Becoming a 'Villa Girl': Youth Culture and the Student Experience at a Single-Sex Private School in Montreal, 1916-1980

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ABSTRACT

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Lisa Moore

Historians have often characterized Catholic private schools for girls exclusively as privileged, homogenous, and strictly regulated institutions that provide little insight into the lived experiences of female adolescents. The following study aims to challenge this perception by providing a microhistorical analysis of the youth culture that thrived at Villa Maria, an all-girls private school in Montreal, from 1916 to 1980. While the private school is acknowledged as a socializing force that influenced students' development, this examination demonstrates that teenage girls actively produced meaningful adolescent experiences within institutional settings. Far from assuming positions of passivity, students at Villa Maria played an important role in shaping and transforming their school. More specifically, this study illustrates the ways in which students borrowed from the normative messages of their superiors, from popular culture, and even from broader social changes occurring within Quebec society to produce a youth culture that reflected their age-based needs and desires and that often challenged institutional values. By foregrounding Villa girls' daily rituals and activities as the foundational basis of this youth culture, this study also tests conventional notions of historical agency, which have largely excluded young women as historical actors. Through its investigation of the student experience at Villa Maria during the twentieth century, this analysis questions established understandings of private schools and calls for the reconsideration of educational institutions as spaces for observing female adolescent agency.

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Introduction

Located on a vast estate [1] that borders Montreal's prestigious neighbourhood of Westmount, Villa Maria was founded in 1854 by the Congregation of Notre-Dame, a Catholic order of nuns dedicated to the education of young women.[2] Operating as a convent boarding school, Villa Maria initially served the interests of privileged girls, preparing them for arguably the only paths available to young respectable women at the time: the novitiate and motherhood.[3] In its early days, the student population consisted of the daughters of francophone and anglophone elites, including those from wealthy American and Canadian families. As a result of its religious mores and elite reputation, the school's ethos was characterized by Catholic morality and bourgeois femininity.[4] This philosophy prevailed well into the twentieth century, even as the Villa began to admit day scholars and expanded its curriculum to include more modern subjects. While educational advancements and attempts at modernization were made in the late 1940s and 1950s, the school continued to uphold conservative views of religious instruction, social class, and the role of women in society.[5]

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[1] In 1795, the Décarie family sold its property to James Monk, Chief Justice of Lower Canada. In 1844, Monk's family leased the estate to the Crown, which in turn used the property to house several governor generals. Ten years later, the Congrégation purchased the estate with the goal of transforming it into a convent school for privileged girls. For more on the estate's history, see Helen Lanthier, *Monklands Then, Villa Maria Now: The Story of a Convent School Which Grew from the Estate of Sir James Monk to a Modern, Private High School* (Montreal: Congregation of Notre-Dame, 2004), 1-10.

[2] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 12.

[3] Ibid., 12, 16; It is important to note that at the time, the Congrégation of Notre-Dame offered arguably the best education available to young women in Quebec. In fact, choosing the novitiate provided many women with an alternative to marriage and motherhood. For more on this, see Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).

[4] Ibid., 15-16.

[5] Ibid., 29-30.

The 1960s ushered in major changes at Villa Maria, especially as a result of the reforms that came out of the Quiet Revolution. The government introduced new regulations that obliged all private schools to offer a standardized curriculum and to update their facilities.[6] In 1966, the Congregation chose to close the Villa's doors because it felt it could not make the necessary changes, a decision that was overturned due to the diligence of parents and teachers who were opposed to the school's closure. By the early 1970s, boarders were no longer admitted and the primary school was phased out. As a result, Villa Maria became an exclusive private high school for adolescent girls.[7] Although the Villa successfully modernized its curriculum and scaled down on religious events, school authorities saw it important to ensure that a middle-class student population was maintained well into the 1970s.

Villa Maria, as it existed in the twentieth century, appeared to fit the typical definition of a private school for girls: a conservative, homogenous institution that catered almost exclusively to white middle-class and elite clienteles. While not unfounded, these characterizations have often dictated how scholars present the student experience at private schools, which in turn has created a one-dimensional understanding of these institutions. More particularly, privately educated girls have often been dismissed as passive recipients of adult-regulated messages and institutionally sanctioned values. The purpose of my research is to provide an alternative view of private education for girls by exploring what it meant to be a student at Villa Maria from 1915 to 1980. More specifically, I wish to demonstrate that twentieth-century Villa girls actively produced a student culture of their own. In doing so, I aim to improve the existing historiography on women's education in Quebec, which has often ignored the importance of youth agency and the impact that girls have had on their schools.

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[6] See Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 292; His work is an extensive examination of the Quiet Revolution, especially in terms of the movement's Catholic foundations, as well as the implications it had for the Catholic Church as a powerful social structure in the province; Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 208-209.

[7] Ibid., 208.

Historiography

The research that I have undertaken fits within three existing historiographies: general institutional histories of education in Quebec, the history of female education in Quebec, and Canadian studies of adolescence and youth culture. Historical studies of Quebec education are typically broad syntheses that focus primarily on Catholic public schooling, such as Louis-Philippe Audet's *Le Système scolaire du Québec: Organisation et fonctionnement*[8] and *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec, 1608-1971.*[9] Education historian Andrée Dufour has produced the most recent analysis of the history of education in Quebec, entitled *Histoire de l'éducation au Québec.*[10] A short survey, the book provides a general examination of education in the province from 1635 to 1997. However, there are only two brief discussions of private education: in chapter five, she explains how the 1960s government reforms extended subsidies to private institutions and in chapter six, she outlines recent debates over the merits of public versus private schooling. Moreover, while she provides a substantial analysis of girls' education in Quebec, she does not discuss them within the context of private institutional settings. Therefore, while Dufour's analysis is useful for its general history of education in Quebec, it fails to provide a comprehensive picture of private schooling in the province.

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[8] Louis-Philippe Audet, *Le Système scolaire du Québec: Organisation et fonctionnement* (Monteal: Beauchemin, 1969).

[9] Louis-Philippe Audet, *Histoire de l'enseignement au Québec, 1608-1971* (Montreal: Holt, Rinehart, et Winston, 1971).

[10] Andrée Dufour, *Histoire de l'éducation au Québec* (Montreal: Boréal, 1997).

Perhaps more relevant is Louise Bienvenue and Christine Hudon's recent work on the development of masculine identities in Quebec's classical colleges for young men.[11] In addition to illustrating the nature of private education for boys in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the authors examine the experiences of the students themselves to construct their analysis, something that other historians of Quebec education have neglected to attempt. In a series of articles, Bienvenue and Hudon consider the socialization of boys and the development of masculine identity through the creation of friendships and the transgression of rules, both of which provide a comprehensive picture of the collège classique and how students navigated its environment.[12] However, the authors focus exclusively on the experiences of male students, calling attention to the absence of historical studies that examine the private education of girls.

The study of female education in Quebec emerged in the 1980s and 1990s with the work of feminist historians like Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid. The early historiography is characterized by a social regulation model that frames female education as a project for shaping girls into representations of bourgeois femininity. One of the few syntheses is Dumont's historical booklet *Girls' Schooling in Quebec, 1639-1960*, which covers the history of female education from the pioneering work of religious women like Marguerite Bourgeoys and Marie de l'Incarnation in New France to the educational reforms of the 1960s. However, the pamphlet provides only a cursory analysis of Catholic schooling for girls in Quebec.[13]

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[11] Louise Bienvenue and Christine Hudon, "Entre franche camaraderie et amours socratiques: L'espace troublé et ténu des amitiés masculines dans les collèges classiques, 1840-1960," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 57.4 (2004): 481-507; Louise Bienvenue and Christine Hudon, " 'Pour devenir homme, tu transgresseras…' Quelques enjeux de la socialisation masculine dans les collèges classiques québécois (1880-1939)," *Canadian Historical Review* 86.3 (Sept. 2005): 485-511.

[12] Ibid.

A more extensive discussion of the history of Catholic boarding schools for girls can be found in Dumont and Fahmy-Eid's *Les Couventines: L'éducation des filles au Québec dans les congrégations religieuses enseignantes, 1840-1960*.[14] A collection of essays written by the authors and several contributors, the book argues that the religious women tasked with running these institutions constructed a controlled social world based on religious and conservative ideas of femininity, designed to mold students into model wives and mothers. The authors provide an especially useful discussion of the students and their lives at the boarding school within this context, examining how the nuns strictly regulated the students' living environments, activities, and newspapers. However, Dumont and Fahmy-Eid offer little insight into the agency of these students and fail to uncover their voices, stating only that oral history can potentially fill in these gaps.[15] Providing a one-sided analysis of female education, the authors neglect to consider how the young women that attended private Catholic institutions may have developed their own identities and influenced their school's cultural environments through age- and gender-specific practices.

Marie-Eve Harbec's M.A. thesis "L'éducation 'idéale' dans un monde 'idéal': le Dunham Ladies' College/St. Helen's School et l'élite anglicane du diocèse de Montréal (1870- 1930)" provides a more nuanced examination of private education for girls in the province through its discussion of the Dunham Ladies' College in the Eastern

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[13] Micheline Dumont, *Girls' Schooling in Quebec, 1639-1960* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1990).

[14] Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines: L'éducation des filles au Québec dans les congrégations religieuses enseignantes, 1840-1960* (Montreal: Boréal, 1986).

[15] Ibid., 66.

Townships.[16] Harbec uses the Dunham Ladies' College as a case study to demonstrate the Montreal Anglican Diocese's concerns following the Church's disestablishment, arguing that the Anglican elite attempted to use the school as a means of preserving their conservative values by promoting an Anglican ideal of femininity.[17] Her discussion is especially useful for what it reveals about the private education of young Anglican women, providing a rich description of the religious ceremonies, the 'ladylike' activities, and the gendered lessons in which the girls took part. However, Harbec relegates the students of the Dunham Ladies' College to passive positions, framing her work instead from the perspective of the Anglican elite who managed the college. As a result, she fails to uncover the voices of the students themselves and the agency they may have demonstrated in shaping their school experiences.

In addition to this selection of scholarly work on the history of education in Quebec, there exists an in-house study on the history of Villa Maria. In *Monklands Then, Villa Maria Now*, a souvenir book for Villa Maria's 150th anniversary, former Villa teacher Helen Lanthier traces the school's evolution from a convent boarding school to a modern secondary institution for girls.[18] While the book lacks a critical assessment of the Villa's history, it provides valuable insight into student-teacher interactions and into the ways that religion influenced youth culture at the Villa. That said, Lanthier advances a biased view, admitting in her concluding remarks that she chose not to write about any negative aspects of the school's past.[19] Therefore, her discussion of student experiences must be read critically, since the positive, even celebratory, representation of the school's history eliminates potential illustrations of resistance.

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[16] Marie-Ève Harbec, "L'éducation 'idéale' dans un monde 'idéal': le Dunham Ladies' College/St. Helen's School et l'élite anglicane du diocèse de Montréal (1870- 1930)" (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 2001); see also Marie-Ève Harbec, "The Ideal Education to Construct an Ideal World: The Dunham Ladies' College and the Anglican Elite of the Montreal Diocese, 1860-1913," in *Negotiating Identities in 19th- and 20th-Century Montreal: A Collection of Essays by the Montreal History Group*, ed. Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers, 149-174 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

[17] Ibid., 149.

[18] Lanthier, *Monklands Then.*

Because few Canadian studies on the history of education employ youth culture as an analytical tool, I have examined the works of scholars that use concepts like adolescence and youth identity to frame their analyses. For instance, in *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950*, historian Cynthia Comacchio offers an examination of adolescence in Canada from 1920 to 1950, looking at how youth negotiated their teenage years within a nation that was also undergoing a process of development.[20] Her analysis focuses particular attention on the modern Canadian high school, examining the ways in which adults used the institution as a tool for exercising power over and regulating the activities of adolescents.[21] Comacchio illustrates the high school as a socializing structure, calling attention to its importance in managing adolescent pastimes and shaping teens' civic and social identities. However, she says little in terms of how adolescents engaged in their own cultural practices, which speaks to the need for more in-depth analyses of student agency.

In *Impatient d'être soi-même: Les étudiants montréalais, 1895-1960*,[22] Karine Hébert frames her discussion of university students by using youth identity as a conceptual tool. Comparing Université de Montréal and McGill University students from 1900 to 1958, Hébert argues that despite their linguistic differences, students at both schools adopted three forms of identity during the period. From 1900 to 1920, they accepted the normative messages of their superiors who viewed them as “tomorrow’s elite.” From 1920 to the mid 1930s, they identified themselves through a generational framework, defining their relationship with the older generation in oppositional terms. And from the mid 1930s to the end of the 1950s, students at both schools identified themselves as global citizens who desired a say in social and political matters.[23] In her discussion of identity formation among university students through ritualized activities like clubs and newspapers, Hébert demonstrates that young adults were not only subjected to the power of their elders but also negotiated their own lived experiences and social worlds.

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[19] Ibid., 270.

[20] Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 1, 3.

[21] Ibid., 99-100.

[22] Karine Hébert, *Impatient d'être soi-même: Les étudiants Montréalais, 1895-1960* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2008).

In her M.A. Original Research Paper “The World of Westmount High School,”[24] Aretha Heenan analyzes youth culture at Westmount High School during the 1960s, arguing that the students’ cultural practices were shaped not by the social climate of 1960s Quebec but by the institution itself.[25] One of the few Canadian scholars to employ youth culture as an analytical tool, Heenan demonstrates that adolescent activities were not simply institutionally regulated projects but rather cultural practices that students themselves produced and engaged in. What Hébert and Heenan’s studies illustrate is that identity and youth culture are both valuable concepts for understanding the lived experiences of students in secondary and post-secondary institutions. They also reveal the notable lack of Quebec and Canadian scholarship on the culture of *female students*.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Aretha Heenan, “The World of Westmount High School: Dating, Leisure, Space and the Meanings of Youth Experience in a Montreal Anglophone Community in the 1960s,” (M.A. Original Research Paper, Concordia University, 2012).

[25] Ibid., 3-4.

Theoretical Framework

To conceptualize this historical analysis of private education for girls at Villa Maria, I employ youth culture and girls' culture as theoretical frameworks. Youth culture was borne out of G. Stanley Hall's conceptualization of adolescence, in which he identified the life stage as a new method for understanding the transition between childhood and adulthood.[26] While this definition acknowledges adolescence as a life stage in its own right, it consigns teens to passive positions through which institutional programs and parental initiatives prepare them for adulthood.

In response to this, British sociologists, who were among the first to employ youth culture as an analytical tool, argued that adolescents were not simply acted upon but rather produced and engaged in their own cultural practices.[27] However, these scholars were preoccupied with class, concluding that social tensions were the deciding factor in the creation of youth cultures among working-class boys.[28] Most sociologists of youth culture also overlooked the existence of girls' cultures, arguing that youth culture was an inherently masculine creation.[29] Feminist sociologist Angela McRobbie attempted to remedy this androcentric view in her examination of Birmingham's teenaged girls, calling attention to the absence of literature on female youth cultures and emphasizing their importance in understanding gender relations.[30]

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[26] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Pyschology and Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, Vol. 1 (London: Elibron Classics Series, 2005).

[27] Mary Bucholtz, "Youth and Cultural Practice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 536-537; As part of her argument for the use of anthropology in the study of youth culture, Bucholtz provides a critical analysis of the leading sociologists' work on the subject.

[28] Ibid., 537.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (London: MacMillan, 1991).

During the 1990s, historians began to employ youth culture as a concept for understanding adolescents. However, they discounted the work of sociologists due to their fixation with class as well as their lack of historical evidence and analysis.[31] While sociologists broke new ground by using youth culture to redefine adolescence, historians went further by applying the concept to *all* youths, and not simply to working-class boys. For example, in *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-1970*, David Fowler advocated for the study of middle-class youths, arguing that despite playing an important role in shaping British youth culture, their contributions had largely been overlooked.[32] Moreover, in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, historians Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard noted the importance of gender and ethnicity in the production of youth cultures.[33] They also emphasized the role of institutions, arguing that schools and other supervised spaces offered teens opportunities to unite over common interests and experiences.[34] For this project, historians' definition of youth culture is an appropriate choice because it upholds the notion that *all* adolescents display agency in their daily lives, negotiating the restrictions placed on them by adults and engaging in age-, ethnic-, and gender- specific cultural practices.

Historians' of youth culture have provided a strong foundational basis for the study of adolescent agency. However, they consider age as the most important factor unifying adolescents. A study of girls' culture adds a second, meaningful layer to the study of youths in its consideration of gender. As feminist scholar Sherry Inness explains, girls have been subjected to a specific set of limitations that are dictated not only by their age but also by their gender, thus explaining the necessity of considering girls' culture as its own conceptual entity.[35] In fact, feminist historians Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris argue for the use of girls' culture in the study of female adolescents because it removes them from the margins, showcasing instead the ways in which they use age- *and* gender-specific activities to negotiate adult-imposed limitations.[36] For this reason, the present study will adhere to the broad definition of youth culture employed by historians while considering the more nuanced lens that a study of girls' culture offers. Since my research focuses on the experiences of 12 to 17 year olds, I have also adopted Sherry Inness's broad definition of a "girl," which includes preteens and adolescents.[37]

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[31] David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-1970* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[32] Ibid., 9.

[33] Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard, eds, *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[34] Ibid., 8.

Youth culture and girls' culture, as concepts applied to the private education of teenaged girls at Villa Maria, reveal the ways in which adults regulated student activities and behaviours, and more importantly, demonstrate how the girls themselves produced their own culture. More specifically, it allows their rituals, activities, and creative outlets to be perceived not solely as institutionally regulated practices but also as manifestations of a student culture. Within this study, I use youth culture, girls' culture, and student culture interchangeably, all of which denote the process that teenagers undertake to create meaningful adolescent experiences.

In addition to applying youth culture and girls' culture as analytical tools, I also employ a specific definition of agency. Historical agency has most often been described as the collective action of individuals, and these usually men, in response to some form of conflict or oppression. However, feminist scholars and historians of children and youth have worked to redefine common perceptions of this concept. In her work on the history of European girlhood during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mary Jo Maynes argues that normative definitions of historical agency do not account for the voiceless and marginalized groups who rarely play major roles in historical events, which is especially problematic for analyses of adolescent female agency.[38] She asks, "how […] are we to understand the agency of girls in history" when "many ordinary understandings of agency and power simply do not apply?"[39] In response, Maynes calls for a feminist approach since it employs the daily activities of women as indicators of agency.[40] It is this definition that I intend to apply to my analysis of youth culture at Villa Maria. More specifically, observing agency in the daily lives of the students, especially in their rituals, activities, and various creative outlets, counterbalances the tendency of many historians to view historical agency as a primarily male practice that is produced only through conflict. What will result from employing these concepts – youth culture, girls' culture, and agency – as methods of historical analysis is a confirmation that studies of private schools can offer more to historians than the stereotypes that often characterize them.

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[35] Sherrie A. Inness, ed, *Delinquents & Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 2.
[36] Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris, eds, *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: The Twentieth Century Reader* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 6.
[37] Inness, *Delinquents & Debutantes*, 3.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

An examination of the girls' experiences at the Villa during the twentieth century can provide a microhistorical analysis of student culture as it was produced in a private, institutional setting. I have chosen to situate this case study within the twentieth century because I wish to illustrate how Villa Maria's students responded to the various changes that occurred in Quebec society during this period. The year 1916 serves as a convenient starting point because it marks the school's adoption of a new pedagogical program, called the cours Lettres-Sciences,[41] which was created by Catholic educational authorities and was used by private schools until the late 1950s. This analysis is divided chronologically into three sections: 1916 to 1946, 1947 to 1965, and 1966 to 1980. These boundaries were chosen because they coincide with the implementation of various educational reforms, which played a role in altering the dynamics of the student culture. Moreover, I chose to end this case study in 1980 because I wish to examine how the changes occurring in the 1960s and 1970s impacted Villa Maria and its student population. Concluding this analysis in 1980 also allows me to expand on the existing historiography of female education in Quebec, which does not look further than 1960 in its consideration of girls' schooling.

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[38] Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," 116.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

In order to undertake this examination, several questions must be answered. First, to what extent did the rigidity of a private, religious, and single-sex institution influence the student culture at the Villa? Second, what role did the sheltering nature of boarding play? Third, how did Villa girls respond to the normative messages and gendered parameters placed on them by the school administration and how did these responses change over time? Fourth, did they accept these messages wholeheartedly or was the appropriation and resistance of these limitations commonplace? Finally, did language and ethnicity influence the nature of their student culture?

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[41] The Lettres-Sciences program will be discussed in more detail in chapter one.

In response to the first two questions, I hypothesize that while institutional rules and values influenced the students' behaviours and activities, the girls were equally active in shaping their school's ethos through the production of their own cultural practices. In fact, the student culture that existed at the Villa evolved in tandem with the school's attempts and failures to modernize, causing harmony and tension at different moments as students began to push for more freedom. This becomes especially apparent when one considers the role that boarding played in the students' daily lives; the culture that existed during the times of mandatory boarding was much more subdued than when it became optional in the late 1940s, a change that was influenced by the students' outward disapproval of the rule.

The next questions generate different responses when they are applied to different periods within the outlined time frame. During the interwar period, the student culture that existed at the Villa was institutionally sanctioned and reflected the values of parents and school administrators. Students accommodated their superiors' normative messages and applied them to their own age- and gender-specific activities and practices. Following the Second World War until the mid-1960s, the end of mandatory boarding meant an increase in independence for students, which led to a culture increasingly dictated by external forces, including popular culture. However, the school had modernized very little in terms of its preoccupation with religious education, its views of women's roles in society, and its concern for status and privilege. As a result, the student culture often clashed with institutional values and rules. During the mid-1960s to 1980, in the wake of major education reforms, the Villa undertook a serious initiative to modernize but maintained a Christian attitude and an ethos centered on middle-class values. While the students accommodated much of this philosophy, they worked within constructed parameters to engage in adolescent activities that were meaningful to them.

The last question is also contingent on the time period to which it is applied. Prior to World War II, students identified themselves as French Canadian, English, Irish, and Scottish as opposed to Canadian, often forming peer groups based on these national affiliations. For the most part, though, the student population of the first two periods was homogenous and the interaction between French- and English-speaking students was more fluid and consistent. Language and ethnicity only began to play a significant role in shaping the student culture during the late 1960s and 1970s, as girls of different ethnic backgrounds began to attend the Villa and students became increasingly divided among linguistic lines.

Methodology & Sources

In order to test the assumption that Villa's students actively shaped their school environment through their participation in specific cultural practices, I conducted an in-depth analysis of relevant textual sources and carried out a series of interviews with alumnae. I examined official administrative sources and student-authored documents to obtain a comprehensive picture of student life at the school. To complement these written sources, I employed the oral history method of interviewing to generate accounts of former students' school experiences.

Historians of adolescence and childhood agree that studying youth, especially girls, is a difficult task because adults have penned most of the documents that end up in the archives. As a result, scholars have not only been plagued by an absence of student-authored source material, many have also taken documents written by adults at face value, basing their analyses on the ways in which adults attempted to control or shape student identities.[42] That said, adult-authored sources are still important, especially since their descriptions of school routines and activities shed light on the environment in which girls were educated. Moreover, a critical examination of the sources produced by girls themselves - in which documents are read for ambiguities, silences, and indications of adult supervision - can shed valuable light on the experiences of students.[43] Three types of documents were especially useful for this analysis: the Villa's annals, the graduate autobiographies, and student publications.

In the annals, the Villa's mothers superior logged an almost daily account of the school's religious ceremonies, special visitors, planned outings, and student activities.[44] For the purposes of my research, I examined the entries from 1916 to 1967,[45] reading them for what they revealed about the methods that teachers used to construct a particular social world for their students. Because they span several decades, the annals illustrate how the administration's views of female education, which they intentionally incorporated into the curriculum, changed as the twentieth century progressed. More importantly, though, the details and descriptions provided in these documents helped me to reconstruct the context within which the students lived.

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[42] Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency and Narratives of Childhood," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1.1 (2008): 117.

[43] Kristine Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak?: The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4.1 (2012): 142.

[44] It is important to note that the annals were a record of the nuns' everyday lives at the school, providing information about their spiritual, religious, and social activities. However, their daily lives were bound up with those of their pupils, and therefore their accounts offer important information about the students' activities and the environment within which they were educated.

[45] Owing to the rules of the Archives Services of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, I was not authorized to examine the entries that were written after 1967.

