chapter 1

introduction

Girls just wanna be mums. The celebrity mothers' club is growing bigger. Trading the body for the baby is the latest move for women who have everything that fame and fortune can buy.1

In 1900, when the first flickering figures on a large screen marked the beginning of the moving picture industry, Victorian ideas of motherhood prevailed in Australian society. Representations in journals, newspapers, advertising and literature reinforced the belief that mothers were at the heart of domestic life, nurturing their families without concern for their own needs or desires. Their place was in the home, the perfect environment in which to undertake responsibility for the spiritual and physical development of children. Outside, in the public sphere,2 men were contemplating ways to encourage mothers to do their national duty by producing more offspring. In 1903, for instance, the New South Wales Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth Rate was set up. It signalled pronatalist governmental intervention in areas of abortion, contraception and infant preservation.3 Social, political and economic pressures combined to extol the virtues of motherhood and women's 'natural' role in a nuclear family home.4

By the end of the 1980s, the family unit had undergone a transformation. Women were employed outside the home and had secured a public career before starting a maternal one. With the availability of the contraceptive pill and the legalisation of abortion, they had gained control of their reproductive capacities. Mothers lived in a greater variety of

2 Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle argued that the dichotomy of the public/private sphere ignored the existence of both men and women in all areas. Instead, they proposed the idea of 'two cultures': one, a heterosexual culture, where women mix with men and the other a 'women's culture'. While noting their point, I use 'public sphere' to denote the space of power which traditionally has been a male realm, although not their inevitable or rightful area. A. Game & R. Pringle, 'Beyond Gender at Work: Secretaries', in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 273-91.
4 Lynn Stearney argued that the first step toward relieving women's oppression was to understand the social construction of motherhood, rather than its instinctive nature. L.M. Stearney, 'Feminism, Ecofeminism, and the Maternal Archetype: Motherhood as a Feminine Universal', *Communication Quarterly*, volume 42, number 2, Spring 1994, pp. 145-59.
family patterns, some parented alone, some in lesbian partnerships, others in communes. The impetus to have children in the 1980s was more individualised and self-centred than the motivation for service to the country which may have inspired women at the beginning of the century. For many women the birth of their infant was their most stunning achievement. Mira Crouch and Lenore Manderson concluded from their interviews of almost one hundred Australian women, that motherhood had become, in a theoretical, political and personal sense, a component of the 'feminine being' rather than designating a social position. Images in the media encouraged the desire to become a mother. Film stars, for instance, with enormous wealth and great beauty, became 'celebrity supermums' to be admired and emulated. These glamorous women who appeared to have everything, intimated that their babies gave them the best experience of their lives.

Despite the considerable change to the mother's position in society, idealized notions of motherhood have endured. Examinations of cultural images provide one way of understanding the enigma of a maternal role which has altered markedly, while in a fundamental way remaining constant. The cinema offers a source of information about images of motherhood, with depictions of mothering in action over several decades. While the representations and the reactions to them are necessarily complex and often contradictory, it is possible to trace patterns within the films of the changing attitudes towards mothers in society. Although the mother may not be the subject or protagonist in many films, she is represented frequently, and her behaviour and relationships with other family members can be closely examined.

In films, stereotypical representations are used as a device to enable the audience to make sense of the narrative. These representations are, perhaps, particularly important in

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issues of motherhood, as the mother frequently takes a minor role on screen and her behaviour is accepted as normal and largely unexamined. In order to challenge stereotypical depictions which can be unfair, inaccurate and oppressive, the images need to be investigated and assumptions about the role mapped out. It is this aspect of the pervasive cultural medium of feature films that my analysis attempts to clarify. As films offer a primary source of images over several decades, they can be understood best when placed in an historical context. Accordingly, the introductory chapter on the representation of motherhood on the Australian screen begins with a survey of the social history of mothering in Australia. In the next part of this chapter, the research design of the thesis is outlined. The final section of the chapter describes the remaining chapters in the research.

The Australian Family 1900 to 1988

The survey of the history of the family in modern Australia focuses on motherhood and provides an overview of social change. Tracing the impact of historical variations on the mothering experience from the mother's point-of-view, the review allows both the spectators and the films to be placed into context. At its base is the understanding that the maternal role is not invariable and that it alters with requirements of community, economy, technology and the mother's own desires and needs.

