chaps 9, 10 and Vicinus M *Independent Women* conclusion

statistical tendency of the fertility decline and confronted their society with a visible example of a new order.Their success can be measured by the virulence of the later reaction against their early reproductive patterns and the severe limitations placed upon those who succeeded in a 'man's world'.[1]

**Feminism, Education and Fertility - the "uneasy connection"?**

In her comprehensive account of women's higher education in America, Barbara Miller Solomon raised the question of what she termed the uneasy connection between feminism and women's educational advancement.[2] Earlier in this study I discussed Solomon's judgement and intimated that I found her definition of feminism too restrictive. In her introduction she explains;

> Although a liberal education does not guarantee feminism (any more than its absence precludes it ), education offers a process by which women can learn to value their own thinking and themselves.[3]

This distinction implies that feminism, in Solomon's view, is public feminism, concerned with public campaigns for issues such as women's suffrage and a vocal and obvious advocacy of women's rights. Such a definition leads naturally to Solomon's finding of an uneasy connection between higher education and such activities. I believe that the definition needs to be wider and to include precisely what Solomon excludes, the process by which women learn to value themselves. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, J A and Olive Banks, searching for a possible connection between feminism and family planning, also used a narrow definition of feminism as public feminism, that is involvement in visible campaigns such as the organized suffrage movement. Thus they were able to conclude;

> The feminist movement as such was not a causal factor in the advent of family planning, and any of its activities which may validly be linked with

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1 See for instance Rosenberg R *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* and Rossiter M *Women Scientists in America : Struggles and Strategies to 1940*

2 Solomon B M *In the Company of Educated Women*

3 Ibid pxxi

this development are to be seen as consequences not only unanticipated but almost certainly unapproved.[1]

Amongst the feminist movement's activities the Banks included the movement for the reform of women's education, thus linking this movement with their conclusion that there was no link between it and family planning. I wish to take issue with both Solomon and the Banks on this matter and to suggest that if a wider definition of feminism is employed then firm links can be found between feminism, education and fertility control. Earlier I suggested that Linda Gordon's definition was broader and more inclusive. She views feminism as a " sharing in an impulse to increase the power and autonomy of women in their families, communities and/or society".[2]

The analysis of university-educated women's demographic behaviour provides the link between feminism, education and fertility control. In this study I have deconstructed the concept of demographic change revealing that behind the large transformation known as the demographic transition lie myriad decisions made by men and women in relation to their personal life. Seizing the opportunities provided by wider social change women strengthened their position within marital relationships, gaining new leverage for reproductive decision making. A statistically small but theoretically significant group, women who had experienced higher education, demonstrated in a specific historical period that women were not prepared to accept the prevailing marital and sexual relationships that were available to them.

It is not my intention to overstate the achievements made by women at this time, although I believe them to be considerable. As I have intimated, much of their challenge to marital relationships was undermined by later ideological developments as well as wider social catastrophes such as the Great Depression and two world wars. Yet , if we look at sociological developments today, at the life chance indicators for women, we find that those with higher education marry less, marry later,

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1 J A and Olive Banks *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* pp128-9 . The context in which this book was written is nicely summed up by a sentence in the introduction, "Feminism in its nineteenth and early twentieth century sense of an organized movement by women for women is a spent force". p ix

2 Gordon L *Women's Body, Women's Right* Penguin 1977 xiv

and have more economic independence both within and outside marriage.[1] As Peter McDonald argues, the search for individual autonomy, by both men and women, now leads sociologists of the family to ask if the nature of 'the family' is qualitatively changing.[2] Arguably, the direction of change was signalled by small groups of women graduates in Australia, in Canada, in Britain and in the United States in the period 1880 - 1920. Rebutting charges that Queen's University, Canada, was a marriage market for young women, a female student put the situation very clearly:

> The fact remains however that a college education is not an asset, but rather a handicap in the matrimonial race. By raising a girl's standards, it narrows her choice of a husband, by increasing her earning power it lessens her need for one.[3]

The issue of power is relevent here. It is useful to return to Joan Scott's observation that we should replace:

> the notion that social power is unified, coherent and centralized with something like Foucault's conception of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships, discursively constituted in social "fields of force."[4]