The graduates' autobiographies are an especially valuable resource because they capture the schoolgirl memories of the Villa's students. I began my analysis with the English and French autobiographies of 1916. Because there were fewer anglophone students writing over a shorter period of time, I analyzed each of the 110 English sector autobiographies from 1916 to 1935. Seeing as there were significantly more French sector graduates, I randomly selected five entries per year from 1916 to 1959, analyzing a total of 225 autobiographies.[46] Because these documents were mandatory assignments that teachers supervised, it was especially important to read them with a critical eye; the girls' silences were often just as telling as the descriptions they offer of school life.

Also important are the publications that students organized, produced, and disseminated among fellow classmates, alumnae, and teachers. Unfortunately, these documents only provide snapshots of the student culture that existed at the Villa, since school newspapers and yearbooks were published intermittently and inconsistently. For instance, only two student newspapers were published during the examined period, one titled *Villa World* from 1914 to 1917 and another titled Eureka from 1951 to 1952. The yearbook volumes were also limited, as they only began to be published in 1971. What's more, teachers and administrators played a major role in the supervision of these publications, limiting students' ability to convey unmediated thoughts and opinions. That being said, they are still valuable sources that demonstrate student agency and shed light on the girls' creation of their own youth culture through meaningful rituals and practices.

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[46] Because there was a large number of autobiographies written by students from the francophone sector, I compiled a list of students' names for each year and blindly chose five students from each list. I then analyzed the autobiographies of those students. I decided to use this random selection process in order to minimize the large quantity of French autobiographies that would need to be analyzed as well as to eliminate any potential biases.

In order to fill in the gaps that plague the Villa's archives, I recruited eight former Villa students as oral history subjects, each of whom had graduated between 1940 and 1980. I interviewed five French sector alumnae who either graduated or left the school in 1947, 1954, 1964, and 1978 as well as three former English sector students who graduated in 1941, 1969, and 1974.[47] The alumnae that participated in this project not only shed light on the student experience at the Villa during various points throughout the middle period of the twentieth-century, but also asserted themselves as important actors in the production of a student culture that not only rendered their adolescence meaningful but also influenced the social dynamics of their school.[48]

In order to create a relaxed atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable expressing their opinions, I employed an interview strategy that combined structured questions with informal conversation, the latter of which is characteristic of the feminist approach to oral history interviewing. As feminist historians have suggested, standard oral history methods, in which a specific question is responded to with a direct answer, reflect more masculine patterns of communication.[49] Female participants respond better to conversational interviews, in which the interviewer's statements of recognition and encouragement facilitate more open lines of communication.[50] Therefore, I acknowledged the participants' answers in a conversational manner, offering reassuring remarks and anecdotes from my own experiences as a student at the Villa. Most women also feel more comfortable speaking in groups and taking turns to tell their stories.[51] This was evident when I interviewed two of the participants together; they took cues from one another when discussing various aspects of their student lives. I also asked open-type questions meant to generate thoughtful and detailed responses (see Appendix A for the interview guide). By asking questions of this nature in a conversational setting, I was able to acquire responses that were both detailed and candid, thus proving the utility of a feminist approach to interviews with women.

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[47] These participants were found through various contacts within the Villa Maria Alumnae Association, which was extremely helpful in finding interested participants. However, it was important for me to keep in mind the possibility that alumnae still affiliated with the Villa would be less open to discussing potentially negative aspects of their school experiences. While this proved in part to be true, many of the participants were quite candid and willing to provide a fair and honest opinion of their time at the Villa.

[48] For more on the merits of oral history, see Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson, 23-45 (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1997).

[49] Kristina Minister, "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 35.

[50] Ibid., 31.

Organization

In the proceeding chapters, I will undertake a microhistorical analysis of the student culture that developed at the Villa from 1916 to 1980. The first chapter acts as the contextual basis for this case study in its examination of the school's educational philosophy, curriculum, and student population. In addition to recreating the environment within which the student culture flourished, it serves as a crucial point of reference for the sections that follow. In the second chapter, which covers the period between 1916 and 1946, I demonstrate that Villa girls accepted the institutional values that governed their education, incorporating them into their own age- and gender-based practices. Chapter three analyzes the changes that the student culture underwent from 1947 to 1965. As students became increasingly influenced by societal forces and popular trends, they used various forms of resistance to oppose the rigidity of boarding school life. In chapter four, I demonstrate how educational reforms and the administration's concerted efforts to modernize altered the student culture between 1966 and 1980. Students accommodated much of the educational philosophy while working within the limitations of a supervised environment to participate in age-based practices. Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive, chronological analysis of how student agency developed and thrived within Villa Maria's institutional setting.

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[51] Ibid.

Chapter 1:

A Profile of Villa Maria and Its Student Population, 1916-1980

In 1920, a graduating student said the following about her education at the Villa:

> "À Villa Maria, j'ai appris en escomptant trop souvent l'inépuisible bonne volonté et l'inatténable patience de mes maîtresses, ce que notre sainte religion nous enseigne, ce que l'éducation et l'instruction ménagent pour faire de nous des enfants que Dieu aimera et que la société chrétienne approuva."[1]

Almost sixty years later, the editor of the 1978 yearbook addressed her fellow classmates with the following message:

> "Pour quelques unes entre nous […] nous arrivons devant cette imposante maison, qu'est Villa Maria, craintives et incertaines du sort qui nous était réservé. Mais nous avons eu tôt fait de découvrir que notre inquiétude était vaine et que ces murs renfermaient une vie scolaire active et chaleureuse. Villa Maria nous a vu grandir, évoluer, pleurer, chanter…et même étudier!"[2]

These excerpts reveal a clear disparity between the experiences of students in the early twentieth century and of those who attended the school in the 1970s. In addition to illustrating the specific changes that occurred at the Villa, they are also reflective of the transformations undergone by convent schools more broadly. In fact, the environments, routines, and rules of these institutions were altered so dramatically that a present-day student would not recognize her school if encountered only half a century earlier.[3] Using these excerpts as signposts, this chapter will analyze the Villa's educational philosophy, its schedule and curriculum, as well as its student population in order to demonstrate how the school evolved from a religious institution into a modern private high school for girls. More importantly, it will shed light on how the Villa's student culture developed and transformed by outlining the context within which it existed.

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[1] Louise Beauregard, "La veille du départ," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1920, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.551; In compliance with the regulations of the Archives Services of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, the names of the students and teachers have been changed.

[2] "Echo," *Journal des finissantes*, 1978, n.p., Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.003.091.

[3] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 15.

Educational Philosophy

Villa Maria's educational philosophy can best be understood by considering the administration's attitudes towards the following: religious training, social status and privilege, and the role of women in society. This section will therefore trace the administration's changing perceptions of each issue over the three periods in question in order to illustrate the evolution of the school's ethos.

From 1916 until 1946, the students' religious training overshadowed their intellectual development. Compelled to abide by the Church hierarchy and to promote its cause, the religious administrators[4] constructed an educational program that encouraged pupils to become good Catholic wives and mothers.[5] They also urged their students to enter the novitiate not only because it was a respectable vocation but also because it would serve to expand and preserve the province's religious communities, such as the Congregation of Notre-Dame.[6] In the annals of January 1916, one nun reflected on the collective goal of the teachers as the students returned from their Christmas vacations: "Le rôle du professeur n'est-il pas d'enseigner, non seulement pour instruire, mais pour porter les jeunes âmes vers un idéal?"[7] This attitude persisted well into the 1920s and 1930s, as Catholic instruction, the regular attendance of religious ceremonies, and hours spent in prayer took time away from the teaching of other subjects. In fact, a school brochure from the 1930s ensured parents that an emphasis would be placed on their daughters' religious instruction while spiritual retreats were used in part to inspire students to become nuns.[8] From the mid 1940s until the mid 1960s, religious training continued to play an important role. For instance, the annual retreat was still employed as a tool for recruiting students to the novitiate.[9] Moreover, the amount of time devoted to religious studies and activities remained significant; one interviewee, who attended the Villa in the 1960s, described herself as being immersed in religious ceremonies and Catechism classes.[10] While it must be noted that more time was allotted to studies of a non-religious nature, the administration continued to impart a largely religious education. By the late 1960s and 1970s, the teachers' fervent advocacy of a Catholic education had subsided. This was replaced by a subdued promotion of Christian morals and ideals. The administrative messages in the various yearbook volumes of the 1970s testify to this, as principals recognized society's changing attitudes towards religion while encouraging students to retain their Christian values.[11] While the administration's views of religious instruction had significantly evolved by the end of the 1970s, its opinion of social status would not be as susceptible to modernization.

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[4] I use the terms 'administrators' and 'teachers' interchangeably, both of which signify any person in a position of authority at the school.

[5] Ibid., 17; Jean Huntley-Maynard, "Catholic Post-secondary Education for Women in Quebec: Its Beginnings in 1908," *Historical Studies* 59 (1992): 44; Author interview with May Vernon, by telephone, July 12, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure the interviewee's anonymity.

[6] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 118-119.

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[7] *Annales manuscrites*, January 7, 1916, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.274.

[8] *Prospectus de Villa Maria*, 193-?, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.201.

[9] Author interview with Louise Simard, Montreal, July 10, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[10] Author interview with Marie Arseneault, Montreal, August 26, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[11] *Journal des finissantes*, 1972, p. 4-5, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.003.084.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Villa Maria prided itself on being an institution that catered to society's elite. Enjoying a reputation that attracted clients from across North America, the Villa emphasized its role as a house of status and privilege. In fact, the Congregation had established the school in response to the demands of wealthy Catholic families who wished to send their daughters to an exceptional private boarding institution.[12] In a brochure from the 1930s, the school's impressive physical space was highlighted as a selling point for the parents of prospective applicants: "The house for the pupils, being the former residence of Lord Elgin, is large and commodious, and is fitted up in a style of comfort, and in some degree of elegance, not surpassed by any educational establishment of its kind."[13] This view also applied to the students themselves; not only were applicants required to provide letters of recommendation, they also had to pay expensive tuition fees.[14] Moreover, students were often reminded of their privileged place in society. For instance, the school priest told the girls at a 1926 conference that they were "l'élite de la jeunesse canadienne-française," a message that was often communicated in convent schools throughout the province.[15] While the 1950s and early 1960s saw changes in Quebec society's attitudes towards social class, Villa Maria continued to emphasize its importance. For instance, the 1955 school brochure assured potential clients that their daughters would be educated in a manner that complimented their role in "the social class to which they belong."[16] This attitude continued into the 1960s despite the increasing diversification of the student population. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, quality of education had replaced status and privilege in defining the Villa's reputation. The school now offered a "pedagogy which [was] student-centered" and a curriculum that complied with the government's educational requirements.[17] Sports and other extracurricular activities were also offered. That being said, tuition still remained rather expensive, with students paying roughly $650 per year.[18] Moreover, no scholarship or bursary program was available at the time to provide financial assistance to students from working-class families. As a result, Villa Maria remained an institution for middle class and privileged girls.

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[12] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 77, 125.

[13] *Prospectus*, 193-?; The administration also regularly welcomed special visits from distinguished guests during this period, such as the Prince of Wales and the Governor General of Canada (see Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 59-60).

[14] Ibid.; *Cahiers des inscriptions des élèves*, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.438.

[15] *Annales manuscrites*, March 8, 1926; See also Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 17.

While the Villa preserved its conservative socioeconomic values, it gradually became more open to the expansion of women's roles in society. In the early part of the twentieth century, however, like most educational institutions of its kind,[19] Villa Maria stressed the domestic and moral role of women. This was made especially clear in an address to the graduates of 1926:

> "Vous ne vous laisserez pas emporter par le courant qui passe; vous serez des femmes fortes qui aiment le foyer de leur maison, qui vivent du passé pour construire l'avenir, de ce passé religieux, du passé national: vous devez le vivre ce passé tout glorieux pour le transmettre comme un riche patrimoine à votre famille en l'enrichissant de votre bonne volonté."[20]

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[16] *Prospectus de Villa Maria*, 1955, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.201.

[17] *Prospectus de Villa Maria*, 1979, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.201. According to the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator, students were paying the modern equivalent of roughly $2000 per year in tuition fees.

[18] Ibid.

[19] In *Les couventines*, Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid examined the convent schools of over a dozen religious congregations in Quebec, all of which offered their students domestic and religious training.

[20] *Annales manuscrites*, June 17, 1926.

Even into the late 1940s and 1950s, attitudes towards women's place in society remained very conservative. It seemed as though the administration believed its students were receiving more than the appropriate amount of education required for their future domestic roles. Interviewee Louise Simard pointed out that she and her classmates were never encouraged to pursue post-secondary studies but were instead expected to become "des bonnes femmes de maison."[21] Similarly, interviewee Adèle Bélisle, who attended the school in the 1950s, felt that they were being educated to increase their desirability among potential husbands.[22] These recollections are consistent with the current literature on convent schools, which has demonstrated that girls were largely trained for marriage and motherhood well into the postwar era.[23] While these views undoubtedly clashed with those of a modernizing society, the Villa dramatically altered its position as the 1960s progressed. By that time, it was considered standard for graduating students to think about their potential career choices and to prepare themselves for a post-secondary education. As the 1970s came to an end, the administration offered messages of encouragement to its departing pupils, advising them that "c'est pour vous le moment de penser sérieusement à votre carrière … à votre voie."[24] Therefore, the Villa upheld a conservative position regarding the social class of its students but adopted increasingly modern views of religious instruction and of the role of women in society.

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[21] Author interview with Louise Simard, Montreal, July 10, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[22] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle, Montreal, June 25, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[23] Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid are the only historians that have examined in-depth the education of girls in Quebec's Catholic private schools. See especially *Les couventines* and *Maîtresses de maison, maîtresses d'école: Femmes, famille et éducation dans l'histoire du Québec* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1983). Also see Dufour, *Histoire de l'éducation au Québec*, 61-62, for a brief discussion of girls' domestic education. In the Canadian context, see the work of Christine Lei, especially *The History of a Catholic Girls' Day and Boarding School, 1865-1970: The Religious and Educational Achievement of the Loretto Sisters* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

[24] *Journal des finissantes*, 1980, p. 3, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.003.093.

Schedule and Curriculum

An examination of Villa Maria's schedule and curriculum is useful for understanding how students spent their time at the school. By observing the yearly schedule, the daily routine, and the curriculum as it transformed over the twentieth century, this section will demonstrate that, like most institutions of its kind, the Villa remained resistant to external forces as it maintained the same scholastic calendar well into the 1950s.[25]

From 1916 to 1946, the administration communicated the importance of religious training by strictly adhering to the liturgical calendar. When students entered for the new school year in early September, they would celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. In early October, a spiritual retreat was held for several days to prepare the girls for a year of discipline and study.[26] This was followed by the celebration of All Saints' Day in November, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in December, midnight mass at Christmas, the feasts of St. Patrick and St. Joseph, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and a month-long celebration of the Virgin Mary in May.[27] Students also attended First Friday of the month ceremonies and 40 Hours Devotion observances, and rituals commemorating the death of Marguerite Bourgeoys, the founder of the Congregation of Notre-Dame of Montreal. Amidst this array of religious activities, boarders were given a few holidays, including a vacation at Christmas and a short visit home at Easter.[28] June convocation marked the end of the school year, after which students would return home for the summer.

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[25] See Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 50-53, where they compare the schedules of four different schools over a century (1860-1960) in order to demonstrate how boarding school routines remained static and consistent well into the second half of the twentieth century.

[26] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 39.

[27] Ibid., 39-40.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, students followed a very similar schedule. The liturgical calendar continued to be observed quite strictly but boarders were given more holidays in order to ease the difficulties associated with being separated from one's family for long periods of time. What's more, in 1953, the administration decided to modernize its boarding regulations, allowing students to return home each weekend.[29] As a result, boarders spent more time away from the school, becoming increasingly exposed to the changes occurring in society and to new forms of popular culture.

While some changes had been made to the scholastic calendar in the 1950s and 1960s, a significantly modernized schedule was introduced in the 1970s. After 1966, boarders were no longer accepted at the Villa, which subsequently altered the school's schedule. Since students no longer lived at the school, there was no need to offer prolonged holidays throughout the year. Instead, to comply with the new government regulations, the administration integrated twenty pedagogical days into the schedule.[30] Prior to 1966, boarders had followed the nuns' routine, which entailed their participation in a number of religious observances and feasts. However, when boarding ended, students were only expected to attend mass for major celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter. As a result, more time was assigned to student-oriented activities, including the secondary-one initiation, the winter carnival, and the graduation ball.[31] Thus, the yearly schedule evolved in tandem with the modernization of the school's educational philosophy.

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[28] *Annales manuscrites*, 1926.

[29] *Annales manuscrites*, September 8, 1953.

[30] Lanthier, *Monklands Then,* 209.

Like the annual schedule, the students' daily routine was rigidly structured until the early 1960s. The following table (Table 1) demonstrates the notable similarity between a typical day at the Villa in 1916 and in 1954:

Table 1: Students' Daily Routine

1916	1954
6:00 – wake up 6:45 - meditation before mass 7:00 – mass 8:00 – breakfast 9:00 – classes 12:00 – lunch 12:30 – calisthenics 1:00 – classes 4:00 – collation 4:15 – visit to chapel 4:30 - reading from a spiritual book 5 pm – catechism class 6:30 – supper and recreation 8:00 – visit to chapel 9:00 – bedtime	6:00 – wake up 7:00 – mass 8:00 – breakfast 9:00 – day scholars arrive, classes begin 10:00 – visit to the chapel 10:15 – classes resume 12:00 – lunch 1:30 – classes 4:00 – day scholars return home; music and art lessons 5:30 – visit to the chapel 6:00 – supper and recreation 8:30 – visit to chapel 9:00 – bedtime

Source: *Souvenir du 75e anniversaire de fondation de Villa Maria*, 1930, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.437; Author interview with Adèle Bélisle; *Annales manuscrites*, September, 1954.

From 1916 until the 1940s, the daily schedule varied on Thursdays, when time would be devoted to sewing and to afternoon family visits. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Sunday afternoons were devoted to recreation; students could take part in various activities, including basketball and tennis in the warmer seasons and tobogganing, skiing, and skating in the winter months.[32] However, this recreational period was short, as students were to be in the chapel at 4:00 pm for the blessing of the Holy Sacrament.[33] By 1953, boarders were permitted to return home for the weekend.

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[31] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971-1980, Villa Maria, Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.003.083-.093.

In the late 1960s, the rigidly structured timetable gave way to a more relaxed routine. All students arrived in the morning to begin classes at around 8:30 am. Lunch was taken at the noon hour, during which many girls took part in extracurricular activities.[34] Classes ended at approximately 4:00 pm, at which time students would either return home or participate in other activities. This newly organized schedule was the product of the education reforms, which had standardized the timetables of the province's public *and* private secondary schools.

Throughout the twentieth century, the school curriculum also underwent a series of transformations. In 1916, the Villa began following the cours Lettres-Sciences, a four-year program offered to adolescent girls by religious congregations, at the end of which they would receive a diploma recognized by the Université de Montréal.[35] The program was divided into the following courses, each corresponding to one year of studies: premier cours, cours supérieur, cours sous-gradué, and cours gradué.[36] Until 1942, individual schools exercised complete control over which subjects were taught, after which time the curriculum was standardized. As a result, the Villa's administration devoted much time to courses of a domestic nature, including sewing and cooking. In fact, a brochure from the 1930s listed hygiene lessons and domestic science as compulsory subjects.[37] Moreover, the cours Lettres-Sciences was an exclusive program, only offered in prestigious convent schools that educated privileged girls.[38]

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[32] Author interview with Louise Simard.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Author interview with Patricia Martin, Montreal, May 21, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[35] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les* couventines, 105-06.

[36] In English, this translated to First Course, Superior Course, Undergraduate Course, and Graduate Course.

While not meant as a precursor to post-secondary education, the Lettres-Sciences program did provide Catholic girls with the opportunity to attend female classical colleges, which became more numerous in the first half of the twentieth century thanks to the work of forward-thinking religious women, many of whom were members of the Congregation of Notre-Dame.[39] Female classical colleges offered a course modelled on the last four years of the cours classique, an eight-year educational program reserved for the secondary and post-secondary instruction of young men.[40] The introduction of the female classical college marked an important achievement for women's education, since completion of its program resulted in the attainment of a baccalaureate degree and provided girls access to post-secondary studies in Catholic universities.[41] However, the cours Lettres-Sciences as well as the program offered in female classical colleges were largely structured to impart a 'feminized' education, thus failing to place girls on an even footing with their male counterparts.

The standardization of the Lettres-Sciences curriculum in the early 1940s meant that certain subjects became mandatory. As a result, the Villa began to offer courses in such academic subjects as science, mathematics, history, and literary analysis. [42]

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[37] *Prospectus*, 193-?.

[38] Ibid., 63; Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 105.

[39] Huntley-Maynard, "Catholic Post-secondary Education," 45-46.

[40] Dumont and Fahym-Eid, *Les couventines*, 109-110; Huntley-Maynard, "Catholic Post-secondary Education," 47.

[41] Prior to the establishment of female classical colleges, Catholic girls could only attend secular or Protestant universities, such as McGill University. See Dufour, *Histoire de L'éducation au Québec*, 63-64 and Karine Hébert, "Carabines, poutchinettes, co-eds ou freschettes sont-elles des étudiantes? Les filles à l'Université de Montréal (1900-1960)," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 57.4 (2004): 594.

[42] "Bulletin mensuelle," 1952, from private collection of interviewee Adèle Bélisle, Montreal.

However, the girls were still graded in feminine courses, such as domestic science, good behaviour, and proper diction.[43] By the late 1950s, female activists, both lay and religious, were calling for a secondary and post-secondary education program that matched the one offered to boys in classical colleges.[44] This resulted in the extension of the standard cours classique to convent schools, which offered the first four years of the program, and to female classical colleges, which offered the last four years.[45] In 1960, the Villa introduced this new program, which dictated the curriculum until 1965.[46] As a result, the four years of schooling were no longer labelled premier cours, cours supérieur, cours sous-gradué, and cours gradué; instead, they were named Éléments Latins, Syntaxe, Méthode, and Versification.[47] Gaining access to the cours classique was another significant step forward for women's education in the province, since girls would now be taught the same subjects as boys. However, like the Lettres-Sciences program, it was largely reserved for Catholic girls who could afford to attend expensive private schools.

Following the recommendations of the 1964 Parent Report, the provincial government implemented a new, universal educational system. The last year of elementary school became the first year of secondary school, resulting in a five-year high school program.[48] In 1966, the Villa adopted this new system, also overhauling its curriculum to meet the new government standards. Biology, Physics, Canadian History, and Mathematics became mandatory subjects and students were given the option to take

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Dumont, *Les couventines*, 160-161.

[45] Ibid., 109-110.

[46] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 200; "Évolution d'une jeune fille," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1959.

[47] Anglophone students followed the same curriculum but referred to each level as First High, Second High, Third High, and Fourth High.

[48] Claude Corbo, *L'éducation pour tous: Une anthologie du Rapport Parent* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2002), 136-137.

Art, Drama, Music, or Latin as electives.[49] By the late 1970s, lengthy catechism classes and feminine training courses had virtually vanished. Instead, a modern educational program and school routine thrived in their place, providing students with a more favourable environment for the development of a dynamic student culture.

Student Population

So far, this chapter has examined how the Villa's administration communicated its values to students through the school schedule and curriculum. While the implications this had on the girls have been discussed at length, they have remained a faceless group. The following section will therefore put a spotlight on Villa Maria's students, examining their socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds as a means of demonstrating how they, too, transformed over the twentieth century.

From 1916 to 1946, the total number of students attending the Villa never surpassed three hundred.[50] During this period, the majority of the secondary students were boarders, since boarding was mandatory for the last two years of high school. Because the classes were small and the living quarters intimate, the students remained a close-knit group. When boarding for all levels was made optional in 1947, enrolment numbers increased dramatically as more students entered as day scholars.[51] For example, in 1945, a total of 320 students attended the Villa, 160 of whom were day scholars.[52] By

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[49] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 209.

[50] The annals do not distinguish between the number of elementary and secondary school students. As a result, this figure reflects the total number of students that attended the school.

[51] By day scholars, I mean students who arrived at school in the morning and left in the afternoon to return home.

[52] *Annales manuscrites*, September 6, 1945.