The arrangement whereby men were designated as breadwinners while women stayed at home to care for the family, received official sanction in 1907 with the adoption of a basic wage for men. The wage was calculated to sustain an 'average' man's family of wife and three children. As Beverley Kingston noted, Australia was one of the first societies to use its wage structure to attempt to keep women unemployed and in the home.7 The basic wage was paid to all working men regardless of their family situation, while women, even those who worked in the same or similar occupations, received a

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lesser amount. The acceptance of a higher wage for men had far reaching consequences for Australian society because it affirmed a patriarchal view of women's 'place'. Its assumption that women were responsible for domestic chores was supported by images that showed women constantly in the home.

Motherhood was frequently a special target for state intervention. Politicians, worried about the declining birthrate, introduced pronatalist policies in the first decades of the century. In 1912, a Maternity Bonus of five pounds was offered on the birth of each child. The state similarly intervened to establish infant and maternal health centres and campaigns to instruct mothers in hygiene and nutrition. At the time, cleanliness was emphasised as the primary requisite of good mothering. The objective was to reduce infant and maternal mortality in order to ensure a rising Australian population.

Apart from health issues, mothers were charged with the moral responsibility of raising adults who would be upright Australian citizens. Although their allegiance to the law and the nation was accepted as unquestionable, the mother's own sense of citizenship was tested on the outbreak of the First World War. Mothers, who had been exhorted to devote themselves to their children's welfare, were called on to encourage their sons to join up to support the men already fighting. Judith Smart noted that there was a strong, though small, group of females in the Women's Political Association and the Women's Peace Army during the War. These organisations signified opposition to nationalistic political campaigns and showed contempt for the 'men's business' of war.

10Judith Allen reported that the concern about infant mortality centred on providing good milk for the baby, educating working-class women and improving public sanitation. While abortion was illegal, Allen noted that abortionists were rarely prosecuted. She concluded, perhaps rather harshly, that turning a blind eye to the murder of unwanted babies, was patriarchy's way of allowing male sexual freedom. J. Allen, 'Octavius Beale re-considered: Infanticide, baby farming and abortion in NSW 1880-1939' in Sydney Labour History Group, *What Rough Beast? The State and Social Order in Australian History*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp. 111-29.
12Marilyn Lake 'Giving Birth to a New Nation', in *Creating a Nation* p. 214.
Despite Sol Encel's assertion that the housewife's position in Australia hardly changed between 1914 and 1939, many had moved into the workforce to assist with the war effort. The post-war reassertion of the female domestic role was greeted by some women with 'hostility and resentment'. Working at responsible jobs during the war, they had expected a greater political role in society at its end. Many were less than exuberant about the Housewives' Association and the 'exaltation of woman's traditional role as wife and mother'. They drew attention to influences which encouraged the move to domesticity and precluded mothers from public life. Political pressures included the introduction of child endowment and the ban on employment of married women in the Commonwealth Public Service.

Another challenge to domesticity came in the early 1920s with an alternative figure to the mother as a symbol of temperance and rectitude. Fashionable young women with bobbed hair and short dresses were to be seen in public, smoking and drinking alcohol. Barbara Cameron noted that husbands were reported to be annoyed and alarmed at the self-confidence and independence exhibited by their wives. The problems for fathers in the 'flapper' era in Australia, however, were short-lived, and as Anne Summers argued, did not herald women's sexual emancipation. By the middle of the decade, women in Australia had again taken their traditional place in the home, caring for the family members.

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16 Smart, 'The Panacea of Prohibition', p. 163.
19 Cameron, 'The flappers and the feminists', p. 265.
Increasingly, images of the mother came from a variety of sources and the period marked a rise in understanding of the way advertising could be creatively manipulated to appear impartial and informative. Commercial radio, introduced in the 1920s, used programmes aimed specifically at women to disseminate advertising for consumer goods as well as advice about housekeeping and child rearing. The creation of specialised women’s programmes on air segregated women in order to manipulate them as consumers. They had, perhaps, a serendipitous and rarely noted side-effect. Reinforcing the idea of ‘women as a group’ paved the way for the sisterhood which was crucial to the women’s movement in the late 1960s. Additionally, within the cinema world, it gave the opportunity for the special genre of ‘women’s films’.