Would it be unduly optimistic to point to a major change in the balance of power between men and women at this stage? I believe educated women gained considerable autonomy, although, as I have indicated, gains in one direction were frequently balanced by losses in another. For example, although women made significant leaps forward in their admission to the professions, that gain must be seen in the light of their absorption into the ideological modes of thinking of the period and its contradictory outcomes for women. Yet, in one 'dispersed constellation of unequal relationships', in the marital relations between men and

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1 Burns A Bottomley G and Jools P *The Family in the Modern World* George Allen and Unwin 1983

2 McDonald P "Families in the Future: The Pursuit of Personal Autonomy" in *Family Matters* p 40 see also *Journal of Family Issues* Vol 8 No 4 December 1987, an issue devoted to a symposium on the state of the American family in the 1980s. Contributers no longer emphasize the themes of adaptability and continuity characteristic of earlier accounts.

3 Neatby N "Preparing for the Working World: Women at Queen's During the 1920s" in *Historical Studies in Education* Vol 1 No1 Spring 1989 p60

4 Scott J W "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis" p1067

women, certain women gained new advantages which they were able to use to redefine the marital relationship in ways more congenial to their desires. Some, such as Rosamond Benham, seized the opportunity of her education and status to enter the discourse of eugenics and population and to manipulate it to women's advantage, gaining in a small way access to the power of defining what had been previously seen as natural and immutable, of speaking women's desires.

Again the contradictory nature of power and its attainment arises. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asks if the marginal and powerless wish to challenge the dominant discourse, must they frame their challenge in the language of the dominant mode? She believes that the abandonment of their own discourse and the adoption of the prevailing male language eventually cut women off from their own source of power.[1] Yet this is not an inevitable outcome. If women use the linguistic and reasoning skills as they have learnt them they can manipulate and challenge the dominant discourse. A fine example of such a challenge can be found in the vast body of feminist scholarship which is emerging from universities today from women trained in the 'male language' of psychology, history, philosophy and other disciplines.

Similar difficulties arise in relation to women's subjectivity. In the introductory chapter I referred to the work of two theorists, Anna Tröger and Dorothy Smith, who both claim that educated middle class women are particularly vulnerable to the dominant discourses of their time. To repeat Smith's words:

> The penetration of the society by the ideological process includes, particularly for the relatively highly educated, an "in-depth" organization of consciousness.[2]

I believe that this is only half the story; that we need to 'reclaim' the consciousness of educated women and look at their practices as well as their speech. It may well be true that when we read their published works or their words recorded in interviews with eager researchers we might

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1 Smith- Rosenberg C "The New Woman as Androgyne" in *Disorderly Conduct*
2 Smith D "A Sociology for Women" in Sherman J A and Beck E T *The Prism of Sex* pp143-4 See also the discussion of this point in chapter 1 ppxx

find *in their public representation of self,* a discourse redolent of dominant thinking. Others manipulated the dominant discourse to their advantage. Yet their private decisions about marriage and fertility represent just as accurately a different aspect of consciousness, a strategic refusal of practices which, for them, are not satisfying. It may indeed be possible to read demographic statistics as an alternative set of practices , practices which are not discursively constituted, as a guide to women's consciousness which is every bit as revealing as the spoken word.

The issue of power and sexuality is particularly complex. As Foucault has pointed out the intermingling of resistances and powers is so complete that a historian must hesitate to speak of victories and defeats. Yet, as Vicinus argues, for feminists, women's sexual autonomy is a key to her achieving personal and political fulfillment.[1] She reflects that women's sexual power in the nineteenth century may well have been limited to saying "no". Education clearly enhanced that strategy for a group of women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century South Australia.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have drawn together the threads of the major issues which this study set out to address. I began by describing the broad social changes occurring in late nineteenth and early twentieth century South Australia. One of the major facets of that change , and the most significant for this work, was the emergence of the professional-managerial stratum, transforming a middle class dominated by landed and entrepreneurial interests to one containing significant numbers of professionals and business and government employees.

An important part of this transformation was the changing nature of women's work in class maintenance. Increasingly women were expected to prepare children for the experience of schooling as education came to be the access route to middle class jobs. As technical rationality came to dominate modes of thinking in production in the period its influence became pervasive within the home, bringing intervention from

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1 Vicinus M "Sexuality and Power: A Review of Current Work in the History of Sexuality" in *Feminist Studies* 8 No 1 (Spring 1982) p 134

experts in infant health, child care, sexuality and the psychological wellbeing of families. A concern with the maintenance and quality of the population provided the justification for such intervention.