1950, the student population had risen to 441 students, 276 of whom were day scholars.[53] This resulted in a changing dynamic among students, with the girls forming separate and exclusive cliques based on whether they were boarders or day students. When boarding was finally phased out in 1966, the number of secondary students increased to over 600.[54] Once again, relationships between students changed, as new parameters would come to influence the formation of friendships.

Table 2: Distribution of Students

Year	Sec. 1	Sec. 2	Sec. 3	Sec. 4	Sec. 5*	Total
1916	x	26	23	22	19	90
1925	x	35	21	23	21	100
1935	x	27	39	29	26	121
1945	x	48	50	29	29	156
1955	x	63	61	45	36	205
1964	x	103	72	72	45	292
1975	151	146	124	113	88	622

*The first year of secondary school did not come into existence until the mid 1960s.
Source: *Cahier des inscriptions des éléves*, 1916-1964, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congrégation Notre-Dame, Montreal, 326.000.438-.447; *Journal des finissantes*, 1975.

Over the twentieth century, the socioeconomic backgrounds of the students gradually changed. From 1916 to 1946, the student population was characterized by a perceptible homogeneity. In this early period, wealthy families from various parts of Quebec, English Canada, the United States, and even South America sent their daughters to the Villa because of its prestigious reputation. The following table (Table 3), which provides information regarding the residences of the students, illustrates their socioeconomic similarities:

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[53] *Annales manuscrites*, September 6, 1950.

[54] Following the elimination of boarding, the dormitories were tenanted by student nuns who were preparing to enter the Congregation of Notre-Dame. For more on this, see Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 212.

Table 3: Students' Places of Residence

Year	**City or Region**				
	Montreal[55]	Other Quebec[56]	English Canada	United States	South America
1918	54	23	7	9	2
1928	61	15	5	12	0
1938	116	11	3	3	12

Source: *Cahier des inscriptions des élèves*, 1918-1938.

Tracing the social and economic situations of students from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s proved difficult, as the school directory replaced residences with telephone numbers. Moreover, the increased number of day scholars meant that more students resided in Montreal, rendering it more challenging to draw a socioeconomic map based on place of residence. That being said, the students that attended the Villa in the second half of the twentieth century were undoubtedly from middle class or privileged families, as tuition fees remained relatively high (see Table 4).

In addition to being socially and economically similar, the student population of the early twentieth century was also ethnically homogenous. In fact, students came almost exclusively from families of American, English-Canadian, or French-Canadian descent, with the exception of a few South American girls. While a lack of sources makes it difficult to discern the ethnic backgrounds of students from the late 1940s to the 1970s, a surname analysis offers some insight into the students' ethnicities.[57] While there are significant drawbacks to using this type of study, such as the fact that surnames often provide only a partial indication of one's ethnic background, it is still a practical medium.

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[55] The Montreal category includes the neighbourhoods of Westmount, Outremont, the Golden Square Mile, and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, all of which are middle and upper class areas in the city. While most of the entries listed the specific neighbourhoods that the girls lived in, some were listed simply as 'Montreal,' therefore making any further breakdown of the distribution impossible.

[56] This category includes areas like Quebec City, Sorel, Shawinigan, Joliette, and St. Jérôme.

[57] Surname analysis can be useful in estimating the ethnic backgrounds of individuals. As a result, I have employed this strategy in order to examine the ethnic diversification of the student population in the second half of the twentieth century.

Table 4: Tuition Fees

1959				1969		1979	
Day Scholars		Boarders		Day Scholars		Day Scholars	
Fee	Price	Fee	Price	Fee	Price	Fee	Price
Entrance fee	$5	Entrance fee	$5	Registration	$20	Registration	$50
Tuition	$170	Sports	$5	Tuition	$300	Tuition	$580
Conferences	$5	Insurance	$5	Student Council Fees	$12	Student Assoc.	$20
Sports	$5	Board	$550	Activities	$8	Parent Assoc.	$7
Insurance	$5	Tuition	$150	PTA Contribution	$5	Piano*	$420
Lunch*	$150	Laundry	$50	Music lessons*	$200		
Drawing*	$50	Room	$60				
Piano*	$100	Piano*	$60				
Singing*	$20	Harp*	$80				
Vocals*	$10	Drawing*	$50				
Studio*	$50	Painting*	$50				
		China*	$50				
		Leathercraft*	$50				
Total:	**$190**	**Total:**	**$825**	**Total:**	**$345**	**Total:**	**$657**
Total with options:	**$520**	**Total with options:**	**$1165**	**Total with options:**	**$545**	**Total with options:**	**$1077**

* indicates optional courses

Source: *Prospectus de Villa Maria*, 1959, 1969, 1979, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.201.

for understanding one's cultural affiliations.[58] In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the directories indicate a culturally similar student body, the majority of students being either anglophone or francophone. In the 1970s, the student population was diversified by the enrolment of girls from Italian, Greek, Latin, German, Eastern European, Middle Eastern, African Canadian, and Asian backgrounds.[59] Table 5 provides a breakdown of the ethnic backgrounds of students from 1971, 1975, and 1979. The separation of the English and

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[58] K. Fiscella and A.M. Fremont, "Use of Geocoding and Surname Analysis to Estimate Race and Ethnicity," *Health Serv Res.* 41.4 (2006): 482-500.

[59] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971-1980; because the yearbooks include images of students, they also provided visual indications of students' ethnic backgrounds.

French sectors demonstrates that the former was more ethnically diverse, which speaks to the tendency of immigrant families to choose an English-language education for their children.[60] Nonetheless, the diversification of the entire student population resulted in the creation of a more dynamic student culture, which in turn would play a significant role in the Villa's modernization.

Table 5: Students' Ethnic Backgrounds, 1971-1979[61]

Ethnicity[62]	**1971**		**1975**		**1979**	
	English Sector	**French Sector**	**English Sector**	**French Sector**	**English Sector**	**French Sector**
British/Irish	83 (55%)	23 (8.5%)	133 (53.2%)	25 (6.7%)	127 (40.8%)	18 (6%)
French	22 (14.4%)	216 (81%)	34 (13.6%)	319 (85.8%)	44 (14%)	231 (79%)
Italian/Greek	11 (7.2%)	12 (4.5%)	23 (9.2%)	9 (2.4%)	57 (18.3%)	17 (5.8%)
Hispanic	3 (2%)	2 (0.75%)	5 (2%)	1 (0.3%)	8 (2.6%)	3 (1%)
German/Eastern European	28 (18.4%)	12 (4.5%)	45 (18%)	12 (3.2%)	59 (19%)	16 (5.5%)
Middle Eastern	0 (0%)	2 (0.75%)	0 (0%)	4 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	4 (1.3%)
African Canadian	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	7 (2.4%)	2 (0.7%)
Asian	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	9 (3.6%)	2 (0.5%)	9 (2.9%)	2 (0.7%)
Total:	**152**	**267**	**250**	**372**	**311**	**293**

Source: *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 1975, 1979, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.003.083, .088, .092.

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[60] John Dickinson and Brian Young, *A Short History of Quebec, 4th ed.* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 323.

[61] The data in this table is based on information retrieved from the 1970s' yearbook volumes. Because the yearbooks include class photographs, they also provided visual indications of students' ethnic backgrounds.

[62] For convenience, the students' ethnicities were divided into the following categories: British/Irish (indicates girls with English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish surnames), French, Italian/Greek, Hispanic (to indicate girls with South and Central American, and Spanish surnames), German/Eastern European (to indicate girls with German and Slavic surnames), Middle Eastern (to indicate girls with Arabic and Persian surnames), African Canadian, and Asian (to indicate girls with Indian, Sri Lankan, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean surnames).

The students' religious affiliations proved more difficult to trace since school administrators did not keep a record of their pupils' denominations. However, using Helen Lanthier's history of the school as well as the girls' individual autobiographies, I was able to piece together a portrait of the students' religious backgrounds. Villa Maria initially only accepted Catholic students; however, this changed in 1926 when the administration admitted its first Protestant student.[63] Between 1926 and 1959, almost all students referred to themselves as Catholics in their autobiographies; a handful of Protestant girls were the exception, and no other religious faiths were declared.[64] During the 1960s and 1970s, when the Villa began to secularize, it is likely that girls from different faiths began to attend the school. However, Helen Lanthier explains that following the education reforms, "many parents were concerned that [the Catholic] religion would lose its importance within the framework of the new curriculum," which seems to indicate that the majority of the student population remained Catholic.[65] Therefore, it is safe to assume that the Villa continued to serve a largely Catholic student body well into the 1970s.

By outlining the school's educational philosophy, its schedule and curriculum, and its student population, I have attempted to construct the foundation for an analysis of the Villa's student culture. In the following chapter, I will examine the culture that developed from 1916 to 1945, drawing upon this contextual basis to demonstrate how the students accepted and adhered to the normative messages and values communicated to them by their teachers.

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[63] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 69.

[64] In their autobiographies, students followed a particular timeline to tell their life stories, often beginning with their birth and baptism and citing their First Communion and Confirmation as important life events. Moreover, Protestant students declared their faith, often pointing to their initial unfamiliarity with the Villa's Catholic setting. In each of the French sector autobiographies, students declared Catholicism as their religious denomination. However, this only represents a sample of the francophone student population and thus it is possible that some girls might have been of different religious faiths. With that said, it seems safe to assume that prior to 1959, the majority of the students were Catholic.

[65] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 211.

Chapter 2

Mirroring their 'Mothers': Villa Maria's Student Culture as a Reflection of Institutional Values, 1916-1946

By the end of the First World War, teenaged girls had begun to acquire increasing independence in Canadian and Quebec society; as school attendance became more consistent among teens, female adolescents began to carve out a space for themselves as secondary and post-secondary students.[1] Their growing presence in educational institutions created opportunities for the production of exclusively female student cultures, especially in single-sex schools. Emerging as a new phenomenon in the early twentieth century, girls' student cultures not only reflected the differences between female and male adolescent experiences, they also often reproduced social and ethnic divisions.[2] Within institutions like Villa Maria, which was almost entirely reserved for white, socially privileged girls, the student population was marked by a visible uniformity.[3] This homogeneity, coupled with school measures to regulate students' education and activities, led to the formation of an adult-approved girls' culture.

In this chapter, I will argue that the student culture that thrived at the Villa from 1916 to 1946 was heavily influenced by the administration and thus perpetuated institutionally sanctioned values and ideals. As I will demonstrate, the isolation of boarding school often caused homesickness, which fostered a maternal bond between students and their teachers. This, in turn, rendered the girls more susceptible to the views of their superiors. I will then examine the students' positions on religion, arguing that their Catholic upbringings led them to share a common belief system with their teachers. Finally, I will contend that the socioeconomic homogeneity of the student population fostered a collective acceptance of young women's civic and social roles.

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[1] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 27; Forman-Brunell and Paris, *The Girls' History and Culture Reader*, 10; See also Hébert, "Carabines, poutchinettes, co-eds ou freschettes," 593-625.

[2] Forman-Brunell and Paris, *The Girls' History and Culture Reader*, 2.

[3] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 193-94; Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 125.

Homesickness and the Search for Stability

In her discussion of American summer camps in the early twentieth century, Leslie Paris suggests that homesickness was an "involuntary form of resistance to camp expectations," often remedied by doting councillors who paid special attention to their campers.[4] Like the sleep-away camp, the convent boarding school was characterized by a secluded setting where parents were prohibited and visits were limited.[5] The challenges of entering school as a boarder were thus exacerbated by students' separation from their families. As such, the beginning of the scholastic year signified a "rupture brutale avec le milieu familial," causing many girls to experience feelings of homesickness.[6] Similar to Paris's camp councillors, Villa Maria's teachers stepped in to assume the role of surrogate mothers. Not only did this maternal position validate the nuns' authority and grant legitimacy to their values, it also created an intimacy through which they could more effectively communicate their normative messages.[7] This relationship resonated with the girls, influencing them to incorporate institutionally sanctioned practices into their student culture.

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[4] Leslie Paris, "'Please Let Me Come Home:' Homesickness and Family Ties at Early-Twentieth-Century Summer Camps," in *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 251, 257.

[5] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 8-9.

[6] Ibid., 17.

[7] See Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 118, wherein she discusses how the members of the Congregation of Notre-Dame used their maternal positions to influence their students to become nuns.

Homesickness emerged almost exclusively during the first weeks of school.[8] As students became accustomed to their new home, the novelty of their surroundings quickly disappeared and feelings of loneliness set in. Instead of turning to fellow classmates, many of whom remained strangers at this point, many students found comfort among their new teachers, primarily because they could offer the kind of care that resembled maternal love.[9] This was important for students struggling with the transition, many of whom sought a replacement for their absent mothers:

> "My heart just broke when I said good-bye to my mother for never before had I been away from home, not even for a night. For the first six months, I was home-sick wondering if I would ever get used to it. […] I generally sought the Infirmary as a place of refuge, and there, Mother Superior […] would always give me milk and biscuits, to my great delight."[10]

These small acts of compassion made all the difference to melancholic students, many of whom had written home to ask their parents if they could become day scholars or if they could leave the school altogether. In 1926, Lucie Germain admitted that during her first year, she begged her mother to remove her from the Villa but changed her mind after she encountered the kindness of the nuns:

> "Les premiers jours je pleurai si longtemps et si fort que je croyais devoir retourner à la maison; mais la peine se passa vite, ma bonne Mère-Sainte-Marie[11] me consola et […] j'arrivai au dortoir et la une autre bonne Mère me reçut; Mère-Sainte-Clotilde avait défait ma malle, fait mon lit et m'attendait, tout allait si bien que je me crus au nid."[12]

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[8] In the autobiographies, almost every student who discusses feelings of homesickness describes them as occurring during the first month of school.

[9] Paris, "'Please Let Me Come Home,'" 251.

[10] Catherine Aldridge, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1918.

[11] The names of teachers have been changed to protect their identities and to comply with the rules of the Service des Archives de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame.

[12] Lucie Germain, "Dix années pensionnaire?!," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1926.

The Villa's administration was undoubtedly aware that the best remedy they could offer students suffering from homesickness was motherly care. Their efforts may have even been intended to safeguard against the threat of students who might persuade their parents to take them out of school.[13] Also strategic was the use of the title 'mother' instead of 'sister,' a choice specific to the Congregation of Notre-Dame. As Marta Danylewycz explains, the title "'mother'" promoted a "family image," which further reinforced the nuns' status as maternal figures.[14] When students demonstrated signs of loneliness, teachers were therefore quick to assume the role of surrogate mothers in order to alleviate their grief as well as to persuade them to continue their studies.

When homesickness was attached to a students' inability to make new friends, teachers often facilitated interactions between classmates. During her first weeks of school, Béatrice Valois remembered feeling lonely because she had entered in the third year of high school, and thus found herself unable to penetrate existing peer groups. A teacher noticed her struggle and introduced her to a student in a similar position, whom she befriended immediately.[15] Similarly, a 1926 graduate described herself as being on the verge of departing from the school when her teacher presented her to a few of her classmates, which helped to cure her homesickness.[16] When attempts at forging friendships failed, the teachers themselves stepped in to ensure the emotional well-being of their students. For instance, after feeling "dismayed […] at being introduced to a whole classful of strange girls" who seemed unfriendly, Wendy Ellington found a friend in her teacher, with whom she shared nightly walks on the school grounds.[17] Like mothers introducing their daughters to new playmates, then, the Villa's teachers actively guided their students towards new friendships, easing the transition to a new school environment.

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[13] See Leslie Paris, "'Please Let Me Come Home,'" 253 for an interesting discussion of the tensions that existed between camp councilors and parents. She explains that councilors often viewed parents as a threat because their visits could undermine their authority and upset the camp's hierarchy. Although the annals do not address this as an issue, it is quite possible that infrequent visits were intended to ensure that students maintained a closer relationship with their teachers than their parents, at least while they were at school.

[14] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 116.

[15] Béatrice Valois, "Ma biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1924.

[16] Lucie Germain, "Dix années pensionnaire?!,"1926.

By effectively assuaging the fears and anxieties of their students, faculty members created lasting bonds that not only reduced the girls' likeliness to misbehave or to challenge authority but that also encouraged them to be more accommodating of adult views and opinions. In the autobiographies of students that describe a maternal connection with a particular teacher, there is often an accompanying passage that either articulates the school ethos or expresses gratitude for one's intellectual and moral instruction. For instance, after referring to her teacher as a second mother who helped her through her first days at the Villa, Cécile Gilbert said the following about her education:

> "Mère-Sainte-Marie-Grégoire s'est efforcée de nous inculquer de profonde[sic] convictions religieuses, d'affermir notre caractère, en un mot faire de nous des femmes de devoir capable a donné[sic] partout et toujours le bon exemple."[18]

Similarly, Denise McDonald coupled a line about her teacher's maternal guidance with a promise to uphold the Villa's values:

> "Mother St. John has not only been a wonderful teacher to us but also a
> mother, and I thank her for her great kindness to my sister and to me.
> I wish to show my gratitude by living up to the ideals which [she] has set
> before me."[19]

Laurence Morin made comparable remarks regarding her first year teacher:

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[17] Wendy Ellington, "Biography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1931.

[18] Cécile Gilbert, "Ma biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1924.

[19] Denise McDonald, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1933.

> “Si nous avons été si heureuses, c’est que non seulement nous aimions notre maîtresse mais c’est aussi que nous sentions combien elle était profondément attachée aux enfants qui lui étaient confiées. […] Je voudrais avoir la plume d’un poète pour chanter ma reconnaissance à Mère-Saint-Philippe, à qui je dois de mieux comprendre le sérieux de la vie, la bonté du dévouement, la sublimité du devoir.”[20]

These expressions of gratitude resulted from the intimate relationships that the girls formed with their teachers during their first days at the Villa, many of which were established as students struggled to overcome their boarding school blues.

While these bonds were cemented during the students’ earliest days at the Villa, they often endured throughout the four years of the Lettres-Sciences program. For many students, their teachers became symbols of stability in a world where unfamiliar surroundings and new routines replaced the comfort and consistency of the home. Some girls’ entrances were facilitated by the presence of teachers they had encountered in the past. For instance, two 1917 graduates described their elation when they arrived at the Villa to find a teacher they had known at their elementary school. Both girls expressed sentiments of intense relief, having been comforted by a familiar face that not only rendered their new school less intimidating but also ensured a more bearable transition from primary to secondary school.[21] Another graduate from 1916 went so far as to change schools so that she could be closer to her teacher, explaining that the separation would have been too difficult had she not followed her to the Villa.[22]

The girls’ search for stability also extended to the classroom, which teachers used to create a family atmosphere for their pupils.[23] Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid observed that this was a common practice in most convent schools across the province, where nuns adopted teaching methods that emphasized their maternal roles and produced a comfortable, familial environment for students.[24] The level of comfort and security that a faculty member could offer to her pupils was indeed important; many girls even preferred to be instructed by the same teacher as many consecutive years as possible because of the stability it entailed. In 1929, almost all of the graduates mentioned the significance of having been taught by Mother Saint Anne in both first and second high. In her autobiography, one of these students summarized the collective joy of her classmates:

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[20] Laurence Morin, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1916.

[21] Amy Moore, “Happy Days at the Villa”, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1917; Gertrude Miller, “My School Days,” *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1917.

[22] Vivienne Rosier, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1916.

[23] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les Couventines*, 119.

> "The night I arrived, Mother Saint Patricia whispered 'Mother Saint Anne has been promoted with you.' We were all very much pleased to hear this, for we knew that another very happy year was in store for us!"[25]

In 1927, several graduates remembered similar feelings of happiness when they learned that Mother Saint Catherine would join them for another year of study. Not only were her teaching methods favoured, her acts of kindness and motherliness were essential to those who struggled to find a place for themselves at the school.[26]

Because the teachers' continuous presence helped the girls maintain a sense of security, their sudden absence would often cause uneasiness, and even anxiety, among many students. In 1919, Gabrielle Groulx explained how her teacher had fallen ill and was admitted to the hospital only weeks before convocation, causing much worry among the students and casting a dark shadow on their final days at the school.[27] That same year, the death of a teacher had a profound impact on the girls, especially because they had all thought of her as a grandmother.[28]

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[24] Ibid., 119-120.

[25] Mary Foster, "My Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1929.

[26] Béatrice Marchand, "Ma biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1927.

[27] Gabrielle Groulx, "Simple Histoire," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1919.

The interchanging of teachers was also a cause for concern, as many students were disconcerted by the prospect of having to adapt to new methods of instruction, to different expectations regarding their behaviour, and perhaps most importantly, to an unfamiliar face. In 1916, one graduate recalled her unease when she learned that she would return from Christmas vacation to find that her teacher had been replaced:

> "Pendant les vacances une lettre d'une compagne m'apprit le départ de Mère-Sainte-Marie et l'arrivée d'une nouvelle maîtresse plus sévère que Mère-Sainte-Marie. Moi qui avais très peur de cette dernière, que ferais-je?[29]

Other students remembered similar incidents, such as Eileen Ryan, who likened her and her classmates to "orphans" when the administration failed to replace their ill teacher for several weeks.[30] These reflections demonstrate the extent to which the girls looked to their superiors to provide them with a sense of stability, the fragility of which was often tested by the deaths, departures, and replacements of beloved faculty members.

While teachers symbolized security for some students**,** for others they were instrumental in the creation of peer groups. More specifically, certain groups of girls would form friendships based on the special connection they shared with the same teacher. For example, a number of 1926 graduates had formed a friendship that was based on their collective appreciation of Mother Saint Anne. As one of them recalls, "we formed a 'petite' family undivided in our love for our little 'Scotch Mother' and were very proud of being called her Darlings."[31] Previously established groups would also look to specific teachers to validate their circle of friends, often identifying themselves through their relationship with that instructor. For instance, Molly McKenzie explained that she and "the Ottawa girls adopted Mother [Saint Adele]" as the unofficial leader of their group, looking to her for refuge and guidance when they felt lonely or needed encouragement with their studies.[32] Similarly, a graduate of 1941 and her best friend assumed a special status because a particular teacher took a liking to them.[33] While these recollections might seem trivial, their overwhelming presence in the students' autobiographies is striking; they demonstrate the extent to which the girls depended on their teachers to guide them through the challenges of boarding school life.

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[28] Hélène Martin, "Biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1919.
[29] Denise Gendreau, No title, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1916.
[30] Eileen Ryan, "Biography," *Autobiographies manuscrites,* 1917.

While the autobiographies provide countless examples of the bonds cemented between students and teachers, they provide no insight into the possible tensions that might also have arisen. This silence speaks to the limitations of using the autobiography as a source; in writing this assignment, students were undoubtedly mindful of their audience and therefore reluctant or unwilling to express any negative sentiments toward their teachers. However, the school experiences of two prominent women demonstrate that not all students shared special relationships with the nuns. For instance, in 1933, Hollywood movie star Veronica Lake (then known as Constance Ockleman) was expelled for her poor behaviour and lack of discipline.[34] Similarly, labour activist Madeleine Parent explained that her time as a Villa boarder in the 1930s introduced her to class-based social inequalities, since she had witnessed nuns mistreat the school's servants, many of whom were the same age as she was.[35] In fact, it was this first encounter with class-based injustice that led her to become a labour activist.[36] These examples produce a very different narrative than the ones conveyed in the autobiographies, further reinforcing their deficiencies in communicating dissident voices. However, the sheer number of students who discussed their relationships with teachers makes it impossible to deny that many faculty members were welcomed as maternal figures and thus played a role in influencing the student culture.

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[31] Sarah MacDougall, "Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1926.
[32] Molly McKenzie, "Biography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1917.
[33] Author interview with May Vernon.
[34] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 104.

Religion and Faith as Markers of Student Culture

If the intimate relationships that students formed with their teachers prompted them to accommodate their normative messages, this was in part because they had been exposed to conservative religious views prior to attending the Villa. The majority of the student population was indeed Catholic, having been raised and initiated into the faith by their families.[37] As a result, their religious values often matched those of the adults who educated them. However, the girls' acceptance and perpetuation of adult views should not be mistaken for passivity, for as Cynthia Comacchio argues, "whether they resist adult expectations, accommodate them, or embrace them outright, the young are not simply acted upon."[38] In fact, the Villa girls produced a culture that placed considerable value on student participation in religious rituals and practices.

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[35] "La syndicaliste Madeleine Parent est décédée," Radio Canada., March 12, 2012, http://www.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/societe/2012/03/12/005-deces-madeleine-parent.shtml.

[36] Ibid.

[37] All of the students discuss their initiation into the Catholic faith, describing especially their first communions and confirmations.

[38] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 11.