With fewer children post-war and more leisure time, films were important to mothers. Females made up about seventy per cent of the Australian cinema audience. Perhaps in recognition of women’s particular interest, a female was included on the Censorship Board of the 1927 Royal Commission into Australian cinema, where issues about morality and the influence of film were considered. Filmmaking also attracted attention and there was a cohort of young women who moved into the industry. Most prominent were Lottie Lyell, Louise Lovely, and the McDonagh sisters who directed, produced and starred in several productions. Sally Speed pointed out that female involvement was limited to the years between 1921 and 1933. It was not until the 1970s that women in Australia were again involved in feature film production.

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21 Judith Allen related the lower average family size of married women (from 7 in the 1870s to 3 in the 1920s, to the purchase of labour-saving devices, private vehicles and homes, and to the increase in time available for entertainment. Allen, ‘Octavius Beale re-considered’, pp. 111-29.


23 Verhoeven, ‘The film I would like to make’, p. 145.

The affluence of the post-war period ended abruptly in 1929, when the Great Depression brought hardship to many families. While official directions from the Department of Public Health were free and available, some mothers were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to follow the advice about the infant's ideal dietary and living arrangements. Many families existed in appalling conditions with the mother's constant fear of becoming pregnant. While at this time there was no contraceptive pill, the low birth rate in the 1930s indicated that mothers controlled their pregnancies probably with abstinence, illegal terminations or spontaneous abortions brought on by ill-health. Despite governmental efforts, the birthrate fell to 1.66% in 1933, an all-time low compared with 2.7% in 1900, and 2.2% in the mid 1960s.\(^{25}\)

During the 1930s, mothers in the workforce on low wages struggled to augment their husband's pay or to provide the sole income for the family. They were castigated for taking men's jobs and, sometimes, even held responsible for causing the Depression.\(^{26}\) The scarcity of jobs reinforced the belief that a woman's place was in the home. There was a double grievance against mothers as Marilyn Lake remarked: 'Not only were women "destroying" men [by taking their jobs]; they were failing to produce in the field in which they were created to produce'.\(^{27}\) Women were meant to remain in their homes where cleanliness, piety and child rearing was to be their primary concern.

The guidelines for mothering altered suddenly and dramatically on the outbreak of World War Two. As in this 1943 advertisement, women were exhorted to move out of their homes and into a 'Victory job':

\[\text{What does it matter if the furniture does get a bit dusty...or the floors a bit dull. What does it matter—provided the man you love comes back sooner and alive:—} \]
\[\text{Come on housewife. Take a Victory job. You'll find it no harder than your house job. Easier perhaps. In fact, many war production factories, with their spic-and-span canteens, bright music}\]

\(^{27}\)Lake, 'Depression Dreaming', in *Creating a Nation*, p. 252.
The rather patronising tone trivialised the mother's contribution to society by individualising her objective to one of having her partner back with her. The advertisement provided an example of how quickly the official polemic shifted to fit the needs of war. After years of being told that the prime requisite of the maternal role was cleanliness and devotion to child care, this imperative was put aside for the new need to leave her home to go to work.

The War changed Australian society in a number of important ways. On a national level, overseas involvement and the threat of invasion lessened insularity and parochialism. From an individual citizen's perspective, war had marked the end of the Depression and brought jobs for both men and women. Working in factories for the war effort, women experienced new skills and responsibilities. In addition, many had increased power within the home where they had taken over as head of the family for the duration. Conceptions of female sexuality also underwent a transformation. Many of the one million American servicemen who visited Australia during the War formed relationships with local women. Stories of females enjoying affairs with men in uniform, proliferated.