However the access of women to higher education at this time enabled them to seize the opportunities provided by their education and to manipulate the discourses of the period to their advantage. Some were able to capitalize on opportunities to join the professional workforce and to shape the emerging medicalization of infant care towards what they saw as the needs of mothers. Others were able to use their education to refuse matrimony and to lead economically rewarding and fulfilling lives, often sustained by the friendships of other women.

These gains need to be viewed with some reservation, as many of the advances were contradictory and had implications for working class women which potentially damaged traditional community interaction. Nevertheless my purpose here was to examine the impact of higher education on a group who experienced this new phenomenon. I have concluded that their education enabled this significant group to challenge the gender order of their time, to use the language and discourse of their male teachers to their advantage and to separate themselves from the inevitability of submersion in a form of marriage and of sexual practice that was not to their liking.

It has been said that educated women's consciousness has been colonized by dominant ideology. I believe this judgement is too simple and that we need to 'read' historical evidence such as demographic statistics to deconstruct the consciousness of a large group of women. There we may find strategies and resistances which are not always revealed in speech.

Importantly, the application of 'scientific' thinking to the home challenged the notion that women were naturally and irrevocably child rearers. As Reiger has pointed out, women were allowed admission to the realm of culture. Although that hold was fragile and has been under significant threat throughout this century, women have not relinquished that understanding and have continued to build on the efforts of their earlier sisters.

## Conclusion

> Clarity is always dependent not on good but on poor vision; on blurring complex details in order to sight the main structure.[1] Gouldner

What then can be gained from this study in assessing the significance of women's higher education in the period 1880-1920? At the outset I claimed that my concern was not to retell or reassess the story of women's admission to higher education, although I would necessarily have to chart that terrain for South Australia. Rather, I sought to evaluate the meaning of that experience for women as it affected their entire lives, not just for a brief period of university attendence. In this short conclusion I will 'blur complex detail' and attempt to describe 'the main structure', as I see it, of social change in which women's higher education is implicated.

Many feminist scholars, myself included, have sought to assess the gains achieved through higher education by examining women's success at attracting university and other teaching posts, and by measuring their inroads into the 'male' professions. On these criteria a pessimistic conclusion is usually arrived at; for most of this century women have lagged behind men, even where women's proportions in undergraduate populations have soared.[2] On this basis women's higher education is often deemed a limited success, a pale shadow of male career patterns. This perception says as much about the nature of universities as it does about women's participation in them and suggests that those writing the history of such institutions should attend to the curiously and persistently intransigent male-defined nature of higher education. The history of Western universities is as much a story of men creating and protecting a bastion of power as of progressively enriching the lives of widening numbers of students.[3]

My agenda is, however, different. I contend that we need to use another set of criteria as well to measure changes associated with higher

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1 Gouldner A *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* p8

2 A recent example is Chamberlain M (ed) *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects* Russell Sage 1988

3 Margaret Rossiter also documents such a process in science, both in academia and in professional associations. See Rossiter M *Women scientists in America*

education for women. After all, women did not enter higher education with the intention of achieving work patterns which exactly replicated those of men. They sought economic independence and the ability to be able to make a broader range of choices about their future lives. They were also firmly committed to improving the lot of other women, as they saw it. As Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a leader in the English women's movement, urged students of Bedford College, there was much to do:

> I tell you many times there is much for you to do if you are trained to it; your whole sex to lift up into the freedom and valour of womanhood.[1]

I believe that it is just as appropriate to examine the impact of higher education on women's attachment to the family, however that institution is defined. Late nineteenth century women in all western societies were challenging the nature of marriage and the family, although, it is important to assert, they were not discarding the institution. As this study demonstrates, higher education, in the period 1880-1920, affected women's demographic patterns in quite significant ways. Here there are no limited gains, no carefully qualified evaluations of a step forward here, a step back there. On the contrary, women can be seen to be making significant choices about marriage and child-bearing which fulfilled the hopes and expectation of the earliest supporters of women's education and exceeded the fears of its opponents.

It was essential for women to redefine their family role before the larger gains which we have sought (equal participation in the academic and professional work force, for example) could take place. For women, greater personal and sexual autonomy is a necessary precondition for fulfilling work. Seemingly paradoxically, the availability of opportunities for paid work provides the context in which alternatives to full family life can be considered. In the period examined the changing mode of production and changing class configuration provided the possibility of new work opportunities for women which in turn empowered them to refuse the option of marriage and total dependency. Looked at from this perspective, higher education was revolutionary for the first two or three generations of women students.