At the Villa, religious life centered specifically on the divinity of the Virgin Mary; not only was the school named in her honour but she also represented the ideal woman.[39] As in many Catholic boarding schools, a "cult of Mary" developed at the Villa, wherein students displayed a remarkable preoccupation with and devotion to the Virgin Mother.[40] This was most clearly manifested through their participation in the Sodality of the Children of Mary, an exclusive group reserved for girls who demonstrated enough discipline and virtue to merit a place among Mary's chosen daughters.[41] During the ceremony, which occurred annually on December 8th – the Feast of the Immaculate Conception – the Children of Mary were given white sashes as a symbol of their purity and devotion. They also promised to behave in a modest, chaste, and feminine fashion, modeling themselves after their spiritual mother.[42]

In addition to demonstrating the role that the Virgin Mary played as a paragon, the Children of Mary ceremony reflected a larger trend that had characterized Quebec society since the second half of the nineteenth century, what Marta Danylewycz calls "the injection of devotional exercises into popular culture."[43] Responding to a perceived lack of religious enthusiasm, the Church had incited a devotional revolution, using the "spectacle" of religious ceremonies to encourage Catholics to become more active participants in their faith.[44] The Villa girls' participation in the Children of Mary ceremony, however, was not only an expression of their religious devotion; it was also a display of their student culture. Becoming a Child of Mary was a popular practice, discussions of which were part of almost every student autobiography. While it is possible that some girls were disingenuous in describing the joy of becoming a Child of Mary, perhaps doing so to appease their readers, most seemed to take their vows quite seriously.[45] For example, in 1933, Janet Harrison conveyed in her autobiography the emotion of becoming a member of the Sodality:

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[39] Mary Vincent, "Gender and Morals in Spanish Catholic Youth Culture: A Case Study of the Marian Congregations, 1930-1936," *Gender and History* 13.2 (Aug. 2001): 284.

[40] Ibid.; Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 42-44; Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 69; Danylewycz as well as Dumont and Fahmy-Eid tell us that the Virgin Mary was an important symbol in most Quebec convent schools.

[41] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), xxxi.

[42] Ibid.; Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 43.

[43] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 39.

> "On December the 8th, I had the happiness to be received into Mary's Sodality as one of her children. My feelings of great happiness could not be put into words when my ribbon was placed on me by my 'Ange.' Undeserving though I was, my happiness was untold because I am sure Our Lady understood. As a pledge of this understanding, she took me under her mantle of love, and set me on the path of 'Higher Ideals.' How faithful I have been, or will be, is for her alone to judge."[46]

Manon Hébert expressed similar sentiments, promising to channel Mary's spiritual strength as a weapon against worldly temptations:

> "Une des grandes journées de ma vie spirituelle a été le 8 décembre 1917, jour de ma réception d'Enfant de Marie. Depuis longtemps, je désirais me placer sous l'étendard de la Vierge. Depuis ce jour, elle m'a prise sous sa protection particulière. C'est me placer dans une fort qui sera attaqué, recevra des boulets, mais ne sera jamais vaincu; il sera assiégé mais jamais pris."[47]

The significance of the ceremony was also communicated through the student newspaper, the December issues of which featured a summary of the event as well as student reflections on their initiation. Yolande Gilbert, a newly-admitted Child of Mary, vowed her loyalty to the Virgin Mother, “promettant en présence du ciel et de la terre, de ne suivre d’autre étendard que ta blanche bannière.”[48] Others made similar vows, swearing allegiance to their spiritual leader and promising to comport themselves in her image and likeness. Like a modern-day celebrity, the Virgin Mary became a symbol that influenced the student culture, providing the girls with a tangible ideal to strive towards.

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[44] Ibid., 33-34; see also Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 17-49, where he discusses how the celebration of Mgr Laval was a "commemorative spectacle" that recreated the Fête-Dieu ceremony to at once honour the archbishop and encourage participation in religious ceremonies.

[45] Vincent, "Gender and Morals," 285-286.

[46] Janet Harrison, No title, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1933.

[47] Hélène Martin, "Biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1919.

In addition to creating their own “cult of Mary,” Villa girls also participated in Catholic student associations. Similar to the extracurricular activities offered in English Canadian high schools, these associations provided administrators with the opportunity to not only regulate adolescent pastimes but also to control the content of their discussions.[49] That said, they were well-received among students, especially because they provided spaces for social interaction and, more importantly, granted them a more active role in the negotiation of their faith.[50]

The Cercle littéraire de Marie[51] was one such association that held an important position in the spiritual and cultural lives of Villa Maria’s students. Conveniently named after the Virgin Mary, the study circle was popular in many convent boarding schools.[52] Weekly meetings were held on Sunday evenings, when members gathered to discuss various subjects, the majority of which were religious.[53] While supervised and directed by a presiding teacher, the study circle elected its own council and designed its own program of activities, demonstrating the students' agency in not only organizing the meetings but also in selecting discussion topics.[54] These initiatives translated most often into activities of a religious nature. For instance, during the assembly before Holy Week, the 1926 study circle participated in the Way of the Cross, stopping at each station to recite the story of Christ's death and resurrection.[55] A week later, the group organized a poetry soirée wherein students had to employ different poetic forms to discuss a religious subject.[56] Examples of this nature are numerous: in 1931, the undergraduates gave an oral presentation on the life and work of the Virgin Mary, the 1935 group debated the role of religious women in Canadian history and held an auction to raise funds for Catholic missionaries in China, and virtually all of the meetings ended with a game of charades in which students often acted out biblical stories.[57]

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[48] “À l’Immaculée,” *The Villa World*, December 1917, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.430.

[49] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 112.

[50] See Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les Couventines,* 68, where they discuss the popularity of these associations.

[51] Ibid., 69-70.

[52] Ibid., 75.

[53] Ibid., 76.

In addition to illustrating the influential role that religion played in the girls' culture, participation in associations of this kind reinforced the importance of the peer group, access to which depended on one's faith.[58] While the majority of girls were Catholic, Protestants began to be admitted in 1926 and made up a small proportion of the student population. Because they were a minority in a devoutly Catholic institution, Protestant girls often felt left out of religious activities. For instance, one Protestant student was dismissed while her classmates attended the retreat and another felt excluded during mass.[59] By that same token, becoming a Catholic granted one access to an otherwise restricted peer group. This was the case for one student who gained the recognition of her classmates when she was baptized.[60] Thus, faith played an important role in the student culture, dictating the girls' pastimes and defining their peer groups.

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[54] It should be noted here that the girls were given a list of themes to choose from each week. While this dictated the subject matter, it did not determine the specific topics that were debated or the types of activities that were held.

[55] *Cercle littéraire de Marie*, March 28, 1926, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.240.

[56] *Cercle littéraire de Marie*, April 1926.

[57] *Cercle littéraire de Marie*, December 6, 1931; March 10, 1935.

[58] Comacchio, *The Dominion of* Youth, 127.

In addition to determining the nature of the students' social activities, the girls' Catholic convictions also influenced their life choices. More specifically, the contemplation and pursuit of a religious vocation were common among many students.[61] Without a doubt, the teachers played a major role in encouraging the girls to follow in their footsteps, using their maternal positions to convince their students of the merits of religious life.[62] Persuaded by the nuns or inspired by their own religious sentiments, many students seriously contemplated this option. Since the post-secondary opportunities available to Canadian adolescents were limited by social, ethnic, and gendered factors, religious life presented itself as a respectable life path to many Villa girls.[63] Whether motivated by their spiritual devotion to God, drawn to the prospect of pursuing a career, or eager to avoid marriage and motherhood, many students demonstrated the centrality of religion in their personal lives by considering a religious vocation.[64] This was true for one student who, in the closing remarks of her autobiography, promised to return to the Villa as a 'Mother'.[65] The girls also closely monitored alumnae entrances into the novitiate; the student newspaper included a specific section for announcements of this kind, demonstrating the regularity with which former students entered Catholic congregations. In fact, in 1954, the number of living alumnae who had entered the Congregation of Notre-Dame was 27; a remarkable figure if one considers the small class sizes and the fact that many former graduates had also joined other congregations.[66]

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[59] Agnes Dobson, No title, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1933; Aline Provencher, "Autobiographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1944.

[60] Isabelle Rivet, No title, *Autobiographies manuscrites,* 1922.

[61] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil,* 116.

[62] Ibid., 116-117.

[63] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 109.

[64] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil,* 106.

[65] Josée Gaulois, "Ma biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1925.

The decision to take the veil also had an impact on students' social lives, especially since it often entailed several years of cloistered living that severed bonds of friendship. In 1919, a student reflected upon her sister's decision to enter the Congregation of Notre-Dame, admitting that she and her family "were all very lonely without her but we were all willing to sacrifice to Our Lord, her, who was so willing to give herself to Him."[67] Similarly, interviewee May Vernon relived the sorrow of being separated from her best friend when the latter entered the Carmelite sisterhood.[68] The decision to enter religious life, then, was not only a personal one; it also affected the social relationships of the students. On a broader level, the girls' daily interactions with their faith played an important role in informing their student culture, which was characterized by a steady involvement in religious rituals and practices.

Citizenship and Women's Role in Society

In the early twentieth century, Canadian adolescents were undergoing a process of identity formation that placed nationalism and civic responsibility at the forefront. As Cynthia Comacchio suggests, this was largely due to the fact that Canada, as a nation, "was effectively working toward its own individuation, the formation of a modern identity that drew from but was self-consciously different from that of its British parent and its American peers."[69] This process manifested itself on a much smaller scale at Villa Maria, whose students identified themselves first by their ancestral heritages (English, Irish, Scottish, and French Canadian) and second by their birthplace (Canada).[70] In many schools throughout the country, adult initiatives promoted citizenship-building activities in order to establish a Canadian identity among young adolescents.[71] At the Villa, administrators failed to provide a uniform and collective program for civic training, thereby reinforcing the division of students along national lines. This was in part due to the fact that the teachers themselves came from various European and American backgrounds and were therefore equally diverse in their cultural affiliations. Moreover, a number of students were not Canadian, having traveled from the U.S. and South America to attend the school. Most importantly, though, the development of a 'Canadian' identity, which was widely viewed as Anglophone, Protestant, and middle class, was lost on many students, who shared neither the dominant language nor the prevailing religious values of their birthplace.[72] As a result, the students expressed much stronger connections to the national heritages of their families than to the country of which they were citizens.

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[66] *Centenaire: Liste des anciennes élèves de Villa Maria entrées à la CND*, 1954, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.300.

[67] Amelia Brown, No title, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1919.

[68] Author interview with May Vernon.

The students' attachment to American, British, and French-Canadian cultures was displayed in part through their adoption of nation-specific holidays. A widely celebrated occasion among Montreal's Irish population, Saint Patrick's Day was observed annually at the Villa for both its religious and patriotic meanings.[73] Unable to attend the parade because of boarding restrictions, the 'Irish'[74] girls enthusiastically organized the non-religious celebrations for their classmates, which most often took the form of parties and games:

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[69] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 3.

[70] The only exception to this is the girls who came from the United States, all of whom identified themselves solely as American.

[71] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 190; Roderick MacLeod and Mary-Anne Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People: School Boards and Protestant Communities in Quebec, 1801-1998* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 224-225. It is important to note that citizenship-building activities were most prominent in anglophone public schools.

[72] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 190-191.

> "Our party on St. Patrick's Day was really a work of art…so we thought, for we were the artists and arranged everything ourselves, even the menus, which we made by hand."[75]

The students' participation in holiday observances was more than just a performance of various patriotisms; it also created opportunities for the girls to learn about different cultures and customs. For instance, the 'Irish' students' Saint Patrick's Day party also had a didactic purpose, as it became an annual tradition to teach the French Canadian girls about Irish culture by inviting them to a customary Irish supper.[76] The American students also sought to assert their identities within the complex national fabric of the existing student culture by hosting Thanksgiving suppers, celebrating George Washington's birthday, and educating their classmates about Columbus Day.[77]

Heritage also played a role in the formation of friendships: like one's religious affiliation, a student's identification with a particular nation or culture often determined her access to specific peer groups. A group of students who graduated in 1917 called themselves the "American girls," one of whom admitted to feeling lonely when her friends returned to Staten Island without her to complete their Regents' Examinations.[78]

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[73] John Matthew Barlow, "The 'House of the Irish' : Irishness, History, and Memory in Griffintown, Montreal, 1868-2009," PhD dissertation, Concordia University, 2009, 123.

[74] Most girls who identified themselves as 'Irish' had in fact been born in Montreal.

[75] Gertrude Tannehill, "Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1926.

[76] Michelle Fortin, "My Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1923.

[77] "Chronicle," *Villa World*, February 1916, December 1916, June 1917.

[78] Amy Moore, "Happy Days at the Villa", *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1917; Regents Examinations are standardized tests taken by students who reside in the state of New York.

Similarly, in 1924, several Francophone students banded together to create a "Parlons biens" group, the goal of which was to practice proper diction in their daily conversations as a means of preserving the French language.[79] While the autobiographies give the impression that most girls were amicable towards one another, they also tell us that the penetration of particular peer groups could prove challenging if one did not share a common cultural heritage with her classmates. Margaret Poulter, a New Yorker, experienced this firsthand when she tried to befriend a group of French-Canadian students:

> "On meeting the French girls I tried airing my French. They kindly but firmly answered in English. I soon took the not too gentle hint and stuck to my mother tongue."[80]

Another student expressed similar sentiments, remembering how unhappy she was to have a francophone roommate, who took no interest in her because she could only speak English.[81] Because most of the girls were unaccustomed to the Spanish language, the handful of South American students were met with even more resistance; many of them recalled the difficulty of forming friendships as a result of their foreignness.[82] These divisions were reified by the teachers, who also identified themselves as American, English, Irish, Scottish, and French Canadian, thereby legitimizing the separation of students along cultural lines.

The ambiguity of the students' civic identities became even more apparent in their discussions of the world wars. Throughout English-speaking schools in Canada, including those in Montreal, the world wars became a tool for teaching children and adolescents how to behave like model citizens. In fact, Mary Anne Poutanen and Tamara Myers explain that during the Second World War, Montreal's Protestant schools worked to curb youth delinquency and to produce "patriotic citizens," goals that were viewed as equally important to the success of the Canadian war effort.[83] By contrast, the Villa's administrators failed to implement a citizenship-building agenda, which is especially reflected in the ways their students addressed the First World War.

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[79] *Cercle littéraire de Marie*, April 2, 1924.

[80] Mary Anne Podmore, "A Biography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1923.

[81] Mary Foster, "My Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1929.

[82] Carmelita Juan, "Villa Days," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1933.

First published in 1914, the student newspaper, entitled *Villa World*, was flooded with announcements, essays, and short stories about the tragic events occurring overseas. However, these were often devoid of any conversation about the Canadian war effort; instead, they were fixated upon the military operations of the U.S., Britain, and France. In the February 1916 issue, one student wrote an essay on the notable bravery of the Irish and Scottish soldiers.[84] In December of the same year, a poem about the French war effort was featured, as was a discussion of the assistance French priests were providing to soldiers in the trenches.[85] In June of 1917, an American student wrote with pride about how U.S. troops had assisted a group of Belgian women and children.[86] That same year, in one of the few discussions of the Canadian war effort, one student described the bravery of the Canadian soldiers but referred to them as "colonials" of the "Dominion."[87] Unexposed exercises in civic training, many students continued to identify themselves through their families' national heritages, which explains the absence of the Canadian war effort in their discussions.

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[83] Tamara Myers and Mary Anne Poutanen, "Cadets, Curfews, and Compulsory Schooling: Mobilizing Anglophone Children in WW II Montreal," *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 38 no. 76 (2005): 367-398.

[84] *Villa World*, February 1916, 72-73.

[85] "The Soul of France," *Villa World*, December 1916, 26-27.

[86] *Villa World*, June 1917, 94-95.

[87] Ibid., 91-92.

In *The Other Quiet Revolution*, José Igartua argues that the emergence of an English-Canadian identity that distinguished itself from its British ancestry occurred during the 1960s.[88] However, his critics have suggested that the development of this identity first began in the 1940s and 1950s, which corresponds to Villa girls' shifting attitudes towards their national identity during the early years of the Second World War.[89] The students' sense of citizenship was also impacted by the transformation of the administration and student population's ethnic composition; both saw a decrease in the number of Americans as well as a reduction of those who defined themselves by their British ancestry.[90]

These changes resulted in discussions of the Second World War that were much more concerned with Canada's role in the conflict. In 1940, two students expressed mixed emotions when their brothers were sent overseas to fight: they feared the prospect of never again seeing their siblings but were also proud that their families were contributing to the Canadian war effort.[91] When news of the war's end reached the Villa, the students celebrated by singing "O Canada" as they marched around the school.[92]

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[88] See José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

[89] Timothy S. Forest, Review of José E. Igartua's *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71*, *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 98.4 (Fall 2007): 200. Also see Brereton Greenhous and W.A.B. Douglas, *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War (rev. ed.)* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1996); While the development of a Canadian identity in Quebec was complicated by the resistance of many French Canadians to their participation in the war under the command of the Canadian army, this did not seem to be an issue among any of the Francophone students; all of those who discussed the subject expressed support for the Canadian war effort.

[90] By the late 1930s and early 1940s, there was a marked decreased in the number of students and teachers who were born in the United States. Moreover, the autobiographies written toward the end of the examined period are not only characterized by a decrease in the number of students who describe their families' British heritage, but are also marked by a lack of discussion about the nationalities of their teachers. While this may only mean that the students placed less importance on the cultural origins of their teachers, it testifies to the broader disregard of imperial bonds.

[91] Suzanne Bouvier, "Ma biographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1940; Marie-Pierre Marois, No title, *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1946.

[92] Louise Simard, "Une page du passé," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1946.

While most students celebrated, one reflected solemnly on the horrific events that had occurred, stating that her inability to comprehend the war was a symptom of being a citizen of a peaceful country:

> "Élevées dans un pays pacifique, nous ne pouvions soupçonner la gravité de ce qui s'annonçait. Nous ne fûmes pas longues à le réaliser. Durant bientôt six ans, nous avons prié avec foi et confiance. Une paix définitive n'est pas encore établie dans le monde mais gardons l'espoir de vivre un jour dans un monde meilleur et pacifié."[93]

While the early 1940s were characterized by a rapprochement between students and their Canadian identities, from 1916 and 1946, Villa girls, for the most part, adopted an ambiguous attitude toward their role as Canadian citizens. Informed by an administration that was equally diverse in its loyalties, the girls were left to navigate complicated questions of citizenship on their own, which led to the production of a student culture that lacked a uniform civic identity.

While early twentieth-century Villa girls were divided in their national and cultural affiliations, their socioeconomic homogeneity produced a student culture that accommodated and implemented the accepted social roles of women. As explained in chapter one**,** Villa Maria's educational philosophy stressed the importance of training its students' for their future moral and domestic responsibilities. Driven by a desire to maintain an elite image and informed by the conservative views of the Church on the status of women, the school's administration propagated the following to its students: as the conservators and perpetuators of the Catholic religion and of the privileged class, Villa girls were destined to either become model wives and mothers, or, to consecrate their lives to God.[94] Having been raised to consider themselves as members of the highest social class, whether francophone, anglophone, or Hispanic, Canadian, American, or South American, Villa girls adopted the roles set out for them by society and, more particularly, by their teachers.

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[93] Louise St. Jean, "Ma biographie," *Autobiographies* manuscrites, 1945.

As we have seen, the students' discussion of the world wars illustrated the ambiguities of their national loyalties and patriotic sentiments. Lacking a real citizenship-building program, the girls participated in the war effort less as a means of asserting their Canadian identities than as an exercise in domestic and charitable service, honing skills that would prove useful when they married. The Villa was not the only school to use the war effort as a means of reinforcing gender roles. In many of Montreal's Protestant public schools, girls and boys participated in gender-specific war effort activities that were geared toward developing their respective social roles.[95] Similarly, many young female Canadians became involved in clubs like the Girl Guides, which were designed to cultivate both their civic identities and feminine responsibilities.[96]

Since the school did not create new associations or programs exclusively meant for the war effort, existing activities that promoted 'women's work' were adapted for the cause. Accustomed to performing charitable acts for the poor, which not only reinforced their Catholic roles but also prepared them for the altruistic duties expected of the elite,[97] the Villa graduates of 1916 and 1917 donated the monetary prizes received at convocation to the Red Cross.[98] The sewing and knitting classes were also appropriated for both war efforts, as the girls made socks, clothing, and blankets for the soldiers overseas.[99]

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[94] See Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil,* 77, boarding schools like Villa Maria and Mont-Ste-Marie were established in order to increase the CND's reputation among Quebec's elite; Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 17, 143.

[95] MacLeod and Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People*, 225, 234-35.

[96] Comacchio, *The Dominion of* Youth, 90, 195; Also see Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak?,"135.

[97] See especially Bettina Bradbury's chapter on Émilie Gamelin in her book *Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws, and Politics, in Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

In addition to fulfilling their social roles during the world wars, the girls regularly incorporated socialization activities into their student culture. At the Villa and elsewhere,[100] the students' social lives were constructed to familiarize them with the social situations they would undoubtedly encounter once they graduated and married. As such, the girls engaged in a number of parties and gatherings, the goal of which was to train them in the art of entertaining and hosting. Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s, classes from both the English and French sectors would host dinner soirées for one another, learning how to decorate, cook, and host a supper for guests. The *Villa World* described one such party given on American Thanksgiving, illustrating the girls' behaviour and etiquette:

> "The tables were prettily decorated with the national colors; in the centre was a huge bouquet of American beauty roses, while on the sides floated in glory, the stars and stripes. The girls who served wore dainty little red, white, and blue caps, with tea aprons to match. The favors were miniature cannons filled with chocolate-coated shot and bearing the inscription U.S.A. After the dinner, a few words of thanks were addressed to the generous hostesses, by one of the Undergraduates…"[101]

It was also a custom for the graduates to partake in a picnic at the end of the school year, wherein one chosen student would host her classmates at her family's summer home.[102]

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[98] *Villa World*, June 1916, 166-167; Violet Smith, "Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1917.

[99] Author interview with May Vernon; "A Knitting Match," *Villa World*, February 1916, 46-51.

[100] Harbec, "L'éducation 'idéale,'" 79.

[101] "Chronicle," *Villa World*, December 1916, 53.

[102] Most graduates discuss the picnic in their autobiographies.

Moreover, the graduates' entertaining skills were tested during the alumnae reunions, where they were tasked with serving tea and refreshments.[103]

While these activities were arranged by the administration, the girls demonstrated their acceptance of them by planning their own parties. For instance, during their October holiday, one student invited her classmates to a dinner party at her home, after which she was praised for her hospitality and excellent hosting skills.[104] Similarly, a group of undergraduate students decided to organize a "farewell banquet" for the departing graduates, wherein they treated their classmates to a supper and games.[105] What is important to note is that the majority of these activities were designed for students in the last two years of high school, thus reinforcing their preparatory purpose.

If the students' deliberate participation in socialization activities is a sign of their approval of female social roles, so too, and perhaps more so, are their discussions of this issue. In fact, after religion, the role of women in society is the most common discourse found in the girls' written and oral forms of communication.[106] While it is important to keep in mind that the school newspaper and student associations were censured and supervised, the frequency with which the girls discussed the social role of women still underscores its importance. Moreover, it is unsurprising that most girls adopted a conservative outlook on the status of women in society, since their upbringing and education facilitated an acceptance of these views.

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[103] Many girls mention in their autobiographies the role they played in serving at the annual conventums for the school's alumnae.

[104] *Villa World*, December 1917, 90.

[105] Mildred Hanson, "Biography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1923.

[106] See Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 168; they explain that the content of most student newspapers were dominated by two major themes: girls' education and women's social roles.