After the War, as Aveling and Damousi reported, women were expected either to return to their role as wives or to work in 'women's industries'. Some mothers, Lake reported, did stay in the workforce, while others were happy to leave and return to the family in the hope of 'sexual and personal fulfilment'. In 1946, The Australian Women's Weekly

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28 Copy of an advertisement, courtesy La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria, quoted by Aveling & Damousi, Stepping Out of History, p. 149.
30 Aveling & Damousi, Stepping Out of History, p. 151.
31 Marilyn Lake, 'Freedom, Fear and the Family', in Creating a Nation, p. 265.
rather optimistically surveyed the scene and opined that women who had worked during the War and were now prepared to return to the home, would be better wives and citizens.\textsuperscript{32}

There was a post-war transformation of family life and relationships within marriage which Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle described as 'almost universal'. These included the move to the suburbs and the emergence of the modern housewife who expected 'domestic happiness based on marital compatibility and close relationships with...children'.\textsuperscript{33} Institutions combined to reinforce the new social structure. Business corporations for example sponsored advertisements in the media which promoted ideas of a better life after the deprivations of the Depression and War. Economic prosperity made owning a home possible and was central to every couple's suburban dream of sexual compatibility and shared pleasures. On the surface, the sexual division of labour remained constant: mothers were still the home makers, and fathers, the breadwinners. The figure of the mother had changed, however. An interest in public life stimulated by work and responsibilities during the War and the recognition of her sexuality introduced the mother's own desires and aspirations into a maternal role which had previously focused on devotion to the family.

For many mothers, life in the suburban nuclear family did not turn out to be as fulfilling as it had been hoped. Mortgage repayments meant that the husband worked for long hours, often at an inconvenient distance from home. The wife in turn was required to keep up to date with child-rearing, far from a 'web of kin and neighbourhood relationships'.\textsuperscript{34} Rather than advice from her own mother, post-war popular psychology, radio programmes, magazine articles and books provided information on the care for the mental and physical health of her children. While this development may have helped the


\textsuperscript{33}Game & Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', p. 96.

child, according to Jean Blackburn and Thelma Jackson, it was often detrimental to the
well-being of the mother, who was 'terrified of being accused of un-motherly attitudes'.
The result was that many housewives became frustrated in their own desires and often
over-involved with their children.\textsuperscript{35} Maushart described the housewife as 'financially
dependent, emotionally isolated, overworked but underutilised'.\textsuperscript{36} Inevitably, perhaps,
some mothers decided to take paid work, either to expand their interests or keep up with
the increasing demands of consumerism.

The 1950s, a time of full employment and economic prosperity, marked a further change
in the social position of women in Australia. Large numbers of married women entered
the workforce.\textsuperscript{37} Although often involved in menial employment which paid a pittance,
the economic contribution to the family helped to increase their authority. Further,
women had built up a considerable amount of expertise in running a household and in
making use of technology and labour saving devices. Their importance in child rearing,
as well as these factors, meant that many mothers began to challenge the father's
authority.\textsuperscript{38} In a 1957 study of nearly nine thousand adolescents in Sydney, W. F.
Connell determined that teenagers thought the most powerful influence on their lives
was their mother.\textsuperscript{39} Similarly, Dan Adler claimed that although the stereotypical
Australian image was male, the mother was the dominant family figure.\textsuperscript{40} Adler
compared families in Mexico and the United States with Australia, and concluded that
mothers in Australian families were the most powerful in making decisions and carrying
them out. He described the Australian family as a 'matriduxy'. His oft-quoted\textsuperscript{41} and

\textsuperscript{35}Jean Blackburn & Thelma Jackson, (eds), \textit{Australian Wives Today}, Victorian Fabian Society,
\textsuperscript{36}Maushart, \textit{The Mask of Motherhood}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{37}Encel et al., \textit{Women and Society}, 1975, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{38}Game & Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', pp. 80-102.
\textsuperscript{39}W.F. Connell et al., \textit{Growing Up in an Australian City: A Study of Adolescents in Sydney}, Australian
\textsuperscript{40}Dan L. Adler, 'Matriduxy in the Australian Family', in A.F. Davies & S. Encel, (eds), \textit{Australian
\textsuperscript{41}See S. Encel 'The Family', in A. F. Davies & S. Encel, (eds), \textit{Australian Society: A Sociological
Australian Patriarchal Family', in S. Encel, M. Barry, L. Bryson, M. de Lepervanche, T. Rowe & A.
pp. 113-69 and Encel et al., \textit{Women and Society}, pp. 54-5.
somewhat misleading conclusions were predicated on the authority of the mother in child care and control. In other areas, such as social activities and economic decisions, Adler conceded mother and father were involved equally. Although it may have exaggerated the mother's authority, Adler's research drew attention to the changes in the power structure of many families.