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1 Fawcett M G The Use of the Higher Education to Women in *The Contemporary Review* Vol L November 1886

Equally important for middle class women was the insertion in the 'life-cycle' of the expectation of a period of paid work outside the home. Although in this period, work force participation for women rarely followed marriage, the work period before it delayed marriage and provided for many the opportunity for earning and self-direction which, I have argued, subtly altered relations between marital partners. In her recent study of Queen's University in Canada, Nicole Neatby concludes that traditional attitudes towards paid employment and higher education for women were being eroded in the 1920s.[1] This same process was visible in South Australia as higher education came to be accepted as an integral part of middle class women's lives.

I have found comparisons with Canadian, American and British Universities to be particularly fruitful. As I mentioned earlier, in spite of a diversity of patterns in the approach to women's admission to higher education and in spite of varied social, economic and religious contexts, higher education for women was achieved ( albeit with a range of acceptance) within a very narrow time-frame, usually between the years 1870- 1890. The most strikingly different contexts lay in the realm of the economic. While late nineteenth-century England was industrializing and undergoing the concomitant social changes, South Australia was not, yet women's admission to higher education was just as eagerly sought. This seems to suggest that either factors other than economic must be brought into the argument for women's admission, or that colonial Australia was following British patterns of institutional reform without reference to the local economy. Another possibility is that Britain, hampered by conservative Anglican-Tory dominance, was very late in entering into the changes occurring in other parts of the western world.

One important factor which clearly shaped the views of the university promoters was a strong faith in science, a faith which was demonstrated in one of their twin hopes for the new university - the ability to be able to grant science degrees and to admit women. In this aspect they showed themselves to be the colonial inheritors of the ideas of that section of the English and American middle class which supported

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1 Neatby N Preparing for the Working World: Women at Queen's during the 1920s in *Historical Studies in Education* Vol 1 No 1 Spring 1989 p 68

industry, technological progress and a more secular view of life. Where these men had religious affiliations, they tended to be with the dissenting church, which had shown itself to be sympathetic to both industrial progress and a wider role for women. The Anglican bishop of Adelaide acknowledged the direction that many thoughtful Adelaide citizens were taking and cleverly attempted to demonstrate the compatibility of science and religion in his address at the inauguration of the new university.

Certainly the British institutional model, rather than the American seems to have been favoured by Australian, Canadian and New Zealand universities, a fact which is scarcely surprising given the colonial status of those societies. Hence one important element seen in the American context was missing - the women's college. As Margaret Rossiter has pointed out, the existence of women's colleges was central to the employment of women scientists in America in the early twentieth century.[1] A similar argument could be mounted for women's academic employment generally, as the many women's colleges in the United States provided a welcoming and supportive environment for women scholars who often devoted their lives to such institutions and enjoyed there a woman-centred atmosphere often denied their Canadian and Australian sisters. The latter could sometimes find employment in women's residences attached to universities but that option was not available to South Australian women in the period studied.

It is not surprising then to find opportunities for academic employment for women extremely limited in South Australia. To return to my argument, it does seem highly likely that the admission of women to university in South Australia was as much a product of wider social change in the West and a need on the part of a significant sector of South Australian society to transplant that change to their soil. Hence women's entrance to higher education can be seen as part of a wider movement of which the women's movement in England was a vital part.

That wider movement, as I have argued, was the expansion of the bourgeoisie from a predominantly entrepreneurial class to one which now included a prominent stratum of professionals and managers, described by some as the new class. This group, particularly receptive to

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1 Rossiter M *Women Scientists in America* p25

the claims of education as a means of transgenerational class formation and maintenance, endorsed a new role for women as well-educated mothers of a future schooled generation. The new class depended on knowledge rather than capital for its strength and women were viewed as ideal conduits for the transmission of cultural 'stock'. This changing nature of women's role within the family provided a point of leverage for women both within and outside the family, as I have demonstrated.

Educating women for their role as mothers has had mixed results, particularly in relation to curricula, where one finds women expected to restrict themselves to disciplines seen to be related to their eventual destinies within the home. On the other hand, it has often meant greater opportunities in the workforce for women who were expected to teach others their domestic duties, and to care for their health and welfare. As Rossiter and Solomon have taught us, the responsibility of transmitting Republican motherhood in eighteenth-century America resulted in the hiring of many women teachers, the establishment of myriad academies and seminaries which were later able to transform themselves into early sites of higher education for women thus giving America an early advantage in the establishment of universities for women.