Manifested in short stories, articles, and debates, the girls presented an opinion on women's roles that conformed to contemporary societal views. In June of 1917, a student wrote a short story in the *Villa World* that reified the accepted social duties of women: two sisters, both of whom were contemplating their life paths, respectively chose to become a nun and a wife.[107] In an article entitled "Palms for the Gentle Sex," one student highlighted the importance of women's maternal care and charitable work, praising socially privileged women for sacrificing their leisure time to attend to wounded soldiers, carrying out tasks "utterly repugnant to the tastes of gentle breeding."[108] In 1931, the Cercle littéraire de Marie debated the value of studying academic subjects versus domestic science; they concluded that learning to become a household manager was equal to, if not more important than, one's intellectual pursuits.[109] Similarly, in 1935, the group held a debate over whether women of the past were more virtuous than contemporary women, siding with the former:

> "Dans le premier débat la femme d'hier fut préférée à celle d'aujoud'hui comme étant à un niveau moral plus élevé. Mais il faut dire que la femme moderne fut chaudement défendue. Tout de même la grandmère possédant une foi vive et solide et menant une vie effacée l'emporta sur la petite-fille volontaire et indépendante dont l'existence est si agitée."[110]

Having established that most students adopted the normative messages put forward by their superiors on the subject of their place in society, it is important to note that dissenting voices existed. However, only three were found in the autobiography sample for this period, all of which argued for the expansion of the workforce to women but said nothing about their domestic or maternal roles.[111] For the most part, then, the girls incorporated these roles into their student culture, performing feminine duties and asserting the legitimacy of women's social positions through various forms of writing and conversation.

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[107] "A Blessing in Disguise," *Villa World*, June 1917, 63-71.

[108] "Palms for the Gentle Sex," *Villa World*, June 1917, 83-84.

[109] *Cercle littéraire de Marie,* December 6, 1931.

[110] *Cercle littéraire de Marie,* February 10,17 1935.

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With every activity, ritual, and performance of their student culture, Villa girls in the decades prior to 1946 mirrored their 'mothers.' While student homesickness and the desire for a stable living environment led to the creation of maternal bonds that teachers used to communicate their views, it is important to note that the girls were not passive recipients of this intergenerational exchange. In fact, they played a leading role in the perpetuation of institutionally-sanctioned ideas, first through the integration of the Catholic faith into their personal and social lives, and second through their participation in women's civic and social activities. In doing so, they produced a student culture that legitimized the normative messages of the school's administration. While the students who attended Villa Maria in the first half of the twentieth century, for the most part, enjoyed a harmonious relationship with their teachers, tensions would rise by the late 1940s and early 1950s. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the influence of a changing society – which many more students experienced firsthand when the boarding restriction was lifted – led to demands for increased independence and to a gradual rejection of conservative views of gender and class.

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[111] Jane MacIntosh, "Biography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1923; Betty Blake, "Me," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1934; Marie-Josée Trudeau, "Autobiographie," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1941.

Chapter 3

Breaking the Mold: Redefining the Student Culture through Resistance and Rites of Passage, 1947-1965

As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the 1950s marked a period of transformation in Quebec society, one that would inform the Quiet Revolution.[1] According to historians like Paul-André Linteau, the decade that had once been subsumed within "'la grande noirceur'" was really characterized by a "tension […] between a population in the throes of rapid socioeconomic transformation and institutions that were too slow to adapt."[2] The institution that was arguably the most resistant to change was the Catholic Church, which had enormous influence over the province's education system until the 1960s. There exists a significant body of literature that illustrates the agency of university students in challenging the Church's authority. As Nicole Neatby has demonstrated, post-secondary students at the Université de Montréal played an important role in dismantling the Church's monopoly over education by calling for state intervention.[3] Focusing specifically on the influence of female university students, Karine Hébert shows how young women began to carve out a space for themselves on campuses by demanding greater access to male-dominated university programs, and, more importantly, a redefinition of the roles that the Church had established for them.[4] While these historians demonstrate the importance of Quebec's youth in reshaping the education system, the agency of adolescents, and of teenaged girls more particularly, has largely been left out of the conversation. In their seminal work on Quebec's convent schools, Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid briefly address girls' frustration with the limits of female education.[5] Still, there exists no in-depth analysis of female students' agency during this period.

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[1] Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, Francois Ricard, *Quebec Since 1930*, trans. Robert Chandos and Ellen Garmaise (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited, 1991), 152.

[2] Ibid., 151-152.

[3] Nicole Neatby, "Student Leaders at the University of Montreal in the 1950s: What did Catholics Want? (Quiet Revolution)," *Historical Studies* 62 (1996): 73-88; also see Nicole Neatby, "Student Leaders at the University of Montreal from 1950 to 1958: Beyond the 'Carabin Persona,'" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29.3 (Fall 1994): 26; also see Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution,* 34-40, for a discussion of Catholic youth during the late 1940s and 1950s.

[4] Karine Hébert, "Carabines," 593-625.

The present chapter will attempt to fill this gap by demonstrating the ways in which Villa girls actively contributed to the modernization of their school from 1947 to 1965. As a result of their increased exposure to external forces, Villa girls became critical of the Catholic conservative and elitist nature of their education. Lacking the freedom and the resources to outwardly demand change, however, students came up with their own methods to defy and alter institutionalized gender and social roles. First, girls engaged in a series of rule-breaking activities to resist a disciplinary structure that imposed a religiously-constructed feminine ideal. They also repurposed institutionally-sanctioned associations and ceremonies as forums for adolescent interaction and as rites of passage. Finally, they challenged the limitations of their education by emphasizing the importance of academic achievement and the pursuit of post-secondary studies.

The Struggle to Modernize

Like the Church in its struggle with university students, Villa Maria began to face criticisms from students who desired greater independence in their academic lives. Boarding was one of the defining characteristics of a convent school and mandatory for the final two years at Villa Maria until 1947, a situation which led many students to pursue their studies elsewhere for the last two years of the Lettres-Sciences program.[6] Attempting to dissuade its pupils from leaving, in 1947, the administration made boarding optional for all levels and, in 1953, they allowed boarders to return home on the weekends.[7] However, until the mid 1950s, they included a condition that forced all students to enter as boarders in their final year if they wished to graduate with a recognized diploma.[8] Despite its unpopularity, administrators continued to uphold the importance of boarding, demonstrating their unwillingness to modernize. In addition to maintaining this regulation, they also continued to employ a pedagogy that stressed domestic and religious training and valued privilege over academics in determining the school's reputation. By preserving the boarding regulation as well as a conservative educational philosophy, the school asserted its aversion to modernization, thus reflecting the Church's broader resistance to change. As Dumont and Fahmy-Eid explain, in response to young women's push for an expansion of their roles, "les évêques et les autorités scolaires proclament avec une force plus vive encore qu'avant la guerre que la place des femmes est au foyer."[9] Whether they maintained a feminized pedagogy of their own accord or were obliged to by educational authorities, school administrators of the 1950s and early 1960s conformed to the Church's limited views of female education.

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[5] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 172-173.

For Villa girls, it became difficult to reconcile the static nature of their school's philosophy with the changes they were witnessing in society. As an increasing number of students chose day schooling instead of boarding, they spent more time away from the Villa's sheltered environment, which led many of them to develop a new sense of independence. Unlike their predecessors, postwar Villa girls were being exposed to the "social freedom" of the outside world, which created tensions between students and teachers that had not existed prior to this period.[10] Moreover, the administration's preoccupation with educating privileged girls did not make sense to a student population that was becoming increasingly middle class. In fact, the development of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce as a middle-class neighbourhood, within which the Villa was located, had a significant impact in altering the socioeconomic composition of the school's clientele.[11] The combination of these factors subsequently resulted in the formation of a student culture that often clashed with institutional values.

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[6] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 107; for more on the Lettres-Sciences program, see above, chapter one.
[7] Ibid., 107, 147.
[8] Pierrette Garon, "Autobiographie," 1948; it seems that this restriction was lifted during the mid-1950s but the exact year is not known.
[9] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 153.

Resistance through Rule-Breaking

In order to maintain their structured environments, convent schools implemented a system of punitive measures that dictated student behaviour.[12] In addition to regulating general conduct, rules also reinforced gender roles: pupils were rewarded for displaying feminine qualities like obedience, spiritual devotion, cleanliness, and proper posture, but were punished for shouting, running in the corridors, and discussing inappropriate topics, acts associated with teenaged boys' behaviour.[13] At Villa Maria, students were regularly graded in the following areas: discipline, silence, uniform and appearance, manners, language, and punctuality.[14] Every movement was regulated, with students obeying strict rules for eating, sitting, speaking, going up stairs, entering a room, and greeting teachers.[15] While early-twentieth-century Villa girls were subjected to the same rules, they displayed much less resistance.[16] This was perhaps due to their desire to please teachers with whom they had formed close relationships.[17] By the late 1940s, however, a culture of resistance had begun to flourish, which manifested itself most visibly in the resistance of general rules, the defiance of teachers, and the use of the graduate autobiography as a medium for expressing dissent.

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[10] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 162.

[11] Walter Van Nus, "The Role of Suburban Government in the City-Building Process: The Case of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Quebec, 1876-1910," *Urban History Review* 13.2 (Oct. 1984): 91.

[12] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 60-61.

[13] Ibid., 56, 63-64, 66; Bienvenue and Hudon, "'Pour devenir homme,'" 1.

[14] "Bulletin mensuelle," 1952, from private collection of interviewee Adèle Bélisle, Montreal.

In their study of youth culture in Quebec's classical colleges, Louise Bienvenue and Christine Hudon argue that adolescent males misbehaved as a means of asserting their masculinity in an otherwise desexualized environment.[18] At Villa Maria, the girls' transgression symbolized their dissatisfaction with the various disciplining methods that aimed to guide them toward a feminine ideal. As we saw in chapter two, this ideal was informed by a Catholic view of women's moral role, the model for which was the Virgin Mary.[19] As such, the Villa girls produced a student culture that rejected this interpretation of femininity and began to adopt more modern forms of female conduct.

Perhaps the most visible expressions of resistance were violations of the dress code. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the uniform represented modesty and severity. Students wore knee-length woollen skirts with matching tunics, black or beige socks, as well as white collars and cuffs that had to be unsewn, washed, and reattached every evening.[20] A more relaxed uniform was worn on Tuesdays and Thursdays to accommodate the calisthenics classes. After 1954, Thursdays were reserved for the centenary uniform, which not only commemorated the school's one-hundredth anniversary but also updated the students' appearance by allowing them to wear an A-line skirt.[21] Despite this attempt at modernizing the uniform, most day scholars made modifications to it on a daily basis as they prepared to leave the school. Their alterations and stylistic choices were often based on the latest fashions or celebrity trends, which Kelly Schrum explains began to "shape teen consumer culture […] in the late 1940s and early 1950s."[22] For example, a number of girls would tease their hair in order to resemble Elizabeth Taylor and Brigitte Bardot.[23] Students also applied dark eyeliner to resemble their favourite French singers and movie stars.[24] Symbolic of the modern young woman, these styles outwardly challenged the austerity of the uniform and, by extension, the school's vision of a properly dressed woman. Because day scholars were less supervised than boarders, their ability to alter their appearances also gained them a special status.[25] Envious were those who watched their peers prepare themselves in the locker room, where they would roll their skirts, apply makeup, and put on jewelry.[26] As such, dress code defiance was not only a rejection of conservative ideas of femininity; it was also a measure of one's position within the student culture.

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[15] Author interviews, with Adèle Bélisle; Author interview with Thérèse Gaudreau, Montreal, August 11, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[16] This assertion is based on the autobiographies of the students, which prior to the mid-1940s included very few discussions of transgressive acts.

[17] See the discussion of the maternal bond between student and teacher in chapter two.

[18] Bienvenue and Hudon, "'Pour devenir homme,'" 1-2.

[19] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 42-44; Vincent, "Gender and Morals," 284.

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[20] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 57-58; Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 147; Author interviews, Adèle Bélisle and Thérèse Gaudreau.

[21] Ibid.; Author interview with Marie Arseneault, Montreal, August 26, 2014. . Name has been changed to ensure interviewee's anonymity.

[22] Kelly Schrum, "'Oh the Bliss': Fashion and Teenage Girls," in *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 135. In this chapter, Schrum provides an important discussion of the emergence of a fashion market in North America that targeted teenage girls and how their adoption of new styles and trends complicated the roles of parents and school authorities in regulating female adolescent behaviour.

[23] Author interviews, Adèle Bélisle, Thérèse Gaudreau, and Marie Arseneault; Marie Arseneault also discussed her difficulty in reconciling what she was taught in her ballet classes, i.e. to embrace her beauty and her femininity, with the nuns' promotion of modesty.

[24] Author interview with Thérèse Gaudreau.

[25] For a discussion of how adolescent girls associate dress with status, see Shauna Pomerantz, *Girls, Style, and School Identities: Dressing the Part* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), xiii-xiv.

The dismissal of what was considered appropriate feminine behaviour was also conveyed through the girls' conduct. One of the most important rules in a Catholic boarding school was silence, which was also a central facet of convent life.[27] A student's ability to remain silent demonstrated her restraint and obedience, qualities that were necessary for religious and married life.[28] To the students, however, this rule was merely an obstacle to social interactions between classmates. In their autobiographies, several girls recalled being scolded because they had discussed inappropriate topics in the classroom, during meals, or while walking through the corridors.[29] Tardiness, laziness, and the violation of dormitory rules were also indicative of poor feminine behaviour; however, day students were increasingly late to class, others subtly defied their lessons by drawing, passing notes, and avoiding their homework, and a number of boarders snuck out of their rooms at night to wander the grounds.[30] However trivial these insubordinations were, they represented a larger rejection of traditional views of proper female behaviour.

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[26] Author interview with Thérèse Gaudreau.

[27] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 61-62; Christine Gervais and Amanda Watson, "Discipline, Resistance, Solace and the Body: Catholic Women Religious' Convent Experiences from the Late 1930s to the Late 1960s," *Religions* 5.1 (March 2014): 281.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Lisane Bouchard, "Ma biographie," 1948; Florence Montpetit, "Autobiographie," 1958; Renée Godbout, "Autobiographie," 1959.

[30] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle; Ginette Chantecler, "Autobiographie," 1959; Micheline Groulx, "Ma biographie," 1950; Paulette Denis, "Autobiographie," 1951.

In addition to signifying student resistance of feminine ideals, rule breaking also presented itself as a means of forming friendships and of accessing peer groups.[31] For instance, two 1955 graduates became friends after one played a prank on the other during class, for which they were both reprimanded:

> "Dès ce jour, je fis la connaissance de ma grande amie Louise. Une petite espièglerie de sa part permit cette heureuse amitié. Au moment où Mère-Saint-Jacques demandait les questions d'usage, Louise, mettant en fonction son grand don d'imagination, tira ma chaise vers l'arrière[…] je pris un plongeon sur le plancher. Rouge de colère et de gêne, je me suis relevée, et après avoir envisagé ma voisine d'arrière quelques instants je lui souris et depuis, nous sommes de bonnes amies."[32]

The act of getting into trouble also reinforced the bonds of friendship between classmates. As Béatrice Boulogne noted, engaging in acts like staying up all night to talk and tinkering with the bell in order to gain an extra hour of sleep led her to develop a stronger bond with her roommate.[33] A student's ability to make friends also often depended upon her willingness to take part in rule-breaking activities, thus demonstrating the ritualization of the practice. For instance, Renée Godbout recalled how she became the third member of her "trio" because she agreed to take part in "les espiègleries" and "les goûts d'aventure" with a couple of her classmates.[34] While the autobiographies do not explicitly mention initiation-type activities that required girls to break rules in order to gain access to peer groups, the frequency with which they discussed shared acts of resistance is indicative of their importance to the student culture.

In addition to expressing dissent through their appearance and behaviour, Villa girls also directly defied the authority of their teachers. This was in part due to the fact that the growing and diversifying student population dramatically altered the nature of student-teacher relationships. Unable to form the same kind of attachment with the day students, it became more difficult for teachers to recreate mother-daughter relationships.[35] As a result, intergenerational conflicts became more common as girls acted out in opposition to their superiors' authority.

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[31] Christine Hudon and Louise Bienvenue, "Entre franche camaraderie,'" 488-89; Bienvenue and Hudon, "'Pour devenir homme,'" 9.

[32] Émanuelle Lasserre, "Mes jeunes années," 1955.

[33] Béatrice Boulogne, "Autobiogrpahie," 1958.

[34] Renée Godbout, "Autobiographie," 1959.

Responding to strict discipline, rigid teaching methods, and to the general monotony of the school routine, Villa girls increasingly challenged their teachers in the classroom.[36] Misbehaviour was often playful in nature, with students playing pranks, talking out of turn, and causing overall difficulty for faculty members as they tried to carry out their lessons.[37] For instance, at the beginning of a new school year, girls would often try to confuse their teachers by switching desks and trading names with their classmates.[38] While not meant as harmful, the girls' actions could lead to serious implications for the administration.[39] Responding to the strict demeanour of an unpopular teacher, one class behaved so poorly that they caused her to resign:

> "cette année-là, nous étions trente élèves, trente écolières espiègles et si insupportables que notre jeune maîtresse Mère-Sainte-Thérèse ne put terminer l'année avec nous"[40]

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[35] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 59; Christine Lei, *The History of a Catholic Girls' Day and Boarding School, 1865-1970: The Religious and Educational Achievement of the Loretto* Sisters (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 165-166; Lei argues that day students at Loretto Academy in Hamilton felt detached from their teachers, placing more importance on their relationships with classmates.

[36] The frequency with which the girls discussed getting into trouble in class significantly increased in the 1950s autobiographies. While this might be the result of a bolder student population that was less afraid to discuss tensions with teachers, their changing relationships and the absence of maternal bonds was more likely the cause.

[37] Paulette Denis, "Autobiographie," 1951; Élizabeth Hamel, "Ma biographie," 1951.

[38] Paulette Denis, "Autobiographie," 1951.

[39] Madeleine Daoust, "Autobiographie," 1947.

[40] Ibid.

Tensions with teachers were also a product of the girls' modernizing views. During the early 1960s, a group of students questioned their young teacher's motivations for becoming a nun because they could not comprehend her decision to adopt such a strict and limiting life path.[41]

For the most part, though, the girls' undermining of teachers' authority was light-hearted. In fact, like rule breaking, the collective defiance of faculty members became a ritualized practice that produced and reinforced friendships.[42] Playing tricks on teachers became an activity that not only helped to release pent-up frustrations but that also fortified bonds between classmates; as Jeanne Décarie explained, the shared experience of shocking their teachers by acting out and discussing inappropriate topics strengthened her friendship with several girls.[43] As a result, teachers no longer played a leading role in the creation and mediation of peer groups.

While the girls' transgression represented a somewhat inconsequential opposition to authority, the tensions that existed between students and their teachers could generate much more serious situations. This was especially true for those students who saw no other recourse than to leave the school entirely as a means of resisting the stringency of insufferable teachers. In 1954, with the consent of her parents, interviewee Adèle Bélisle chose to depart from the Villa because she felt terrorized by a strict faculty member who had been given the difficult task of managing a group of forty students.[44] Describing her last year as "une année vraiment pénible," she attributed her unhappiness to this teacher who used fear and punishment to control her students' behaviour.[45] Similarly, in 1964, interviewee Marie Arseneault left the Villa after prolonged tensions with a particularly unforgiving faculty member.[46] Resistance to authority, then, became a common element of the student culture, influencing student behaviour, contributing to the formation of friendships, and even leading some to leave the school altogether.

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[41] Author interview with Marie Arseneault.

[42] See Bievenue and Hudon, "Entre franche camaraderie," 488, where they discuss the solidarity of students in response to teachers' severity.

[43] Jeanne Décarie, "Autobiographie," 1958.

[44] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle.

The girls also displayed resistance within the pages of their autobiographies, which became increasingly characterized by the assertion of their individual identities.[47] Prior to the late 1940s, the autobiographies seemed to follow a rigid chronological structure and to lack genuine expressions of personal opinion. While the chronology was largely maintained, postwar students began to use their autobiographies as forums for airing out their resentment of certain faculty members. Whereas earlier autobiographies were filled with praise for beloved teachers, those written in the late 1940s and 1950s featured fewer declarations of gratitude and occasionally described student-teacher tensions. For instance, Catherine Dufour articulated her dislike for the teacher who had welcomed her to the school, describing her as unnecessarily stern and cold.[48] In previous years, any negative discussion of a teacher was usually accompanied by a justification of the teachers' actions: students would rationalize the severity of a faculty member by explaining that the harsh treatment had been for their own good. By the 1950s, however, the students were no longer making excuses for their teachers.

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Author interview with Marie Arseneault.

[47] See Mary Jo Maynes's discussion of the autobiography as genre in her chapter "Notebooks from the Road: How Workers Became Autobiographers," in *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers' Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 32-34.While these documents were supervised assignments more than they were true autobiographies, they still provided students with an opportunity to, as Mary Jo Maynes puts it, "search for a sense of self."

[48] Catherine Dufour, "Dix-sept années de ma vie," 1949.

Postwar students also began to address forbidden topics in their autobiographies, demonstrating not only a defiance of the assignment rules but also an increased preoccupation with female adolescent issues. While these texts were kept brief and vague, they nonetheless included expressions of the girls' affinity for the opposite sex and of their struggles with the coming-of-age process. In 1955, Angèle L'Amoureux described herself as becoming more interested in boys and wondered whether she would be able to find a date for the upcoming graduation party.[49] In 1957, Mariette Antoine defined her transition from "jeune fille" to "femme" as a sometimes uncomfortable and overwhelming process.[50] Renée Godbout explained that she underwent "une crise d'adolescence" during her first year of high school as she coped with the physical and emotional challenges of becoming a teenager.[51] These discussions speak to Gaston Desjardins's argument that during the 1940s and 1950s, teenagers in Quebec were becoming more vocal about their sexuality and about the changes associated with adolescent development.[52] They also speak to Comacchio's suggestion that girls became more expressive of their sexual desires and more self-conscious of their changing bodies as popular and material culture began to address subjects of this kind.[53] As these issues became more openly discussed within society and among adolescents more specifically, Villa girls also began to communicate their age-based concerns, using their autobiographies to do so.

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[49] Angèle L'Amoureux, "Ma biographie," 1955.

[50] Mariette Antoine, No title, 1957.

[51] Renée Godbout, "Autobiographie," 1959.

[52] Gaston Desjardins, *L'amour en patience: La sexualité adolescente au Québec – 1940-1960* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université de Québec, 1995), 2. In his work, Desjardins provides an important analysis of adolescent sexuality during the 1940s and 1950s, calling attention to how the Church discarded its discourse of repression in favour of one that promoted morality and that centered upon the family.

[53] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 71.

The transgression of rules was not simply a response to the rigidity of boarding school life; it also provided students with the means to challenge the feminine ideal that had long been the goal of convent school training. Furthermore, it allowed students to express their individualism, becoming an important ritual that forged friendships and helped girls cope with the process of teenage development. Most importantly, rule breaking played a major role in creating a student culture that was increasingly resistant to generational pressures.

Appropriating Institutionally-Sanctioned Activities

In most educational institutions, spaces for adolescent amusement were shaped and controlled by adult initiatives that aimed to prepare youths for their future gender, civic, and social roles.[54] For administrators and faculty members, modern leisure and popular culture were considered dangerous influences that could potentially lead to transgression and delinquency, further reinforcing the need for supervised activities.[55] At Villa Maria, there was an especially strict intolerance of popular music, magazines, films, and books because of their perceived potential to incite inappropriate behaviour.[56] So severe were these rules that in 1954, two students who missed an afternoon of classes to attend an Elvis Presley concert were promptly expelled.[57] To contain and supervise student pastimes, the administration implemented a series of activities, the goal of which was to cultivate proper female behaviour.

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[54] Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition: Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32.3 (Fall 1997): 5.

[55] Ibid., 7-8; For a discussion of female delinquency in Montreal, see the work of Tamara Myers, especially *Caught: Montreal's Modern Girls and the Law, 1869-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[56] Author interview with Thérèse Gaudreau.

[57] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle.

In response to this, Villa girls began to appropriate these activities for their own purposes. This reflected an existing trend among English Canadian students who since becoming a definable group through their increasing enrolment in high schools during the early twentieth century, had been repurposing adult-organized extracurricular activities to fit their respective youth cultures.[58] Villa Maria's students were undoubtedly slower to engage in similar efforts due to the strict limitations that boarding school education entailed prior to late 1940s. As regulations were gradually relaxed, however, Villa girls became more exposed to societal influences that redefined for them what it meant to be an adolescent girl. Unlike their predecessors, who turned to their teachers for assistance in navigating the challenges of adolescence, postwar students, like many teenaged girls at the time, "began to rely on their peers and on commercial popular culture for guidance."[59] This resulted in the production of a student culture that emphasized age-based practices and modern leisure pastimes, thereby undermining the school's effort to promote their conservative vision of femininity. More importantly, students found that one of the most effective ways to establish these age-specific rituals was through the appropriation of existing religious events and activities.