The mother's authority within the family, however, should not be overstated. Some were powerless and abused: Game and Pringle have described mothers who endured marital rape and physical assault. Others, with little individual freedom, were subjected to male domination as a 'natural' patriarchal right. While some mothers may have been forthright or autonomous, the institution of motherhood to which they belonged was generally disparaged. Mothers in the workforce were blamed for neglecting their children, while mothers who stayed at home were often considered dull and unintelligent: 'I'm only a housewife' was a common self-designation. In a response that has almost become a stereotype, some mothers, perhaps, from feelings of guilt and anxiety, resorted to drugs such as headache powders, tranquillisers or alcohol.

The availability in 1961 of the contraceptive pill had vast repercussions on the sexual freedom of both sexes. It facilitated social freedom and equality within the family. Although Australia quickly became one of the largest consumers of the Pill, it should not be forgotten that the Catholic Church forbade it. Catholic mothers, often in the poorest and largest families, used the Pill at their peril and many declined to do so. On the other hand, women who did, were able to plan their families and their careers. Encel has pointed out that the mother's physical condition and vigour improved with fewer pregnancies and a smaller family. As well, one could add the important improvement to women's mental health and autonomy in gaining control of her own reproductive life.

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42 Game & Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', p. 96.
43 Encel et al., Women and Society, p. 19.
Germaine Greer returned to Australia in 1972 with the message that women should not be content with domesticity. It was not long before the issues she raised began to be debated within the media, women's consciousness raising groups, and at home. Greer's polemic gave impetus to the growing women's liberation movement in Australia which had become interested in the writings from overseas from feminists such as Kate Millett, Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell. Attracting mostly white middle-class women, the movement argued for social and economic change throughout the community, particularly for wage parity\(^44\) and the establishment of shelters for women suffering physical abuse. The goal at the time was equality of the sexes which would raise women's subordinate position. Ann Curthoys, for instance, described her ideal society as one where there were 'no distinctions between men and women'.\(^45\) As well, the institution of motherhood came under scrutiny and as a consequence, perhaps, its fundamental concepts began to disintegrate. As Norma Grieve has pointed out, many women came to consider that motherhood was neither their primary goal nor was it necessary for their fulfilment.\(^46\) Some blamed their own mothers for accepting domesticity and the subservient position of females. The decade of the seventies was a turbulent time which witnessed men's increasing anxieties about the changes to the structure of the family.

Feminists found an outlet for their grievances in the documentary film industry during the 1970s. As Annette Blonski and Freda Freiberg noted, female filmmakers began to object to the representation of the woman's role as exclusively wife and mother.\(^47\) Filmmaker Jeni Thornley observed that it was a time when: 'many women were attracted to film as a means of disseminating feminist ideas and challenging traditional sexist


depictions of women that were rampant in the mass media. Women saw film as an ideal medium to spread their views and with government assistance, set up groups to make independent and experimental films. The Sydney Women's Film Group, established in 1971, for example, was instrumental in introducing contemporary feminist concerns to its filmmaking activities. By the end of the 1970s, many women had become proficient filmmakers and were attempting to raise consciousness in the community about women's oppression. Investigating the maternal role, they challenged the assumption of women's inevitable and sole responsibility for child care and domestic labour.

The dissatisfaction that many women felt with motherhood abated somewhat from the early 1980s. Mother-blame diminished as greater understanding of the mother's difficulties of child rearing came with the next generation's experience of having children of their own. It was still a conflictive and complex issue, although as Crouch and Manderson have shown, motherhood came to assume a new importance for women in political and personal areas. The idea of the mother being solely responsible for the child's 'physical, mental, social and emotional development' was replaced with a more equitable concept. In public life, for instance, problems like isolation, language, lack of money, single parenting, cultural difference and unemployment came to be seen as community problems. At the same time the pleasures of child rearing which often had been overlooked in the effort to reform the traditional family, were rediscovered.