Paradoxically, the arguments which supported women's entrance to higher education which focussed on the value to the nation of the well-educated wife and mother also created the conditions which enabled women to modify that role or eschew it altogether. It has not been possible here to examine and compare the life histories of women who were educated in institutions of higher learning whose aim it was explicitly to prepare women for lives of service to their families and communities. Nevertheless one such study is very suggestive and raises the possibility that for women educated in areas such as business, social work, food management and paramedical fields, the possibility of continuing in paid work throughout life was extremely high even when graduates were married and had children.[1]

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1 See for instance an unpublished paper by Kathleen Lyman The Impact of a Simmons Higher Education upon Career and Family Choices from 1906-1926 Paper presented at the Symposium, "Comparative Perspectives on Women's Education: Wellesley, Radcliffe and Simmons, 1875-1925" at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Montreal. Canada April 1983

This study raises a further question, seemingly heretical, which requires exploration. Is the **content** of women's higher education as crucial as the **participation** of women in it? I hasten to add that I do not wish to endorse limited and narrow vocational choices for women. Yet in an historical period in which any higher education was a luxury and the expectation of dependency for women was almost universal, higher education offered release from this situation firstly by enabling women briefly, but significantly, to experience a situation that was non-familial and universalistic in values. It gave them the empowering use of the language of critical thought. And, vitally, it gave them the possibility of economic independence. Arguably for those who sought employment in areas viewed as women's work there was less competition and opposition from men who thought their domains were being invaded.

There is a difficulty here as, on the one hand the creation of professional work defined as suitable for women institutionalizes the sexual division of labour. This in itself would not be such a major problem if 'women's work' was as well remunerated as that of men. On the other hand, I have argued that what is crucial for women is the change of consciousness which accompanies higher education, a change which enabled women to exercise more autonomy in their marital and reproductive choices, more ability to negotiate within their marital relationships. The experience of higher education, I have argued, crucially changed the subjectivity of the first generations of women graduates, allowing them to see themselves as autonomous beings.

This change of consciousness has, I believe, the potential, only now being realized on a larger scale, of creating a major challenge to the gender order. Its realization in the small groups of early women graduates, manifested in their demographic patterns, provides an historical instance of the possibility of later change. I have argued then, that education can, in a specific time and place, lead to a change in consciousness and indeed to social change. Liberal discourse can have liberatory potential. Women's enhanced view of themselves can, in appropriate circumstances, lead to a change in their material conditions. The personal is indeed political, or, in Gramsci's terms, a transformation of consciousness is an inseparable part of structural change.

One of the problems of women's history has been the tendency to see women as victims or at least as passive participants in social change. I suggest that we should use demographic data as a way of approaching women's agency in shaping large events such as the demographic transition. This study has demonstrated that higher education affected women's choices about marriage and fertility. Two distinct groups, those who married and those who did not, differed from their contemporaries in significant ways. While they did not initiate the demographic transition they amplified it and made its effects particularly visible to their community.

As I have pointed out, it is rare to find accounts of demographic change which acknowledge women's role in the process other than as one half, and presumably a consenting one at that, of a couple. This study supports Folbre's belief that changes in women's bargaining power might affect fertility decisions. Further, such changes provide for the possibility of political struggle. Higher education created two new roles for women, that of the single professional woman and of the highly-educated wife, often engaged with her husband in the professional sphere. As women remained outside familial settings they identified in their social and professional lives with other women and, alongside activist married women demanded reforms which they saw as vital to improving women's lot. Although we, with the benefit of hindsight, may not always agree with the directions or outcomes of their reforming zeal, it would be arrogance in the extreme to dismiss their campaigns.

With Folbre and Seccombe I believe that feminist accounts of social change have issued a challenge to demographers to include the perspectives which focus on women's activities and beliefs in their explanations of phenomena such as the demographic transition. The changing role of women within their societies may well prove to be a key to understanding the fertility decline. It is certainly the explanation most commonly evoked by late twentieth century commentators on the current dramatic drop in the Australian rates of marriage and child birth.[1] Detailed research which analyses changes in relationships between men and women is essential if a changing balance of power between spouses is

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1 McDonald P Families in the Future: The Pursuit of Personal Autonomy in *Family Matters: Australian Institute of Family Studies Newsletter* No 22 December 1988

to be identified. I suggest that highly-educated women at the turn of the century are ideal subjects for such research as they were at the forefront of demographic change.