Examined in chapter two as an occasion that fortified students' religious convictions and provided them with a feminine ideal to strive toward, the Children of Mary ceremony was appropriated for a much different purpose in the postwar period. While students continued to assert its spiritual importance, most began to view their entrance into the Sodality as an affirmation of their coming of age. This can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, as the student population increased and diversified, girls became more preoccupied with age-based practices and hierarchies; and secondly, they had become critical of the conservative feminine ideal that informed the ceremony.[60] As such, the Sodality became a rite of passage that bestowed a special status upon chosen students, marking their transition from girls to young women. As one student put it, the ceremony had given her the sense that she had matured in the eyes of both her teachers and her parents.[61] It also elevated a student's position among her peers, many of whom longed for the opportunity to reach this defining moment in their adolescent lives. Moreover, the title and the white sash earned upon initiation came to represent the students' maturity rather than their modesty and purity, further demonstrating the girls' agency in redefining the event.

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[58] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 209.

[59] Kelly Schrum, "'Teena Means Business:' Teenage Girls' Culture and 'Seventeen' Magazine, 1944-1950," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls*, ed. Sherry Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 137.

Catholic student associations were also adapted to fit the student culture, as the girls began to view them as opportunities for adolescent discourse. For instance, the Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique,[62] a province-wide educational initiative that grouped students together for discussions of religion, was often repurposed as a space for friendly competition between students. Being chosen as the leader of a group became an important accomplishment because it afforded one a superior position within the student hierarchy. As interviewee Marie Arseneault recalled, when she and her best friend were chosen as leaders of their group, an emphasis was placed on which of them could best deliver the opening presentation to their peers.[63] These types of associations were also appropriated as spaces where students could engage in discussions of popular culture. For instance, the Cadets du Sacré Coeur, a group that met on a monthly basis to debate religious subjects, was often used for discussions of the latest celebrity gossip. Adèle Bélisle, who was team leader of her group, recalled that during a meeting that was supposed to feature the importance of prayer, "personne ne parlait de la prière. Tout le monde parlait d'Élizabeth Taylor qui s'était mariée avec je ne sais pas qui […] ou de Rock Hudson."[64] While this should not be viewed as a wholesale rejection of religious devotion, it does illustrate the increasing importance of age-based interests. Moreover, because mediums of popular culture were banned within the school, it demonstrates the girls' agency in circumventing authority.

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[60] Leslie Paris, "Through the Looking Glass: Age, Stages, and Historical Analysis," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1.1 (Winter 2008): 108.

[61] Catherine Dufour, "Dix-sept années de ma vie," 1949.

[62] Part of the Catholic Action movement, the Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique was an association organized by the Catholic clergy to promote religious discourse among students. While it began as a masculine activity, it was introduced in convent schools during the 1930s. For more on the Catholic Action movement and the role of the Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique, see Louise Bienvenue, *Quand la jeunesse entre en scène: L'Action catholique avant la Révolution tranquille* (Montreal: Boréal, 2003), Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution*, and Dominique Marquis, *Un quotidien pour l'Église: l'Action Catholique, 1910-1940* (Montréal: Léméac, 2004).

The girls also made use of the school newspaper, employing it as a vehicle for communicating their student culture on a larger and more organized scale. While it is important to keep in mind that student publications were heavily censored, the girls displayed ingenuity in the ways they managed to incorporate adolescent issues into their newspaper. *Eureka*, the French language publication that existed for two years in the early 1950s, was meant to be a forum for discussions of academics and religion. In the first issue, the school chaplain outlined the newspaper's mission, explaining that it should be based on principles of morality and that it should communicate Christian values.[65] Working in the margins of these parameters, the girls invented subtle ways to include age-based content. For instance, one student reviewed an adult-authorized book entitled *Toi qui devient femme, déja!*, which through its discussion of female coming-of-age issues allowed her to comment on the trials of becoming a young woman.[66] The newspaper staff also created an advice column for their peers, which was supposed to provide guidance on religious matters and school studies but in reality was used by the students to discuss their social lives or their tensions with teachers.[67] For example, when one student asked how she should manage strained relations with a particular teacher, the columnist responded with: "il y a une cause à ce derangement; trouve-là et essaie de mettre fin à cet état de chose qui te rend sûrement malheureuse" and advised her to explain her sentiments to her teacher to see if they could come to a resolution.[68] By offering their peers subdued recommendations, the girls at once escaped adult control and aired out their adolescent issues. As such, they succeeded in appropriating school activities for their own purposes.

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[63] Author interview with Marie Arseneault.

[64] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle.

[65] "'Eureka,'"*Eureka*, November 1951, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.307, 2, 5.

The girls also created their own spaces for adolescent interaction. Having gained new social freedoms with the loosening of boarding regulations, many students, like other Canadian teenagers, began to engage in modern leisure pastimes away from the school.[69] For instance, they organized their own informal get-togethers that, unlike the socialization activities that their predecessors had planned, saw the girls listening to music, making scrapbooks of celebrities, watching television, and reading magazines.[70] In doing so, Villa girls engaged in the "bedroom culture" that Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber argued was popular among postwar female adolescents, especially because public spaces were less accessible to them.[71] What's more, they planned their own parties, the purpose of which was, in part, to interact with the opposite sex. For instance, beginning in the late 1940s, senior students organized their own graduation party. Although it was a chaperoned event approved by parents, the party was neither planned nor condoned by the school administration.[72] Bringing a date seemed to be an unofficial requirement, which testifies to the girls' increasing preoccupation with teenaged romance and dating.[73] More importantly, though, the girls' participation in modern pastimes signified a rejection of institutionally-sanctioned activities.

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[66] "Toi qui devienne femme," *Eureka*, November 1951, 4-5.
[67] "Courrier Confidence," Eureka, November 1951, 14.
[68] Ibid., 14-15.
[69] Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition," 8.
[70] Author interviews, Marie Arseneault and Adèle Bélisle.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, coming of age became an important aspect of female adolescent life at the Villa. Prior to this period, however, discussions of age and the role it played in creating rites of passage were limited and inexplicit. As the stages of adolescent life became more stratified and contingent on certain factors like grade levels, girls began to view their transition from one year to the next as akin to the ascension of an age-based hierarchy. Like the sleep-away camps that Leslie Paris foregrounds in her discussion of age as "a category of historical analysis,"[74] convent schools became "worlds of age hierarchy" wherein students began to link age with status.[75] While the four levels of the Lettres-Sciences program permitted the administration to classify students based on their intellectual capacities, they came to signify something much more important to adolescent girls: 'first year,' 'superior,' 'undergraduate,' and 'graduate' were all titles to which an age-specific ranking was attached.[76] In 1960, when the adoption of the cours classique transformed the pedagogical program, the new titles associated with each of the four levels also assumed age-specific rankings.[77] This resulted in a student culture that used age as a form of classification and that emphasized the importance of maturity.

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[71] Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1976), 213.

[72] Author interviews, Marie Arseneault and Thérèse Gaudreau.

[73] Author interview with Louise Simard; for more on adolescent girls and dating, see Cynthia Commachio's chapter "In Love: Dating and Mating" in *The Dominion of Youth*; also see Aretha Heenan's discussion of romance and dating at Westmount High School in "The World of Westmount High School."

[74] See Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," 114-124.

[75] Paris, "Through the Looking Glass," 110.

Two defining transitions marked the high school experience of a teenaged Villa girl: becoming a secondary student and becoming a graduate. Prior to the late 1940s, most girls discussed the first weeks they spent at the Villa, often framing their descriptions in terms of the challenges that homesickness presented. As fewer girls commenced their first year as boarders, however, they began to attach a very different meaning to this level. In fact, it became a representation of their initiation into the adolescent world. In many of their autobiographies, the girls described the sense of pride that accompanied their promotion to secondary school. In 1947, Madeleine Daoust exclaimed, "Quel honneur! Et combien je me sentais déja vieille!,"[78] while in 1952, Marie-France Tautou offered these sentiments: "comme je me croyais agée et avancée!"[79] The idea of feeling older, then, was directly linked to their attainment of the first level of secondary school.

While this transition was crucial, 'graduate' was considered the highest ranking that a student could achieve because it symbolized the fulfillment of four long years of secondary schooling and the attainment of the ultimate position within the age hierarchy. Whereas the last year of schooling had previously signified the final stage in a girl's preparation for marriage and motherhood, by the postwar era, the graduating year had been reinterpreted as a marker of age-based status. Throughout their secondary education, Villa girls longed to become graduates; their desire for this title was overwhelmingly expressed in their autobiographies. As Émanuelle Lasserre explained, "depuis longtemps, j'enviais le sort de mes compagnes graduées. Je voulais être chargée de responsabilités."[80] In 1956, Yvette Pellan explained that, "Quand on est en première année, on regarde les graduées, et on les trouve grandes, chanceuses d'avoir fini le cours Lettres-Sciences," further reinforcing the idea that being a graduate was analogous to having achieved the final stage of adolescence.[81] When they did reach this level, most girls described a feeling of maturity, of responsibility, and of privilege. As Claire Lachance put it, after becoming a graduate, "je n'envisage plus la vie d'un même oeil. Mes idées sont un peu modifiées. Mes illusions achèvent de tomber," demonstrating her personal coming-of-age process.[82]

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[76] For a discussion of the four levels of the Lettres-Sciences program, see above, chapter one.
[77] For a discussion of the cours classique program, see above, chapter one.
[78] Madeleine Daoust, "Autobiographie," 1947.
[79] Marie-France Tautou, "Mes dix-huit ans," 1952.

It is evident that the girl's appropriation of the grade levels was an important act of agency; however, it would be misleading to ignore the fact that teachers were aware of the importance the girls attached to these titles. In fact, the administration increasingly allotted special privileges to the graduating students, which not only reinforced the age hierarchy but also provided teachers with some control over their pupils' pastimes.[83] If students were defining the status of being a graduate by the increased freedoms they were granted, then it was less likely that they would define it through inappropriate or transgressive acts, such as dating, skipping class, or smoking.[84] Moreover, the teachers were creating a self-perpetuating model of behaviour, as younger students continuously strove to become like the older girls. While it is impossible to discern from the existing sources if rebellious acts also determined one's age-based status within the student culture, the autobiographies do illustrate that the privileges awarded to graduates were viewed as markers of their age-based status.[85] Nonetheless, postwar Villa girls expertly used appropriation as a method of fostering a youth culture that not only emphasized leisure, popular culture, and age-based rituals but also rejected the normative messages of adults.

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[80] Émanuelle Lasserre, "Mes jeunes années," 1955.

[81] Yvette Pellan, No title, 1956.

[82] Claire Lachance, "Mon premier livre," 1950.

[83] Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition," 8; Paris, "Through the Looking Glass," 109-110.

Resisting Female Social Roles

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated that Villa girls asserted themselves as members of a modernizing society by rejecting the conservative feminine ideal that was embedded within the school's curriculum and disciplinary system. What has yet to be addressed is how the girls resisted the class structure that informed this ideal and the broader gender roles laid out for them. In her work on American private schools for girls, Amira Proweller argues that "changes in the class culture of the private school do not take place outside of social and political dynamics" and that girls respond to these dynamics through "their active resistance and negotiation of dominant school forms and practices."[86] This was especially true at Villa Maria, where the students, who were influenced by shifting views of women's place within the larger social fabric, became key actors in reshaping the school's position on female social roles. In fact, the emphasis they placed on academic achievement and on post-secondary studies were factors that persuaded the administration to adopt a more modern view of women's education.

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[84] Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition," 6-8.

[85] Gabrielle Latulipe, no title, 1956; Vivienne Hudon, "Les années qui ne s'oublient pas," 1950; Marie-Solange Côté, "Autobiographie," 1949.

[86] Amira Proweller, *Constructing Female Identities: Meaning Making in an Upper Middle Class Youth Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 1, 7.

As underlined in the first chapter, religion and social class were the two driving forces that shaped the school curriculum; this resulted in an academic program that stressed the moral and domestic role of women. As we have seen, students resisted some of the religiously influenced portions of their education, especially through their rejection of a feminine ideal that was modeled after the Virgin Mary. However, their resistance was more a product of their dissatisfaction with the antiquated values of the Church than it was a rejection of their faith, which continued to play an important role in shaping students' identities.[87] While the girls struggled to reconcile the Church's out-dated views of femininity with their religious values, they were less conflicted in their criticisms of the roles attributed to them through social class.

The Congregation of Notre-Dame's private boarding schools were originally established to serve a privileged clientele.[88] Although the increasing enrolment of middle-class girls diversified the student population, Villa Maria continued to define its superiority in terms of its ability to cater to society's elite. In the 1950s, brochures emphasized the school's social repute over the quality of academics.[89] Administrators also maintained the importance of hosting special events and distinguished guests as visible manifestations of the school's prestige. For example, the centenary celebrations in 1954 provided the administration with the opportunity to display the school's privileged history through lavish suppers, ornate masses, and an extravagant reception for the Duchess of Kent.[90] However, the school's preoccupation with these events caused the girls' studies to suffer. As one former student recalls, instead of devoting their time to academics, "on a passé l'année à s'exercer."[91] Administrators also coached their students on how to behave like privileged ladies. During the domestic science classes of the 1950s, girls were instructed on how to properly peel an orange, which they were told would be helpful when they attended high society dinner parties.[92] In the early 1960s, students were shown how to use their belts to practice tying cravats, which would prove useful when they were married to professional men.[93]

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[87] Neatby, "What did Catholics Want?," 74-75.

[88] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 212; Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 77.

[89] *Prospectus de Villa Maria*, 1955.

The administration also categorized the students within a social hierarchy.[94] Several examples drawn from interviews with former students reveal that as late as the 1960s, the school based its reputation on the role it played in educating privileged girls. Louise Simard remembered being repeatedly told that she was a member of "la crème de la société" and that she should behave in a corresponding fashion.[95] In 1953, a high-ranking member of the Congregation visited with the French sector superior course and asked all of the students whose fathers were professionals to stand up. When one student stood up alongside some of her classmates, she was scolded for doing so because her father was an engineer, which, according to the administration's standards, was not considered a professional occupation. What's more, one student was forbidden to announce the profession of her father because he owned a tavern.[96] Modern methods of making money were indeed frowned upon: in 1961, a student whose mother had become successful as a business-owner was reminded that the fathers of her classmates won respectable livings as doctors, lawyers, and politicians, thus insinuating that the wealth from which she came was inappropriately earned.[97] In fact, she was told that "Villa Maria est un institution qui éduquait l'élite de la société, et qu'il fallait que je me mette au pas."[98] Despite their efforts to construct a social hierarchy within the school, however, the administration's initiatives had little impact on the students. Interviewee Thérèse Gaudreau explained that some girls upheld the importance of wealth and chose their friends based on who could afford the most expensive fashions. However, she and interviewee Adèle Bélisle both confirmed that the majority of their classmates were indifferent to the social status of their peers.[99]

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[90] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle; Lanthier, *Monklands* Then, 148-153; *Fêtes du centenaire de Villa Maria*, 1954, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.302.

[91] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Author interview with Marie Arseneault.

[94] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 212; as Dumont and Fahmy-Eid explain, this also occurred in other convent schools across the province.

[95] Author interview with Louise Simard.

The girls also responded to institutionally-constructed class hierarchies by emphasizing academic achievement over privilege. Although convent schools such as the Villa offered the best education that a young woman could hope to receive, as late as the 1960s, pedagogical programs stressed elite feminine training as opposed to academic studies.[100] Wanting more from their educational experiences, Villa girls expressed an increased desire to cultivate their intellectual capacities. In the 1950s, the autobiographies were marked by a dramatic increase in discussions of an academic nature. The type of subjects that girls took an interest in is particularly revealing: while algebra, anatomy, physics, and Latin were among the favourites, there was a marked absence of enthusiasm for 'feminine' courses like domestic science and sewing.[101] Exam preparation also became a central theme in the girls' memoirs; they recalled undertaking long and tedious study sessions in the hopes of achieving good grades, reinforcing the notion that they valued the outcome of their intellectual endeavours.[102]

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[96] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle.
[97] Author interview with Marie Arseneault.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Author interviews, Thérèse Gaudreau and Adèle Bélisle
[100] Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, 125; Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 173.

Additionally, the students created a competitive academic environment, wherein high marks and awards became symbols of status within the student culture. Girls often measured their worth in terms of where they ranked within the class; placing first or second among one's peers was an achievement that students displayed proudly within their autobiographies.[103] Similarly, girls competed for academic awards because of the distinction it bestowed upon them. For example, after winning a literature competition and being elected president of the Académie Saint Thomas d'Aquin,[104] Sylvie Valois framed her accomplishment as an "honneur qui me rappela la saine influence que je devais porter sur toutes mes compagnes!"[105]

As academics became more important, some students felt like they were not being adequately challenged by the Villa's educational program. For instance, interviewee Adèle Bélisle, who attended the school in the 1950s, recalled that she and the girls who came to the Villa from the neighbourhood's elementary school found their classes easy.[106] Another student, who graduated in the early 1960s, did not recall having to work very hard to achieve good grades.[107] This led some students to pursue their studies elsewhere; the Collège Marguerite Bourgeoys, which was also run by the Congregation of Notre-Dame, was a favoured choice among departing students because the academic program was more developed and the teachers were more concerned with the intellectual as opposed to the ornamental instruction of their students.[108]

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[101] Lise Morin, "Ma biographie," 1954; Émanuelle Lasserre, "Mes jeunes années," 1955; Yvette Pellan, No title, 1956.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Catherine Caron, No title, 1956; Michelle Brault, "Ma jeunesse," 1959; Raymonde Lessard, "Évolution d'une jeune fille," 1959.

[104] L'Académie Saint Thomas d'Aquin was a literary association to which students from across the province belonged; for more, see Maurice Lemire and Denis Saint-Jacques, *La vie littéraire au Québec* (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1996), 139.

[105] Sylvie Valois, No title, 1956.

In addition to paying more attention to their academic success, Villa girls also began to demand greater access to higher education. Even into the postwar era, post-secondary institutions remained the "preserve of men."[109] Although young women became a larger presence in universities, they were met with considerable resistance from their male classmates.[110] For many teenaged girls, this challenge often began before they set foot on a university campus; most were not expected by their teachers or families to pursue further studies because their convent school training was viewed as sufficient instruction for their future domestic roles.[111] However, by the 1950s, the majority of girls educated in convent schools were choosing to continue their studies at the post-secondary level.[112]

Prior to the mid 1950s, few of the Villa's students discussed the prospect of pursuing their education, which was due in part to the fact that their teachers did not encourage them to do so.[113] However, after 1955, students began to express a strong desire to attend college and/or university. In the closing remarks of their autobiographies, numerous students mapped out their future plans, which often included the pursuit of post-secondary studies at the Collège Marguerite Bourgeoys, l'Institut de pédagogie familiale, or the Royal Victoria College (for English students) in fields like family science, nursing, teaching, and secretarial work. While these career choices reflect the limited options available to women, they also demonstrate the girls' growing desire to lead professional lives. The students also often framed their decisions to pursue careers as a defiance of expected social and gender roles. In 1957, Manon Brossard explained that her desire to acquire a Bachelor of Arts degree was complicated by the societal pressure to become a wife and mother.[114] In 1955, Angèle L'Amoureux expressed the frustration of being met with resistance from family members, who tried to dissuade her from pursuing a career in nursing:

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[106] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle.
[107] Author interview with Thérèse Gaudreau.
[108] Author interview with Adèle Bélisle; Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 109-110.
[109] Hébert, "Carabines," 593.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 25.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Author interview with Louise Simard.

> "Je voudrais devenir infirmière. Pierre dit que c'est parfaitement inutile. Il a poussé l'amour fraternel jusqu'à me prédire que je me marierais jeune! C'est gentil, n'est-ce pas, un grand frère quand il dit des choses pareilles à sa soeur!!!"[115]

The students' demand for a better education and greater access to post-secondary studies undoubtedly had an impact on the school. In 1960, the administration decided to discard the Lettres-Sciences program in favour of the cours classique program, which was characterized by a more modern and academically challenging curriculum.[116] Moreover, as the 1960s progressed, teachers began to encourage their students to pursue their studies at the collegial and university levels.[117] While these advancements reflected shifts in society's views of education, they also demonstrate the students' influence in reshaping their school's values, which they accomplished by rejecting out-dated social and gender expectations and by asserting the importance of obtaining a quality education.

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[114] Manon Brossard, no title, 1957.

[115] Angèle L'Amoureux "Ma biographie," 1955.

[116] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 179; Dumont and Fahmy-Eid, *Les couventines*, 109-111; for more on the transition from the Lettres-Sciences program to the cours classique, see above, chapter one.

[117] Author interview with Thérèse Gaudreau.

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Much as it did for Quebec society as a whole, the postwar era marked a period of transition in Villa Maria's history. And, like the province's university students who influenced education reforms, Villa girls played an important role in their school's modernization. Through their transgressive acts, their appropriation of extracurricular and religious activities, their participation in modern leisure pastimes, and their demand for a superior education, Villa girls assisted with the gradual restructuring of an academic program that had once confined them to limited social and gender roles. As the next chapter will demonstrate, changes to the education system led Villa Maria to implement a more moderate outlook in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which led students to adopt their school as the chief location for the production of their girls' culture.

Chapter 4

Navigating Boundaries: Producing a Student Culture within the Villa's Institutional Setting, 1966-1980

In 1960, Jean Lesage's Liberal Party ended the fifteen-year reign of Maurice Duplessis's conservative government, marking the beginning of the Quiet Revolution.[1] Throughout the 1960s, the changes generated by this movement became more visible within the structural foundations of Quebec society. The Catholic education system, which for decades had been a pillar that reinforced the Church's power in the province, was among the long-standing institutions that experienced a significant transformation. In 1961, the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec was established to address the problems inherent in both Protestant and Catholic schools.[2] The goal of the Commission was to standardize education, making it available to all youth regardless of their social position or gender.[3] Monseigneur Parent, chair of the Commission, along with the rest of the members, were responding to a disorganized and unequal education system in which post-secondary studies were largely inaccessible to working- and middle-class francophones; in order to attend university, students were first required to complete their studies at a collège classique: private institutions that often charged substantial tuition fees.[4] As political scientist Claude Corbo explains, "Ainsi coexist[aient] chez les franco-catholiques un système public incomplet au secondaire et un système privé élitiste et complet."[5] Moreover, female instruction in Catholic French-language schools largely imparted only the skills necessary for marriage, motherhood, and gender-based responsibilities.[6] The members of the Commission also sought to address linguistic inequalities, since both Protestant and Catholic anglophones generally enjoyed a higher quality of education in their respective public schools, which granted them greater access to English-speaking universities.[7] In order to correct the imbalances that characterized the existing system, the Commission called for the creation of a ministry of education, the modernization and standardization of a school curriculum, and a student-centered pedagogy. In other words, as John Dickinson and Brian Young explain, the Commission demanded that power over the education system be "largely taken away from the church and entrusted to a generation committed to secularism, nationalism, and modernism."[8]

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[1] Dickinson and Young, *A Short History of Quebec,* 318.

[2] Claude Corbo, *L'éducation pour tous,* 11.

[3] Ibid., 15.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Because private schools were also subjected to these reforms, Villa Maria was forced to adopt the new curriculum, to modernize its facilities, and to respect the authority of the new ministry.[9] Moreover, the administration could not force non-Catholic students to participate in Catechism classes or religious observances.[10] As mentioned in the first chapter, these reforms almost led to the Villa's permanent closure. However, the fervent petitioning of parents, teachers, and students influenced the Congregation of Notre-Dame to rethink its decision. Opting to make the necessary changes, the school undertook renovations, ceased to admit boarders, and phased out its elementary school. By the early 1970s, the nuns had shed their religious names as well as their habits and had become a smaller presence within the faculty, which itself saw a corresponding increase in lay teachers, a number of whom were male.[11] This influenced the nature of student-teacher relationships, which were no longer characterized by the tension that stemmed from fundamental disagreements over religious and social values. One interviewee captured the changing dynamics of student-teacher relationships, stating that "in [grade] nine we had our first lay homeroom teacher…we were just enthralled with that because she was young, beautiful, had a husband and kids, came to work everyday with a different outfit on…she really got the sense of our class, we were a little rambunctious but that didn't bother her."[12] The new curriculum did away with lessons in feminine training, while the number of observed religious holidays and events significantly diminished, demonstrating a shift in the school's views.[13] In addition to educational reforms, Villa Maria was also affected by the ideological and political ramifications of the Quiet Revolution. Targeted as a symbol of elitism and English domination (even though it was a bilingual institution), Villa Maria received bomb threats in 1969 from the paramilitary separatist group known as the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), which prompted the school to close for several days.[14] Unable to ignore the significance of the changes occurring in society, the administration aimed to successfully transform the Villa from a convent boarding institution into a modern secondary school for girls.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.; For a discussion of the broader socioeconomic inequalities that existed between francophone and anglophones, see Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 22-27.