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48 Jeni Thornley, 'Past, Present and Future: The Women's Film Fund', in Don't Shoot Darling!: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia, A. Blonski et al. (eds), Greenhouse, Richmond, Victoria, 1987, p. 62.
50 The documentary was seen as the most effective genre, for instance: Meg Stewart's They Reckon a Woman's World's Just It and a Bit (1977), Feminist Film Workers' As a Matter Of Fact—A Film About Abortion (1979) and Jeni Thornley's Maidens (1978).
51 Crouch & Manderson, New Motherhood, p. 10.
The joy in mothering in a more understanding community was not without problems.\textsuperscript{54} Women, with paid work outside the home discovered that their responsibility for domestic labour had not lessened. The much-vaunted shared parenting of the seventies had turned out for most, to be an unattainable myth. In 1982, sociologist, Kathryn Backett completed fieldwork interviews with a series of married couples in Scotland. Typically, she found that 'The mother had the overall responsibility for the organisation of the home and children, with the father being regarded as the helper'.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly in Australia, Maushart has commented, that the revolution in contemporary family life meant more work for the mother with little meaningful recognition of her contribution.\textsuperscript{56} From a different perspective, the celebration of motherhood had acclaimed it so unreservedly, that as Christine Everingham remarked, it ignored those women who did not wish to be mothers.\textsuperscript{57} Although women affirmed the joy of mothering a child and their unique ability and difference in giving birth, the difficulties in the actual experience of child rearing were sometimes overlooked.\textsuperscript{58}

The dynamic changes to traditional concepts in the 1970s and again in the 1980s stimulated interest in motherhood. Markets for films dealing with family situations increased. During the 1980s, women began to enter the feature film industry as directors, producers and screenwriters. Scott Murray has claimed that female directors took a depressing view of human relationships, citing the example of Gillian Armstrong in \textit{My Brilliant Career} (1979) and \textit{Hightide} (1987). Showing a lack of awareness of what was going on for women in the 1970s, Murray was critical of Armstrong's


\textsuperscript{56}Maushart, \textit{The Mask of Motherhood}, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{57}Christine Everingham, \textit{Motherhood and Modernity: An Investigation Into the National Dimension of Mothering}, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{58}Feminist Sara Ruddick did look at the actual mothering experience and noted that her respondents confessed that they were struggling with problems with the children or with problems the society presents to their children. S. Ruddick, 'Thinking mothers conceiving birth' in D. Bassin, M. Honey & M.M. Kaplan, (eds), \textit{Representations of Motherhood}, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 33.
portrayal of the women's view of men as an 'inhibiting force'. His evaluation of the character of the eponymous mother in Glenda Hambly's *Fran* (1985) was also perfunctory. He commented on her 'perversely distrustful attitude to men', although it was precisely the opposite failing that caused Fran so much trouble. Despite the persistence of male predominance, women's inroad into filmmaking was reflected in the growing complexity of the mother's role in film narratives.

The late-century mother is in many ways different from her earlier counterpart. For the first half of the century, the mother mostly worked within the home with her infant's health a major preoccupation. In the last decades, many mothers were concerned with managing a public career and attending to domestic responsibilities. The maternal role in Australian family life has undergone a transformation which has been influenced by government policies, technological developments, economic fluctuations, community expectations and the growing recognition of the mother's own proclivities and desires. The shifts were clear and, perhaps, surprising considering that motherhood has often been thought of as inevitable and unchanging.

**Research Design**

The broad endeavour of my research is to observe how mothers have been represented on the Australian screen. The study reaches from the early days of cinema at the beginning of the century, to the year of the bicentenary, in 1988. The foundation of contemporary family life was laid in this period. This is an appropriate date to end the analysis because it signalled a watershed in Australian history. Consideration of the repercussions of the bicentenary on Australian films would raise complex issues of interpretation beyond the scope of this thesis. Additionally, my focus has chiefly been on representation in the narrative and I have not included influences of sound, camera

60Murray, 'Australian Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s', p. 125. Fran wanted the relationship with her husband to continue, even after he had savagely beaten her. She then found a lover, whom she trusted, with disastrous consequences as he sexually abused her young daughter.
positions and lighting in the analysis. I have noted, however, some effects where they were a particular and meaningful addition to the narrative.