Several writers in the field of women's education and professional life have attempted to schematize the period around 1880 -1920 into distinct sub periods. Whilst not overlapping completely, these sub periods have a remarkable degree of convergence and their similarity suggests that a wider phenomenon needs to be explained. In her thorough examination of American women in science, Margaret Rossiter identified a period before 1880 where some women were able to join in the less formal, often amateur scientific networks of their time. This was followed in1880 -1910, by a period of "fluidity and innovation" for women scientists, and, thirdly, after 1910, a time characterized by containment. Rossiter notes that this type of chronology corresponds with few others in American history and is indeed an important chronology for women's history.[1]

The most interesting period, she contends, is the second, 1880 to 1910, during which there was an " almost silent process of economic, social and demographic differentiation... whereby new roles and opportunities were unfolding at the same time as new persons were becoming available to fill them."[2] Patricia Palmieri identifies related, although not entirely similar, periodization in women's education in the U S when she writes of a romantic period from 1820 to 1860, a reformist era from 1860 to 1890, followed by a mood of increasing hostility towards women in scholarly life from 1890.[3]

Barbara Solomon refers to two sets of three periods. In Chapter 1 I noted her statement that her book is about three generations of women; those who hungered for education, those who fought for it, and those who took it for granted.[4] Although she does not specify dates to define

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1 Rossiter *Women Scientists in America* p xvi

2 Ibid

3 Palmieri P A From Republican Motherhood to Race Suicide: Arguments on the Higher Education of Women in the United States, 1820-1929 in Lasser C (ed) *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World* University of Illinois Press 1987

4 Solomon BM *In the Company of Educated Women* p xvii

those generations I would roughly equate them with Palmieri's schema, with the proviso that those who "took it for granted" were more likely to be the generation attending American colleges after 1910 or 1920. Later in her book she differentiates three generations of college students. Those who attended from the 1860s to the 1880s she dubs "true women", those from the 1890's to the 1900s, "new women" while the third group, those collegians of the 1910s and 1920s, she views as urbane sophisticates seeking happiness rather than the serious and purposeful pursuit of knowledge which had motivated their forbears. They were perhaps the first of the generation who took education for granted.

Although these attempts at periodization differ somewhat they agree in two important ways. They all identify a significant period of reform and progress for women in higher education from about 1870 to 1900 ( or 1910). They all identify a definite process of containment following that flowering, a loss of gains made, a curtailing of radical change or, as in Solomon's case, a 'taking for granted' which in itself subverted the radical potential of women's education. Roberta Frankfort was an earlier commentator on the same phenomenon, arguing in her 1977 book that the intellectual commitment among women students subsided after the first generation of collegiate women, and that after 1910 the collegiate experience was no longer controversial or unique.[1]

A similar process could be observed in South Australia where the pioneering decades of the late nineteenth century were followed by a period during the 1910s and 20s where higher education became an accepted part of the life cycle for women from, it must be remembered, a very small social group.This type of periodization is essential for feminist historians as it leads to an evaluation of the factors leading to women's liberation and those which maintain the structures which support patriarchy. The existence of such similarities in timing and of the ubiquity of the reversal, signal the very real degree of threat that the entrance of women to higher education had posed.The gender order had been shaken to its foundations. Social and demographic change had reached a critical mass and could no longer be ignored. In America the feminization of science in the years up to 1880 drew a hostile response and a subsequent

1 Frankfort R *Collegiate Women: Domesticity and Career in Turn-of the Century America* New York University Press 1977

defeminization as universities and professional societies redefined their membership criteria to keep the unwelcome newcomers out.[1]

The alarmed response to the decline in the birth rate in most western countries led not only to the introduction of domestic training in schools and the glorification of motherhood as woman's chief end but to the concomitant reassertion of patriarchal power, albeit redefined in 'modern' terms. Yet, I would argue, the gains made by women in the period to 1920, were not forgotten. They had demonstrated that women were intellectually the equal of men, that the presence of economic independence could mean emotional and psychological independence. They had placed the keystone in the arch.

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1 Rossiter *Women Scientists in America* ch4

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