[8] Dickinson and Young, *A Short History of Quebec*, 319.

[9] Corbo, *L'éducation pour tous*, 348.

[10] Ibid., 295-296.

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[11] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 214-215.

[12] Author interview with Linda Robertson, May 21, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure the interviewee's anonymity.

[13] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 211.

[14] Ibid., 222-223; Author interview with Patricia Martin; It is also worth noting that in 1977, Quebec novelist and separatist Hubert Aquin committed suicide on the Villa grounds. Whether Aquin's decision to take his life at the Villa was another symbol of the school's position within a politically divided province or, as Helen Lanthier suggests, a result of the author's love for the surroundings, it nevertheless demonstrates that Villa Maria ceased to maintain a sheltered environment.

As expected, these changes had a significant impact on the school. Strictly regulated behaviour, extensive religious instruction, and a pedagogy that sustained a limited view of women's roles gave way to a more student-centered education that encouraged the girls to pursue professional careers. While administrators still drew upon Christian and middle-class values to guide their pupils, by the late 1960s, they had adopted new educational standards and developed a more open and progressive learning environment. This, in turn, created a favourable setting for the development of a student culture that was much more accepting of the rules, values, and normative messages put forward by institutional authorities.

In this chapter, I argue that, unlike postwar Villa girls, who actively resisted the structure and limitations of the boarding school environment, students from this period worked comfortably within constructed parameters to participate in rituals and practices that were important to them. First, I illustrate the ways in which students accommodated the school's philosophy by adopting its age-based hierarchy as well as by incorporating its historical traditions and white, middle-class values into their student culture. Second, I demonstrate how the girls appropriated the school's physical setting as the principal location for their age-based activities, navigating delineated boundaries to produce and engage in adolescent discourses and pastimes, such as coming-of-age issues and dating rituals. Finally, I consider students' interactions with their teachers, demonstrating how they challenged authority within a controlled setting. Using the school's 1970s yearbook volumes as material manifestations of the official student culture as well as three alumnae interviews, this chapter will reveal the ways in which students navigated the supervised spaces of their high school to create meaningful adolescent experiences.

Accommodating the School Philosophy

As a result of the school's concerted effort to modernize, the clashing views of postwar students and teachers were replaced with the girls' general acceptance of much of the institution's ethos. One of the primary ways in which they accommodated the school's initiatives was through their participation in the preservation of an age-based hierarchy. In the postwar era, student relationships had been relatively fluid, becoming more stratified only when the girls created an age-based hierarchy to appropriate institutional structures, such as grade levels. By the late 1960s, these practices had become entrenched within the school's social fabric. Faculty members essentially took advantage of the students' previously constructed hierarchy in order to maintain a system of authority. As such, the perpetuation of age-based divisions became the initiative of the administration.[15]

The yearbook volumes are most reflective of this project, since their structure not only reinforces the authority of administrators and faculty members but also ranks students based on their age.[16] For instance, the administration is always displayed first, followed by the teachers, the yearbook staff, the student council, the graduates, and then the undergraduates. Moreover, the graduates occupy the most space within the yearbook, as numerous pages are devoted to displaying their high school experiences. This reinforces education historians E.L. Panayotidis and Paul Stortz's argument that the yearbook structure forced students "to unquestioningly adhere to social and academic values and expectations within predictable and immutable stages of student experience."[17]

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[15] See Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 128.

[16] Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 47.

The administration also introduced new age-based activities, such as the "Initiation" day. While the official purpose of the activity was to welcome new students to the school, the goal was also to produce rites of passage that assigned age-based roles to students. Organized and planned by the seniors, the initiation activities forced the secondary one students to participate in a number of challenging and sometimes embarrassing activities in order to prove their worthiness as Villa girls. For example, "for the unforgiveable sin of being new," the 1976 "victims underwent various tortures such as underwater opera and wheelbarrow races."[18] By highlighting the new students' inferior position within the student culture, the initiation day served to reinforce age as the defining factor in structuring the school hierarchy. Moreover, it asserted the authority of adults in producing new rituals and rites of passage.[19]

As it had done in the postwar period, the administration also continued to impart special privileges to the graduating class. As mentioned in chapter three, this not only ensured that students would identify these privileges as markers of age-based status but also served to shape graduates into models for younger girls to emulate. As the yearbooks show, the graduates took part in a number of activities that were exclusive to their grade, including the secondary five ski trip, the visit to Stratford, the graduation ball, and the graduation mass. Moreover, graduating students were given the most important positions on the student council and on the yearbook staff. "Signifying a change in status," as

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[17] E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz, "Visual Interpretations, Cartoons, and Caricatures of Student and Youth Cultures in University Yearbooks, 1898-1930," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 19.1 (2008): 209.

[18] "Initiation," *Journal des finissantes*, 1976, 12-13.

[19] Mary Bucholtz, "Youth and Cultural Practice," 529.

Hoffman explains, the various graduation activities constituted "important rites of passage in students' high school careers." [20] While undergraduates undoubtedly challenged their inferior position within the school hierarchy, there is little evidence of their discontent in the available sources. Across ten yearbook volumes, only one instance of frustration was communicated: in 1972, ninth grade students referred to themselves as "the lowly undergraduates" and sarcastically pitied the "overworked, destitute and servile graduates of '72."[21] This lack of resistance speaks to the fact that as age-based hierarchies became an adult-led initiative, students supported their teachers' aims and took part in the rituals and activities that reinforced their division.

Also accommodated were certain values and traditions that had long been espoused by the administration. For instance, the student culture unquestionably adopted the official version of the school's history. Characterized by a discourse that upholds Villa Maria as a time-honoured institution, each yearbook volume opens with a drawing of the school and a short paragraph that explains how the building transformed from a lavish residence into a school for girls in the nineteenth century.[22] The opening statement also communicates the following message: "subtly blending tradition with modernization, [Villa Maria] can well afford to hold its head up high, proudly aware of its honourable past, its educational present, and its aspirations for a lengthy future."[23] This reflects Charlotte Linde's argument that institutions remember their past by constructing narratives of commemoration, "representing the past for the purposes of the present and the projection of a future."[24]

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[20] Hoffman, "Why High School's Don't Change," 31-32.

[21] *Journal des finissantes*, 1972, 64.

[22] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971-1980.

[23] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 2.

While this narrative was undoubtedly written by the administration in an attempt to promote the school's long-standing reputation, the students themselves also engaged in thoughtful discussions of their school's past. In 1974, the yearbook staff devoted two pages to commemorating Villa Maria's 120th anniversary. After providing a detailed description of the school's history, the author concluded with the following message: "As we look back at the birth and development of Villa Maria, we should all be proud and honoured to be called 'Villans.'"[25] In 1979, thirteen pages of the yearbook volume were attributed to honouring the school's 125th anniversary. In addition to providing a history that emphasized the Villa's pioneering role in the education of young women, this section also featured a poem written by a student in 1966. It addressed the imminent closure of the school, decrying the end of an institution that occupied such an important place within the historical past of the city and within the hearts of its former students.[26] The significance of the Villa's legacy also permeated students' personal reflections. For instance, Suzanne Auclair dedicated a poem to her school in which she associated "ses planchers qui craquent" and "sa vieille pierre grise" to its distinct historical charm.[27] While these representations of the Villa's past certainly reflect the views of the dominant student culture and the aims of the administration, they still speak to a general acceptance of the school's official history.

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[24] Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), 3.

[25] *Journal des finissantes*, 1974, 2-3; The terms "Villians" and "Villans" are used interchangeably to describe the students.

[26] *Journal des finissantes*, 1979, 72.

[27] *Journal des finissantes*, 1974, 51.

Other time-honoured school traditions were also important to students. For instance, Linda Robertson stated that as one of the last students to have attended the Villa throughout elementary and high school, she was disappointed to find out that the custom of awarding a crystal rosary to those who studied at the Villa for eleven years had been discontinued. In response, she and her two classmates visited their principal and insisted they receive their prize, which come graduation time, they did.[28] This serves to further illustrate the students' support of and participation in the school's traditions.

Villa Maria also continued to value its role as an institution that educated middle-class and, to a lesser extent, privileged girls. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the late 1960s saw a significant shift in the administration's view of students' future social roles. However, as chapter one demonstrated, tuition fees remained substantial into the 1970s, preserving the Villa's position as a middle-class institution. Unfortunately, the yearbook volumes offer little evidence of the students' social backgrounds, and thus no hint of a class-based hierarchy or resistance. The only editorial component of the yearbook that sheds some light on the girls' consideration of their place within society is the graduates' departing messages. For instance, the 1975 graduate photo captions, which are formatted as a questionnaire, ask the girls to indicate their ambitions, examples of which are veterinarian, lawyer, psychologist, and journalist.[29] Students clearly viewed themselves as members of a social class that would provide them with access to professional occupations, all of which require university education. In their study of student career aspirations, Barbara Singer and Deborah Saldana attest to this, arguing that students' professional preferences are often associated with their socioeconomic status.[30] Besides this brief hint, however, the yearbooks provide little evidence to determine how the student culture navigated the issue of social class.

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[28] Author interview with Linda Robertson.

[29] *Journal des finissantes*, 1975, 73.

Information obtained from alumnae interviews provides clearer insight into the students' views of class. In fact, they seem to support the notion that students accommodated the middle-class environment of their school because it was familiar to them. Patricia Martin and Lise Trudeau stated that they grew up in Laval and La Prairie respectively – both of which are suburban areas – and were driven to school by their parents each morning.[31] Patricia also recalled that after school, most of her classmates would frequent the cafés on Monkland Avenue in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce or spend time at Claremont café in Westmount, depending on which were closer to home.[32] Many students either lived in these respectively middle-class and privileged neighbourhoods or were at least familiar with them. This can be compared to Aretha Heenan's discussion of Westmount High students: a diverse group of public-school students who appropriated different areas of Westmount's space to symbolize varying levels of social class.[33] As such, these testimonials speak to the middle-class nature of the student population, rendering it likely that students accommodated this aspect of their school's philosophy.

Also accepted were the administration's efforts to create a linguistically divided environment. Primary sources from the postwar period reveal little in the way of information regarding the interactions between anglophone and francophone students.

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[30] Barbara Singer and Deborah Saldana, "Educational and Career Aspirations of High School Students and Race, Gender, Class Differences," *Race, Gender, and Class* 8.1 (2001): 22.

[31] Author interview with Patricia Martin; Author interview with Lise Trudeau, by telephone, July 8, 2014. Name has been changed to ensure the interviewee's anonymity.

[32] Author interview with Patricia Martin.

[33] Heenan, "The World of Westmount High School," 50.

However, in her history of the Villa, Helen Lanthier explains that the two sectors became increasingly divided following the education reforms of the 1960s. Bilingual departments were separated into French and English branches and students were physically segregated, with each sector occupying its own wing in the school.[34] While the faculty attempted to promote bilingual interactions through French and English conversation classes that included girls from both sectors, students reinforced the linguistic divisions that had taken shape by the late 1960s.[35] As the yearbook volumes reveal, both sectors elected their own student council and participated in separate extracurricular activities. Moreover, while most of the yearbook volumes were bilingual (except for in 1976 and 1977, when both sectors produced individual yearbooks), they were organized so as to distinguish between the high school experiences of English and French sector students. While their activities, rituals, and practices remained overwhelmingly similar, francophone and anglophone students began to divide themselves along linguistic lines, thus rendering the administration's language policy a prerequisite for peer group formation.

In addition to reinforcing the school's linguistic separation, the students also accommodated its views of ethnicity. As demonstrated in chapter one, in the 1970s, the Villa witnessed the enrolment of a significant number of students who did not claim French or British ancestry. This resulted in the ethnic diversification of the student population, which the girls began to address as a new component of their student culture. This expansion of ethnicities, however, was mostly limited to students of Italian, Greek, German, and Eastern European backgrounds. Even into the 1970s, students from African,

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[34] Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 209-210.

[35] Ibid.

Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin backgrounds remained a very small group, thus preserving the school as a largely white environment. This narrowed version of ethnic diversity was visible within the student culture, with girls of mainly European descent being distinguished for their cultural customs and for their appearance. For instance, in the 1971 yearbook volume, Anne Hamilton thanked her friend Susan Kazinski for sharing with her Polish music while in 1979, Cassandra Badowski was noted for her daily lessons on Polish culture.[36] Similarly, numerous Italian girls across the yearbook volumes were noted for their dark hair and olive skin tone. Because girls of non-European descent were such a small presence, little attention was paid to their ethnic traditions and qualities. However, not all students promoted this limited notion of ethnic diversity. As interviewee Lise Trudeau explained, when she met her best friend, who was Syrian, she found her fascinating as a girl of such a significantly different culture than her own.[37] Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the girls' acceptance of diversity was extended mostly to students of various European backgrounds, thus reflecting the values of a largely white, middle-class institution.[38]

Engaging in Adolescent Discourse and Rituals at School

While many of the institution's core values and traditions found their way into the student culture, Villa girls also worked within delineated boundaries to participate in meaningful adolescent activities. In order to achieve this, students consolidated the high school as the chief site for performing age-based rituals. As the 1970s yearbook volumes demonstrate, there was a multitude of activities in which students participated at school, including the student council, the student newspaper, dances, winter carnival, basketball, guitar, and drama. This speaks to the students' adoption of the high school's physical space as the principal location for their adolescent pastimes, which is significant because it illustrates a shift in the girls' relationship with their school.[39] In the 1950s and early 1960s, Villa Maria's strictly regulated environment had provided little space for adolescent activities, leading many students to seek their leisure elsewhere. However, in compliance with the new government guidelines, administrators of the late 1960s and early 1970s introduced a variety of extracurricular activities and events. In doing so, they not only provided themselves with an opportunity to monitor and manage student behaviour but also refashioned the school into a primary locus for age-based practices.

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[36] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 54; *Journal des finissantes*, 1979, 22.

[37] Author interview with Lise Trudeau.

[38] Zoe Burkholder discusses the importance of the educational institution in framing very limited meanings of cultural diversity in "From 'Wops and Dagoes and Hunkies' to 'Caucasian': Changing Racial Discourse in American Classrooms during World War II," *History of Educational Quarterly* 50.3 (2010): 324-358.

As Cynthia Comacchio reminds us, the initial goal of "'extracurriculum'" was to create "school spirit," which solidified students' attachments to their high schools and reduced the frequency of unregulated pastimes.[40] "Primarily an adult project" that taught "loyalty, co-operation, and fairness," school spirit represented "the rallying call and emblematic expression of modern high school culture."[41] Determined by one's involvement in extracurricular activities, school spirit also acted as an important benchmark for measuring status and popularity.[42] At Villa Maria, like other Canadian high schools, school spirit was an institutional initiative carried out through the implementation of a rich and varied extracurriculum. Students responded positively to this program, taking to their yearbooks to display their participation in school activities and to exhibit their school spirit. For example, in 1972, the president of the French sector student council congratulated her fellow classmates for their overwhelming participation in extracurricular activities, saying "cette année vous avez fait preuve d'un dynamisme formidable […] plus particulièrement au cours du carnaval et de la danse."[43] Similarly, in 1974, the president of the English sector student council testified to the school spirit of her classmates by explaining that "we surpassed the number of Villians which attended the carnivals in previous years […] and many showed their enthusiasm at the dances. We never ran short of students willing to work at any of the events."[44] Interviewee Linda Robertson corroborated this sentiment, stating that she enjoyed her role as president of the 1969 student council, recalling that her participation made her feel like "a member of the community."[45]

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[39] Heenan, "The World of Westmount High School," 25-26; Hoffman, "Why High Schools Don't Change," 27.
[40] Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition," 9-10.
[41] Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 115, 120.
[42] Hoffman, "Why High School's Don't Change," 27.

Having established their school as the primary setting for engaging in age-based activities, it is not surprising that students also utilized its space for discussions of an adolescent nature, such as the struggle associated with the coming-of-age process. Up until the mid-1960s, as we have seen, faculty and administrators constructed a religiously-informed feminine ideal to regulate student conduct, which postwar Villa girls subsequently challenged. When 1950s and early 1960s students began to alter their appearance and behaviour and to address coming-of-age issues, they contributed to the redefinition of accepted gender practices. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, this monumental shift had come to dictate and define many of the girls' conversations and rituals.

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[43] *Journal des finissantes,* 1972, 10.

[44] *Journal des finissantes,* 1974, 77.

[45] Author interview with Linda Robertson.

As we saw in the previous chapter, coming-of-age narratives were subtly woven into the student autobiographies of the late 1940s and 1950s. In the decades that followed, these narratives became a major thematic presence within the Villa yearbook volumes. As social historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg explains, "Every girl suffers some kind of adolescent angst about her body; it is the historical moment that defines how she reacts to her changing flesh."[46] Prior to the 1960s, Villa girls were relatively silent on coming-of-age issues, which further speaks to Brumberg's argument that during the interwar and postwar periods, North American girls received little support from society in navigating their transition to womanhood and were discouraged from discussing their bodies.[47] In the late 1960s and 1970s, the students' fixation with body image and with the physical and emotional changes they were undergoing reflected broader discourses of female sexuality that emerged from the Women's Liberation Movement.[48] In Quebec, McGill University's female students were among those who condemned female sexual repression and sought to reclaim women's control over their own bodies. This was communicated through their *Birth Control Handbook*, which touted sexual liberation and informed women about different contraceptive methods.[49] Popular forms of material culture like teen magazines also began to address issues of puberty and self-esteem, creating an even more open platform for female discussions of this nature.[50] By the same token, the liberation of the female body also served to create a sense of anxiety surrounding these issues, preoccupying teenage girls with their appearances more than ever before.[51]

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[46] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project* (New York: Random House, 1997), xxiii.

[47] Ibid., xxiv; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls': Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative," in *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 16.

[48] For a discussion of the Women's Liberation Movement in Quebec, see Micheline Dumont, *Le féminisme québécois raconté à Camille* (Montreal: Les editions du remue-ménage, 2008) and Mills, *The Empire Within*.

[49] Dumont, *Féminisme*, 125-126; Christabelle Sethna, "The Evolution of the 'Birth Control Handbook': From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-Empowerment Text, 1968-1975," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23.1 (2006), 90.

At Villa Maria, the struggle attached to this physical and emotional coming-of-age process played out most visibly within the yearbook volumes. The creative writing section, characterized by several pages of poems and short stories, often included content that centered on themes of body image and self-esteem. For example, Maryanne Parker wrote "you know you're really overweight…when Mr. Balinski asks you of his own accord whether you'd like some exercises for 'de heeps.'"[52] In a similar vein, secondary two student Anne Middleton discussed her desire to lose weight so that she could confidently wear her bikini to the beach.[53] Assuming a more serious tone, a poem entitled "The Image" reflected self-esteem issues: "At home you are all alone,/ Until the next party anyway./ And as you have removed the eyeshadow,/ And the expensive blouse,/ You do not feel as important anymore."[54] Speaking to the struggles associated with adolescent insecurities about body weight, Christine Gumbley wrote, "Thin, pale, and brittle she was/ We all knew her/ Well, but not enough. / We tried to tell her / But, her ears, like the rest of her body, were too weak to hear."[55]

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[50] Laura M. Carpenter, "From Girls into Women: Scripts for Sexuality and Romance in *Seventeen* Magazine, 1974-1994," *The Journal of Sex Research* 35.2 (1998): 160.

[51] Brumberg, *The Body Project*, xxv-xxvi.

[52] "According to Our Dictionary," *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 43; It is interesting to note how the phrase "'de heeps'" indicates the teacher's accent, and thus, his ethnicity. This attests to the chapter's earlier discussion of the school's cultural diversification, which was limited to students (and teachers) of mainly European descents.

[53] "My Diet," *Journal des finissantes*, 1972, 50.

[54] "The Image," *Journal des finissantes*, 1979, 60.

Since coming-of-age narratives most often addressed body image, it is unsurprising that an attractive physical appearance also became a measure of one's femininity and popularity. At the Villa, the girls' preoccupation with their looks was communicated especially in the messages that accompanied their yearbook photographs, which often characterized students based on their physical appearances. For instance, Ellen Wright was hailed as "Our blonde bombshell" and Deborah Fitzgerald was praised because she "look[ed] like a model."[56] Students even formatted their departing messages as questionnaires that forced their peers to comment on each other's physical traits. For example, in 1972, classmates listed "teint blanc comme un drap, cheveux noirs comme du charbon," "maigre comme un échalote," and "ses cheveux épais" as the "trait[s] particulier[s]" of three of their classmates.[57]

Students also took advantage of existing extracurricular activities as opportunities for assessing each other's attractiveness. As Susan Cahn explains, school rituals like beauty pageants and the selection of prom queens emerged in the postwar era, emphasizing the importance of appearance and status.[58] At the Villa, the beauty course was a popular activity where girls learned how to enhance their looks through posture and stance exercises.[59] In 1971, one student was mocked for not properly executing the exercise, calling attention to her lack of skill in performing her femininity.[60] Students also participated in the "Queens of Elegance" pageant, which awarded the prettiest girls with tiaras, sashes, and bouquets of flowers.[61] While these activities were institutional constructs, the girls used them for their own purposes, turning them into spaces for discussing, displaying, and even competing for titles associated with beauty and status. Physical appearance and popularity therefore went hand in hand, illustrating the importance of slenderness and attractiveness as indicators of a student's position within the peer culture.

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[55] "When Will She Stop?," *Journal des finissantes*, 1979, 61; While the quote seems to suggest a reference to anorexia, this term was fairly new during the 1970s. German psychoanalyst Hilde Bruch was responsible for creating awareness of the disease and familiarizing the term during the late 1970s.

[56] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 19; *Journal des finissantes*, 1972, 27.

[57] *Journal des finissantes*, 1972, 16-17.

[58] Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 218.

[59] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 63.

Also worth noting is that the ethnic diversification of the student population played a role in defining accepted versions of beauty. As previously mentioned, Villa Maria's student population was diversified by the enrolment of students from various ethnic backgrounds. As a result, ethnicity became a benchmark for measuring beauty. Communicated especially through the graduate messages, which summarized students' identifiable traits, a girl's attractiveness, or lack thereof, was often attributed to her ethnic background. For instance, in 1975 and 1976, two Italian students were described respectively as the "Italian bomb of Sec. V" and "the sexy Italian bombshell.[62]" Similarly, Catherine Sosa was dubbed the "Snow White of Argentina."[63] By the same token, some students were mocked for their distinctly ethnic features. For example, Jane McCarthy's red hair and freckles were described as unfortunate Irish traits while Stephanie Chang's classmates described her as having "slanty eyes."[64] These descriptions are significant because they speak to the incorporation of ethnicity into new definitions of beauty, demonstrating the ways in which girls responded to the cultural diversification of the student population.

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] *Journal des finissantes*, 1975, 79; *Journal des finissantes*, 1976, 47.

[63] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 22.

[64] *Journal des finissantes*, 1975, 82; *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 22.

As students began to emphasize the importance of femininity and beauty within their discussions and rituals, the administration responded by updating their uniforms. In the late 1960s, the modest and formless attire was replaced with a tailored tunic that fell above the knee and that revealed more clearly the female silhouette (See Figures 1 and 2).[65] While Patricia Martin explained that she and her classmates would staple their tunics in order to shorten them, they were grateful for the updated look, which she described as "very much of the season" in the 1970s.[66] As such, the students not only incorporated new definitions of beauty into their student culture by using existing institutional settings but also managed to influence the administration's views on this subject.