Although no specific investigation so far has covered the representation of motherhood in Australian cinema, books with general information on feature films have been helpful. The foremost reference work on the history of Australian film from 1900 to 1977, came from Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, whose synopses and historical information I have used extensively.\(^1\) A close-to-companion volume, edited by Scott Murray, covered the balance of the period from 1978 to 1988.\(^2\) Using the reviews in these volumes, I initially selected those films which listed a mother in the cast of characters. It was, perhaps, surprising that of more than seven hundred films cited, only about two hundred included a mother acting in any capacity. In very few was she the focus of the story. Despite her omission from the action of the narrative, it was hinted in some of the synopses that she had an important part in the diegesis, if only as a catalyst or as a stabilising influence for other characters. Other synopses did not list a mother in the cast, although their story, perhaps, because of a family focus, suggested the presence of a mother. These I included as well.

My greatest difficulty in carrying out the research was to obtain the early films. Very few made before 1927 remain intact. The year 1927 was significant as it marked the release of Norman Dawn's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, where over two tonnes of film were burnt to create a fire on a ship for a scene in the film. As William Routt noted regretfully: 'who knows how many early Australian and foreign classics [were destroyed]?'\(^3\) Apart from other similar incidents of wilful burning,\(^4\) many films have

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\(^4\) The pattern continued, as veteran filmmaker Ken G. Hall reported with no hint of regret, that in a bushfire scene in his 1933 film, *The Squatter's Daughter*, 'We left nothing to chance with that fire, lacing the scrub and tree trunks with thousands of feet of old film and then spraying the lot with old sump oil…'. K.G. Hall, *Australian Film: The Inside Story*, Summit, Sydney, 1980, (1977), p. 61.
disintegrated owing to the volatility of the nitrate material of which they were composed. Of the fifty-one films from 1900 to 1926 which were of interest because of the mother role, only eighteen were still available. Most of these were incomplete, some only having a few valuable surviving minutes. From 1927 onwards, however, almost all the films needed were available. Some had been restored and preserved by the National Film and Sound Archive, others were owned and broadcast occasionally by television stations or were available for hire on video cassettes.

I viewed nearly three hundred films and constructed the synopses of the missing ones from photographic stills, reviews and articles in early journals such as *The Theatre Magazine*, *Smith's Weekly*, *The Green Room*, *Everyone's* and *The Picture Show*. While it was obvious that the image of the mother had changed over the years, both in her appearance and her behaviour, a more nuanced picture began to surface. The films displayed different facets of the mother's life and portrayed particular aspects of her behaviour. For instance, the appearance of a bad mother in films during the 1970s was so extraordinary, it drew attention to the nurturing and kind screen mothers of other decades. Likewise, when a baby girl born in a film in the 1980s came as a surprise, it prompted questions of why I was anticipating a boy. Other unexpected representations became evident. While the mother's association with the husband might seem central to the narrative, in many films it was clear that most of her time was spent with her daughter. Additionally, there was a transformation in the depiction of the mother's sexuality. The chaste mother at the beginning of the century was an amazing contrast to the passionate adulterous woman in recent films. Film genres were not of great assistance in explicating issues of motherhood, as the output of Australian film is neither prolific nor particularly formulaic. There was one genre, however, that aroused interest. Remembering pioneering tales of the hardships that women faced in early colonial days,

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65 An exception was the McDonagh sisters' *Two Minutes Silence* (1933), of which no trace remains.
66 The National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra ACT has a branch office in Acheson Street, Crows Nest which houses a collection of otherwise unavailable films.
I expected the mother to be included in bush films. Her physical absence but emotional presence raised questions about where she might be found in the narrative.

The organisational patterns of the mother's portrayal which emerged after viewing the films, suggested that areas of maternal behaviour could be divided into the following groups: the good mother, the birth of a child, the relationship with the daughter, maternal sexuality, the unwed mother, and the mother in the bush. These categories, with the addition of a summary of theoretical research on motherhood, formed the chapters of the thesis.