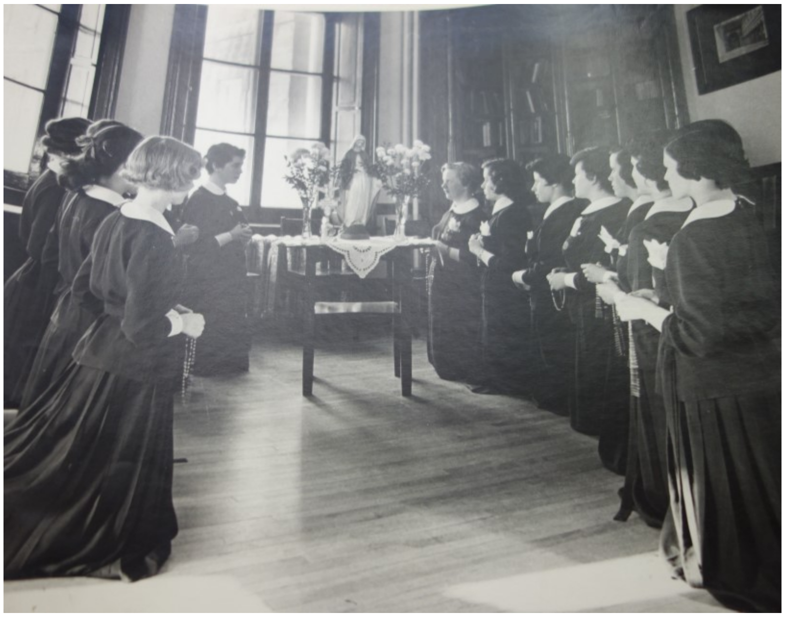

Figure 1: Undergraduate students, 1954, *Photographies du centenaire du couvent*, Villa Maria, Archives of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, Montreal, no. 326.000.145.

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[65] Author interviews, Linda Robertson and Patricia Martin; Lanthier, *Monklands Then*, 233.

[66] Author interview with Patricia Martin.

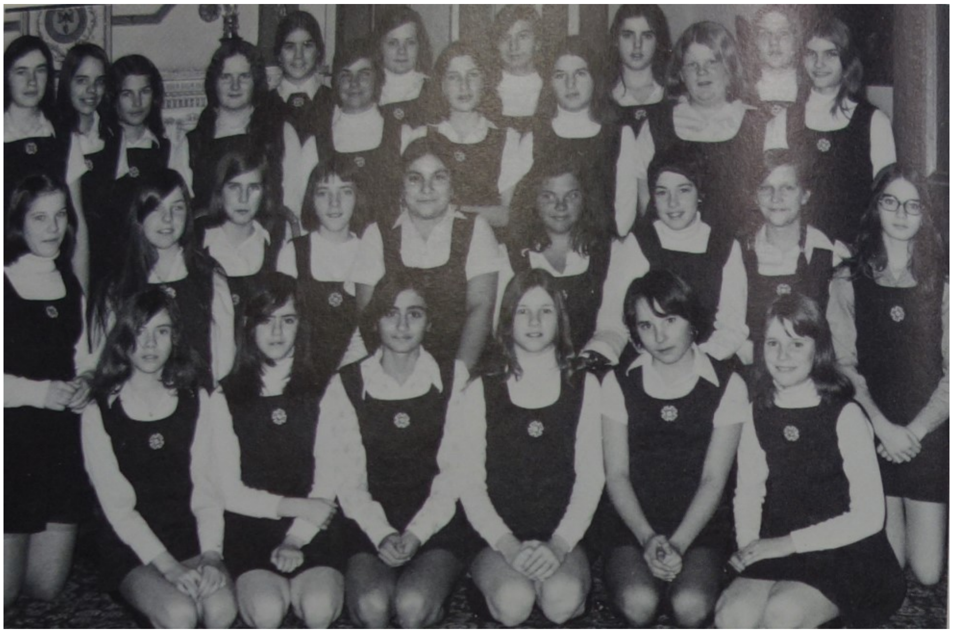

Figure 2: Secondary two students, 1974, *Journal des finissantes*, 1974, 20.

In addition to ritualizing coming-of-age issues and discussions of body image through the use of their yearbooks and extracurricular activities, the girls also adopted dating as a meaningful rite of passage. Only briefly discussed in the student autobiographies of the 1950s, dating became an increasingly common feature of adolescent life at Villa Maria. As Susan Cahn explains, a shift from "courting" to "dating" occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, wherein chaperoned visits between a girl and her suitor gave way to unsupervised interactions within the public sphere.[67] Whereas Villa girls had undoubtedly engaged in dating prior to the late 1960s, they only began to assert it as an important age-based ritual during this period. Prior to this time, these issues were strictly off-limits within the school environment and the administration did not sanction any form of co-ed activity.[68] With the school's modernization, however, students could work more freely within constructed parameters to address their sexual desires.

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[67] Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 22-23.

[68] Susan K. Cahn's discussion of post-war Southern high schools also refers to the opposition that teenagers faced from religious leaders with regard to dances. For more, see Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 216.

That being said, the girls' preoccupation with the opposite sex reinforced heteronormative behaviour, which Mary Louise Adams argues governed society's sexual "discourses about young people."[69] As Aretha Heenan points out, within Westmount High School's student culture, "an assumed heterosexuality" was "promoted via institutionally-sanctioned activities."[70] At the Villa, students' discussions about romance as well as their dating rituals adhered to a prescribed heteronormativity and most often took place within supervised settings, further demonstrating the girls' adoption of their high school as the primary location for their age-based practices.

As they did with coming-of-age issues, Villa girls appropriated the creative writing sections and graduate messages of their yearbooks to discuss dating, love interests, and heartbreak. In 1974, Annick Masson wrote a poem called "Pour Toi," which addressed her love interest, stating "Dès le premier baiser / Tout s'était transformé / Alors d'un même élan / Nous nous sommes fait amants."[71] In 1975, Karen White described preparing for the graduation ball, readying herself for her "Prince Charming" who was coming to take her to the dance.[72] In 1978, a poem addressed unrequited love, describing the heartbreak that the student felt when her love interest chose to date another girl.[73] What is interesting to note is that senior students, either from secondary four or five, undertook the majority of these discussions, speaking to dating as an age-based rite of passage. In fact, the 1973 French sector graduates included in their questionnaire the heading "Style de gars," whereby students would fill in which physical attributes of the opposite sex were most appealing to them.[74] This is comparable to what Aretha Heenan discovered in the 1960s' yearbook volumes of Westmount High School, wherein graduates often defined their "'weaknesses'" as members of the opposite sex.[75]

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[69] Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997), 3.
[70] Heenan, "The World of Westmount High School," 30.
[71] "Pour Toi," *Journal des finissantes*, 1974, 48.
[72] "Graduation Ball/Bal de Graduation," *Journal des finissantes*, 1975, 88.
[73] "The MoonGoddess," *Journal des finissantes*, 1978, n.p.

In addition to employing their yearbooks as mediums for expressing sexual desires, the girls also used the high school dance as an important site for engaging in dating rituals. As Susan Cahn suggests, the dance was an "institutionalized heterosexual rite" in which "casual and serious dating thrived."[76] At the Villa, dances were held with Loyola, an all-boys Catholic high school also situated in the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce area.[77] For administrators and teachers, the dance was useful as a supervised event that allowed them to monitor and regulate their students' interactions with the opposite sex. As interviewee Patricia Martin recalled, teachers scurried around "making sure everyone wasn't dancing too close" and turned down the music when an expletive was uttered.[78] For students, the dance became one of the most important spaces for participating in dating practices. In fact, the activity became so popular that in 1972, the student council created the Social Coordinator position, the representative of which would be responsible for liaising with Loyola in the planning of dances and other co-ed activities.[79] One of the most anticipated events on the social calendar was the winter carnival dance, which, according to the yearbook volumes, saw the enthusiastic participation of many students. Like the winter carnival that Heenan describes in her analysis of Westmount High School, the Villa's version highlighted dating as a central facet of the student culture and reinforced heterosexual behaviour through the ritual of selecting a Carnival King and Queen.[80] The graduation ball, the equivalent of a prom, also featured dating as an important ritual, since girls were expected to bring a date to the event. Therefore, as their discussions of coming-of-age issues and their participation in dating rituals demonstrate, Villa girls took advantage of existing institutionalized activities to carry out their age-based rituals.

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[74] *Journal des finissantes*, 1973, 14-20.

[75] Heenan, "The World of Westmount High School," 33.

[76] Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 212, 216.

[77] For a discussion of adult anxieties regarding dances and their efforts to integrate them into the high school extracurriculum, see Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition," 10-11.

[78] Author interview with Patricia Martin.

[79] *Journal des finissantes*, 1972, 11.

Interacting with Teachers

As students navigated the boundaries of institutional rules and regulations to engage in adolescent activities, they also came up with new ways of interacting with their teachers. Outlined earlier in this chapter, education reforms impacted Villa Maria in profound ways, one of which was the increased presence of lay instructors. This dramatically changed the students' view of teachers, with whom they could more easily identify without their habits or as non-members of the Congregation. Whereas postwar students often resisted their teachers because of fundamental differences in values, girls from this period playfully subordinated their teachers, challenging their age-based authority within accepted parameters through the reversal of hierarchical positions.

Newly defined student-teacher relationships were communicated most visibly within the yearbook volumes. Mentioned earlier in this chapter, the high school yearbook is often arranged in terms of who occupies the most authoritative position within the school, usually beginning with the "formal gallery of school administration followed by faculty," who appropriate spaces for their photographs and in some instances include a general greeting.[81] On the surface, the Villa volumes seem to adhere to this hierarchical structure; the administration's messages are featured first and are followed by several pages depicting faculty members. To offset the limits of this structural hierarchy, students employed a number of narrative devices to insert subversive humour into their yearbooks, which was often directed toward their teachers.[82] In each volume, students sketched caricatures of faculty members or snapped photographs of them in compromising positions. For instance, in 1973, the students included a cartoon of one of the teaching nuns, who was depicted as a clandestine detective, implying that she was often trying to catch the girls in mischievous acts (Figure 3).[83] In the same year, another teacher was depicted trying to dictate a lesson to her students, accompanied by a caption that says "Sister Esdon giving orders?"[84] Similarly, in 1976, yearbook staff captured a pair of teachers kissing, captioning the photo "Guess who!!!" and in 1977, one male teacher was caught holding two bottles of wine and a cigar as he left the faculty staff room (see Figures 4 and 5).[85] However trivial, these photographs demonstrate the use of what Peter Stallybrass and Allon White term the 'carnivalesque' – which is defined by its social subversion of established hierarchies – to deconstruct the images that teachers attempted to establish of themselves as a means of maintaining obedience and respect.[86]

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[80] Heenan, "The World of Westmount High School," 34-35.

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[81] Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High*, 47.

[82] For more on the use of narrative devices as vehicles of humour and subversion, see E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz, "Visual Interpretations, Cartoons, and Caricatures of Student and Youth Cultures in University Yearbooks, 1898-1930," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 19.1 (2008): 195-227.

[83] *Journal des finissantes*, 1973, 27.

[84] Ibid.

[85] *Journal des finissantes*, 1976, 76; and *Journal des finissantes*, 1977, 61.

[86] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 7-8.

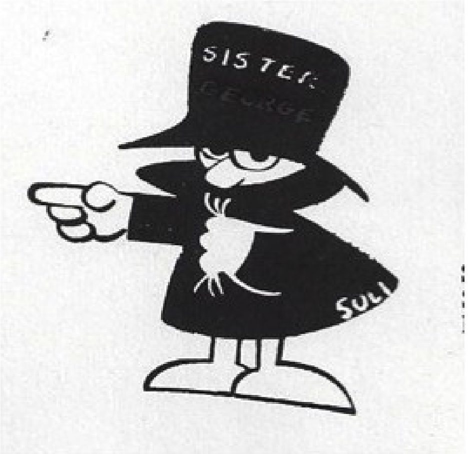

Figure 3: Caricature of a teacher, *Journal des finissantes*, 1973, 27.

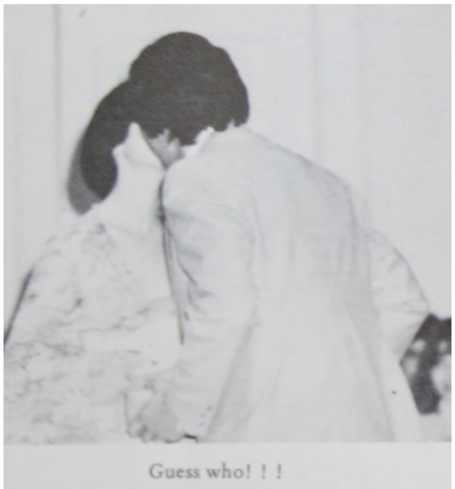

Figure 4: Teachers caught in an embrace, *Journal des finissantes*, 1976, 76.

In addition to visual representations, the girls also incorporated textual devices of humour, especially through the section entitled “Quotable Quotes.” In this section, students mocked their teachers for their habits and sayings, examples of which include, “Sister Frances Roberts, famous intellectual answer – ‘Um, I’ll have to check on it…’” and “Miss Lorraine Boulianne, the only one of us with any manners – ‘Girls please!! It’s just not ladylike.’”[87] Perhaps resulting from their newfound openness in addressing issues of a sexual nature, students also quoted teachers out of context to frame their sayings as sexually suggestive. For instance, in 1976, one male teacher was quoted as saying "Maybe you could take it all off…" and in 1979, another was overheard asking "Why do it in the morning if you can do it at night?"[88]

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[87] *Journal des finissantes*, 1971, 55.

While these insertions sought to disrupt the hierarchical balance between students and teachers, perhaps the most visible demonstration of the 'carnivalesque' occurred during the initiation ceremonies. Created to welcome newcomers to the Villa, the activity was also an opportunity for students to subvert the authority of the supervising teachers. For instance, in 1976, students assumed positions of authority and claimed the teachers as their "victims," reversing hierarchical roles. One yearbook staff member described the event, stating that "Amid loud cries of 'We want Shirley!,' Miss Temple, (alias Mr. Lukowski) appeared, complete with wig and bobby sox. Accompanied by five smaller Shirleys, he graced us all with his rendition of 'The Good Ship Lollipop.'"[89]

While hierarchical inversions of this kind provided students with an outlet for mischief and misbehaviour, some scholars have argued that the carnivalesque actually served to reinforce existing hierarchies by creating controlled environments for the performance of subversion.[90] This is quite true of what occurred at the Villa, since overall, students accepted their teachers' positions and seemed to value them as important actors in their academic and social development. For instance, many graduates spoke fondly of faculty members in their departing messages. Also, all three of the interviewees expressed positive sentiments towards most of their teachers, one even going as far as to say that "c'était comme une famille," which calls to mind the mother-daughter bonds that characterized student-teacher relationships in the early twentieth century.[91] Moreover, the students' subversive humour was playful at best and not at all like the displays of resistance that were witnessed among postwar students. As such, the girls challenged accepted social interactions with faculty members but did so within a controlled setting.

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[88] "Quotable Quotes," *Journal des finissantes*, 1976, 70; *Journal des finissantes*, 1979, 64.
[89] "Initiation," *Journal des finissantes*, 1976, 12-13.
[90] Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics*, 7-8.

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During the late 1960s and 1970s, Villa Maria made its final transition from a devoutly religious boarding institution into a modern secondary high school that drew upon Christian morals and values. This was reflected within the student culture, which embraced the school's modernization and designated its space as the primary location for engaging in adolescent activities. This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which students both accommodated the educational philosophy and worked within the administration's parameters to create a meaningful high school experience. However, this should not be taken to mean a total absence of agency on their part. Like the postwar students who looked for leisure spaces beyond the Villa's walls, late 1960s and 1970s' students used their school as the principal setting for expressing and acting out their age-based needs and desires. In doing so, they proved Mary Bucholtz's point that despite the initiatives of adults, youth play the most important role in "socializ[ing] themselves and one another as they enter adolescence."[92] More importantly, they demonstrated that the Villa had become an environment conducive to their adolescent needs.

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[91] Author interviews, Patricia Martin, Linda Robertson, and Lise Trudeau.

[92] Bucholtz, "Youth and Cultural Practice," 529.

Conclusion

Through its microhistorical analysis of the student culture that evolved at Villa Maria from 1916 to 1980, this study has demonstrated that single-sex Catholic private schools merit the attention of historians, insofar as their histories reveal the agency of female youth. While often cast aside as bastions of white, privileged society where authorities communicated conservative views and exercised strict control over their pupils, an examination of the student experience at Villa Maria reveals that private schools were often characterized by much more complex and dynamic environments. Observing with a critical eye the student-authored sources found in the archives as well as considering the oral histories of former students were both crucial to this discovery, as they allowed me to present an alternative view of private schooling. While the sources reveal that institutional authorities sought to regulate student behaviour and activities, they also prove that Villa girls actively shaped their school's environment through the production of their own age-based rituals and cultural practices.

This analysis has also shown that private schools do not exist within a vacuum. The various changes that Quebec society underwent during the twentieth century played a role in the school's path to modernization and had a significant impact on the students themselves. More importantly, these changes contributed to the development of a student culture that became increasingly assertive and that challenged prescribed religious, social, and gender norms. Therefore, I have argued that Villa girls were not merely passive recipients of adult-sanctioned values and ideals but rather agents in the creation of a student culture that fit their age-based needs and desires. As a result, this examination has complicated perceived notions of female agency within institutional settings, calling for a reconsideration of the impact that girls have had on their schools.

In the first chapter, the Villa's environment was carefully mapped out in order to illustrate the numerous changes the school experienced between 1916 and 1980. An examination of the educational philosophy demonstrated that until the early 1960s, school administrators emphasized religious training and offered an education that cultivated the domestic and moral responsibilities of its students. By the late 1960s, however, vigorous religious instruction gave way to a subtle advocacy of Christian values and the administration became much more open to the expansion of women's roles in society. Nonetheless, social status remained an important factor that defined the school's reputation well into the 1970s. Apart from tracing the evolution of the school philosophy, the first chapter also revealed the changes that the schedule and educational program underwent over the examined period. The strict, religiously informed timetable and curriculum, which characterized the school prior to the 1960s, was eventually replaced with the secularized and standardized program created by the provincial government. The student population also experienced a number of changes, as a small, socioeconomically homogenous group of students was gradually diversified by the enrolment of girls from middle class families and from various cultural backgrounds. By contextualizing Villa Maria's environment, the first chapter provided a detailed portrait of the school and constructed the foundation for an analysis of its student culture.

With this framework in mind, chapter two set out to illustrate the ways in which Villa girls mirrored their 'mothers.' From 1916 to 1946, students overwhelmingly accepted the values and ideals of school authorities, incorporating them into their student culture. Homesickness laid the groundwork for the creation of maternal bonds between students and teachers, whereby girls looked to the nuns to help them cope with the challenges of boarding school life. While these intimate relationships may have encouraged students to wholeheartedly accept the normative messages of their superiors, it does not indicate a lack of agency on their part. In fact, as the second chapter demonstrated, students played a decisive role in the perpetuation of institutionally-sanctioned ideas by incorporating the Catholic faith into their personal and social lives and by participating in gender-based civic and social activities. In doing so, Villa girls produced a student culture that legitimized the views of the school's administration.

In the third chapter, I charted the transformation of the student culture between 1947 and 1965, demonstrating how the girls became increasingly influenced by their encounters with the outside world. The loosening of boarding regulations meant that students spent more time consuming popular culture and engaging in leisure pastimes away from their school. While the student population steadily experienced more freedoms, the administration remained resolved in its promotion of a religious and domestic education for its pupils, thereby advancing the Catholic Church's social agenda. In response, Villa girls engaged in transgressive acts, appropriated extracurricular and religious activities for their own purposes, and demanded a superior education. In doing so, they contributed to the dismantling of an education program that had once confined them to limited social and gender roles.

Chapter four considered the student culture that existed between 1966 and 1980, illustrating the ways in which it was impacted by the social and educational reforms that came out of the Quiet Revolution. As the administration's views of female education were updated and modernized, they became increasingly aligned with the girls' own values, thus perpetuating a student culture that largely accommodated the school's philosophy. Moreover, the development of a more open learning environment led students to adopt their school as the primary location for their adolescent pastimes, where they participated in age-based rituals and challenged the authority of teachers within delineated boundaries set out by the administration. As such, the last chapter of this study demonstrated that by 1980, Villa girls had embraced their school as the most important setting for the creation of meaningful adolescent experiences.

By employing youth culture and girls' culture as analytical tools to observe the experiences of female students at Villa Maria, I have showcased the ways in which girls accepted, accommodated, and resisted both age- *and* gender-based values and restrictions. Moreover, by adopting the feminist approach to understanding historical agency, I have attempted to demonstrate that female adolescents' daily activities merit further study, as they reveal the role that girls have played in shaping their schools. Despite the important work of historians like Cynthia Comacchio, Micheline Dumont, and Nadia Fahmy-Eid, who have enriched the historiography with their analyses of adolescent education in both English and French Canada, teenaged girls' experiences in Catholic private schools have largely remained uncharted territory. The present study has attempted to remedy this by calling attention to the culture that Villa Maria's students produced, developed, and reshaped over the twentieth century. While the school itself had an enormous impact on their development, Villa girls were also influential, redefining their school's social and moral landscape through their ever-evolving age- and gender- based rituals and practices. In doing so, they confirmed 1933 graduate Lily

Hughes's assertion that, "Villa has given us all she can…but we too have done something to Villa; we have enriched it with memories, with friendships and love."[1]

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[1] Lily Hughes, "Autobiography," *Autobiographies manuscrites*, 1933.

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Appendix I

Oral History Interview Guide

General background information

- Could you begin by telling me your name and where you were born?

- Where did you grow up as a child?

- Where did you attend elementary school?

Arrival at Villa Maria

- How long were you a student at the Villa?

- Was there a particular reason why you attended the Villa? What was your parents' role in choosing the Villa?

- Were you a border at the Villa? If so, describe how you adjusted to the boarding school routine.

- Tell me about your first few weeks at the Villa. Can you recall the impressions, concerns, and/or excitements, you might have had? Was it easy or difficult to adjust?

It used to be a tradition for the secondary one students to take part in initiation activities. Did you take part in these and if so, could you describe them? How did you feel about these activities?

- Describe your initial contact with your new peers. Was it fairly easy or more difficult to make new friends?

Classes and Teachers

- Tell me about the relationship you had with your teachers. How would you describe it?

- Did you have a favourite teacher? If so, why?

- Were there any teachers that you did not like? If so, why?

- Can you recall the rules that you had to follow while you were at the Villa?

- Were there any times when you broke these rules? If so, can you describe what happened?

- Tell me about the school curriculum. What subjects did you enjoy the most?

- Did you dislike any of your classes? If so, which ones and why?

- Describe your student self. Did you strive to get good grades or were you less concerned with studies and homework?

Extracurricular Activities

- What was a typical day at the Villa like for you? How did this typical day change over the five years?

- Tell me about the extracurricular activities you took part in, if any. Why did you choose to participate in those specific activities?

- Did you organize or play a leading role in any events or activities at the school? How so?

- Describe the pastimes you enjoyed or took part in afterschool. Did any of these activities ever conflict with the rules set out by the teachers?

- Did you ever skip school? If so, what did you do instead of attending school?

Wartime/Class

- Did you attend the Villa during wartime?

- At the Villa, did you participate in any war effort activities, such as rationing, conserving, or providing assistance to the soldiers?

- Did your teachers speak to you at all about the war? What was their opinion/position?

- Was social class important at the Villa, either for the teachers or for the students?

Friendships

- Tell me about the friendships you made at the Villa. Did you have a specific group of friends?

- Did you keep the same friends throughout your time at the Villa? Were all the girls generally friendly with one another? Were there ever disputes or rivalries between peer groups or grades?

Image & Dress

- Describe your uniform. What were your thoughts of the uniform? Did you ever make modifications to it?

- How did self-image and self-esteem play into your day-to-day life at the Villa?

- Were makeup, hair, and clothing styles important to you? If so, how?

- Who were the celebrities and cultural figures that were most popular with you and your friends?

- Were you/how were you influenced by the trends made popular by these celebrities and cultural figures?

Events

- Can you recall/describe any memorable events that occurred while you were at the Villa, such as special visits from government or other officials? What role did you play in them?

- Tell me about attending mass and other religious ceremonies. What were your feelings towards these ceremonies?

- Were you a member of the Sodality of the Children of Mary? If so, can you describe the ceremony and how you felt upon receiving your ribbon?

Graduation and Leaving the Villa

- Describe your last year at the Villa. What kind of senior activities did you take part in?

- Tell me about the graduation ceremony. Can you recall how you felt upon receiving your diploma?

- Did you attend the graduation ball? If so, can you describe it/your feelings about it?

- Tell me how you felt during your final days at the Villa.

- Tell me about the future aspirations you had when you were leaving the Villa. Did you want to further your education, begin a career, start a family?

- Looking back, how do you feel about the high school experience you had at the Villa? Would you describe it as a positive or a negative one?

- Did you ever return to the Villa for reunions or other occasions?

Closing Question

- Is there anything else you would like to add or share?