The Layout of the Thesis

The review of literature in the second chapter specifically relates to motherhood and draws on an eclectic mixture of research from psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist viewpoints. Theories of motherhood, although primarily from the point-of-view of European and American scholars, are used to underpin the Australian historical framework with the aim of broadening the base of knowledge about the maternal role in our society. Additionally, overseas research which focuses on the way filmmakers have represented the mother on screen and importantly, the audience response, forms the final part of the chapter.

The 'good mother' has been seen as the linchpin of family life. The third chapter examines a number of films and focuses on an exploration of the behaviour of the mother as nurturer. There is a frequent expectation that the mother, while not taking part in the action of the narrative, has responsibility for raising the family. Her relationship with her children is often her main contribution to the film. Concepts about her maternal role and what makes a good mother are so 'naturalised' that they almost escape notice. Close examination of the films, however, can determine patterns in her role which can be explained by contemporary historical events. As well, information about attitudes in
society can be gathered from the way that she is judged by the outcome of the narrative, in terms of whether her actions are punished or rewarded.

Psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist theoreticians have long sought to understand sexual and gender difference. In polarised accounts, sexual roles have been explained as the result of either biological predisposition or cultural manipulation. Research which relied on biological explanations has argued for an inherited and unchangeable connection, while cultural theories pointed to societal influences on the growing child. The fourth chapter explores how films incorporate the sex of the newborn child into the narrative. Birth is always a significant event in films and how the infant is received and what difference its sex makes to the life of the mother can be clearly discerned. This part of the research may challenge or reinforce theories of sexual difference by its interpretation of the platitude 'Congratulations it's a boy!'

The mother's relationship with her daughter has a particular and special importance for the process of mothering. Both the biological connection and the cycle wherein the daughter learns about the mothering experience from her mother, are crucial in determining whether, and in what way, she herself will mother. Psychoanalysts have drawn attention to the manner in which mothers treat boys and girls differently and the consequent repercussions for the child's autonomy and independence. Sociologists have pointed out the imitative behaviour of young daughters and the bonding with the mother in later years, particularly through the daughter's own pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing. Individual feminists have questioned their own maternal relationship, some finding love and similarity with their mothers, others finding fault and difference. The fifth chapter considers how films deal with the crucial association of mother and daughter and how the depiction compares with prevailing theoretical discourses.

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67 See for example, the work of Melanie Klein, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein.
68 See for example the work of Adrienne Rich, Jessie Bernard and Lucy Fischer.
69 See for example, the work of Jane Flax, Sara Ruddick and Lynne Segal.
In general, images of the mother in society overlook her sexual desires and needs. While the sexuality of young women is frequently displayed in the media, the possibility that a mother could be desirable or desiring is rarely considered. Descriptions and images of the sexual woman as a whore have helped to consolidate the mother's exclusion from the realm of sexuality. Some writers have suggested that this has served the patriarchal end\textsuperscript{70} of keeping women safely under control and within the home.\textsuperscript{71} The sixth chapter identifies the way films portray the mother's sexuality, how it is proscribed and what happens if it is 'unleashed'.

Traditionally, the Australian bush provided the setting in which the enduring male pitted himself against the rigours of isolated rural life. Although a myth from the early days of white settlement, this image has persisted to the present and is an integral part of national identity. There has been no place set aside for women in this concept, yet we know that women, although in the minority in early settlement, were not only there, but were necessary for the maintenance of daily life. Mothers were vital to the colony. They were responsible for the care of the children and often worked with men in hard labour under trying conditions. Stories about the bush have been at the heart of many film narratives. The seventh chapter investigates some of these in order to locate the women's place.

The chapters consider representations in films of good mothers, births, mothers and daughters, mothers' sexuality and the place of mothers in the bush, with a detailed summary and individual conclusion. The final chapter, the eighth, will point to the overall significance of the research and its location within women's experience and the understanding of motherhood.

\textsuperscript{70}Patriarchy in this research means the organisation of the social relations between men and women in western society where men have power and women are oppressed.

\textsuperscript{71}See for example, the work of Betsy Wearing, Shulamith Firestone and Iris Young.