WOMEN AND DEATH ON THE ISLE OF LEWIS: 
THE CULTURAL MANAGEMENT OF A LIFE CRISIS 
AND THE MAINTENANCE OF GENDERED IDENTITY.

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1999
I declare that this thesis has been composed entirely by me and that the research contained within it is my own.

Fiona Margaret MacDonald
ABSTRACT

This study examines responses to and the management of death on Lewis, in the Western Isles, focusing on women’s roles around the time of a death, while as individuals they are always engaged in a process of maintaining a coherent gendered identity. Several themes are given extended investigation, while an attempt has been made to undertake, where appropriate, experimental analysis of gender as a process. Death and its consequences are seen outside institutional settings, in the home or community, as an extended crisis provoking reactions that are often culturally distinctive. Individual identity is taken as emerging perpetually from ongoing construction processes through actions and understandings shaped within culturally mediated discursive matrices which combine in the constitution (of the idea and the ‘realization’) of gender. The study offers fresh interpretations of previously collected and new ethnographic and oral traditional material derived from several sources: primary evidence and secondary description in published works; ethnographic documentation, including that from participant observation, interviews and correspondence conducted by the researcher; and primary resources such as interviews and songs in the Archives of the School of Scottish Studies, at the University of Edinburgh. Qualitative analysis is made of local practices and concepts, from the past and present, as founded in both orthodox religion and in ‘folk belief’, sometimes ‘para-religious’, tradition, as well as secular custom. Data from other predominantly Protestant and, less often, from Roman Catholic island communities are brought in for comparison.

Methodologically, a general approach from ethnological and folk culture studies has been combined with one adapted from gender studies theory. Ethnographic and oral tradition materials connected with death are approached according to a paradigm that broadly conceptualizes culture as performed, in everyday routine and individual experience as much as in staged, formal and ritualistic events. Judith Butler has demonstrated that gender emerges in a cumulative, perpetual process through individuals repeating and imitating acts and behaviours that are understood as signifying ideas of gender. Butler extends the idea of linguistic performatives to such gendered actions, for these do not merely reflect gender, but, in fact, achieve it: gender is the always emergent effect of behaviours that function like performative
utterances, creating what they are normally understood to be denoting. Basic parallels can be drawn with the ‘culture as performance’ approach which deconstructs concepts like ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’, revealing their dependence on coherent performances by individuals for their existence. The presence of ‘coded’ levels of meaning, in instances of even the most conservative traditional genres, reveals the potential there for subversion and alternative cultural signification. Similarly, the discourses within which people ‘enact’ gender are not fully deterministic; there is the potential for resignification, redefinition and transgression, exposing the fabricated, negotiable and variable status of gendered identity.

The research process and materials and the study’s customary and belief context are outlined. Themed chapters based on oral culture, personal testimony and ethnographic data vary in their methodological emphases. Different chapters consider the involvement of women and men in wakes and funerals; mourning experiences and behaviours; women’s responsibility for other people’s bodies and welfare; and lamenting in the context of women’s creative traditions. A discourse connecting understandings of emotions with gender concepts underlies these topics. Culturally grounded behaviours in each sphere of activity and behaviour to which a chapter is devoted appear to provide evidence of the performative and performance basis of gender as a processual construction.
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INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

This study explores aspects of the cultural management of death in the Western Isles of Scotland, particularly on the Isle of Lewis, in terms of informal, local cultural practices, and the ways in which women, as central actors in this crisis, are always simultaneously involved in performing as individuals with a gendered identity. A primary ethnological study of the life crisis creates a substantive ground for an investigation into how gender identity is a process that requires constant maintenance. Between these main interwoven levels of enquiry encapsulated in the title lie others. As far as possible within this work, the principal intentions are to pursue the following main lines: to investigate a particular life crisis and to gain some new perspectives on the culture of the Gaidhealtachd, especially the Western Isles; to explore certain dimensions of the lives of women islanders, while resisting stereotypes of mythological matriarchs invented by those who try to defend past social structure or of the utterly abject ‘beast of burden’ identified by others, and while recognizing the variability of common experiences; to exemplify research that is possible when ethnology engages with other fields, such as women’s studies, and to display the value of such disciplinary frontier-crossing; and to pursue the question of how gender is constructed as an individual creates a sense of who she is as a subject in particular cultural contexts, testing out one particular theorization of gender as a performance and performative process. A basic assumption of this work, backed by postmodern conceptualizations of the human subject, is that individuals have fragmented identities which are variable, complex and contingent upon specific interactions and situations. Identities are negotiated processes which are not determined by an essential female or male nature and which are constructed and maintained within cultural discourse. As an ongoing changing condition, which comes about from emergent states created in the conditions of a particular situation, identity has to be examined in specific temporally and physically located contexts. The emphasis on the localized and on individual specified situations in ethnology makes it an appropriate discipline for studies of identity processes.

The subjects and research methods of this thesis are some of those which were introduced to me as an undergraduate student of ‘Scottish Ethnology’ at the
University of Edinburgh, and are generally the topics, concerns and methods of the modern-day folklorist. Many British academic institutions still resist the stigmatized term ‘folklore’. I use it in this work, however, not only because it is a convenient and apt way to describe much of the data with which I am concerned, but also because I draw many of my influences, and much of my inspiration, from work by researchers in North America who take the discipline of folkloristics seriously and who broadly practise in the same (in certain respects interdisciplinary) field as the one in which I am involved. Folklore, as the informal or ritualized embodiment and expression of beliefs and attitudes, has been under-exploited as a source of data on the way genders are constituted and on the social differentiation of women and men.

It is conventional to preface any study of the Outer Hebrides with a summary profile of the archipelago’s history, geography, language, and economy, but so many of these are accessible in other works that I omit such an introduction. Certain phenomena, beliefs, ideas and customs which are described in this thesis are impossible to delimit temporally and have a history extending far beyond the twentieth and nineteenth centuries which are largely the focus of this research. There is no attempt here to manufacture an historical ethnography of death and grieving, or to construct definitive or generalizing insights into Scottish or Highland thanatological philosophy in the manner of the ‘historian of death’ (e.g. Ariès 1981). Although there has always been ongoing change in the cultural management of death, recent developments in the West have resulted in and continue to produce observable, radical changes. Concomitant with the medicalization and institutionalization of this life crisis has been a process of deritualization which has contributed to the loss of informal, shared templates for responding to and organizing the experience of a death. Scientific, impersonal terminology developed by professionals and the end of many traditional mortuary practices and beliefs have changed the language of death so that terms become redundant, lose their cultural resonance and disappear. With the decay of allusive language, tropes and phrases connected to death, the need for grief counselling or other forms of support can be increased as the mourner seeks a way to articulate her/his experience.
On Lewis there is still sufficient cultural cohesion in villages and common appreciation of traditions that a corpus of informal knowledge about death is shared. Many incomers will choose to be buried in another area, for example with their own families or in their place of origin. This has perhaps lessened the impact of conventions and customs from outside the islands which might otherwise have been more influential or which might have been imported more completely. However, as elsewhere, social changes and new choices about how death is to be managed and responded to, which can bring welcome developments, may also result in a lack of structure and communal understanding that can create confusion. Many, now seemingly empty, practices of the recent past were once important components of religious ceremonial but the inference of profound significance and macrocosmic cultural conclusions from minor customs, which have often been only sketchily documented by visitors to the community or from memories, is generally avoided here; much of the fundamental value and efficacy of traditions lies simply in their provision to the bereaved of strategies for coping with the crisis and the radical changes it brings about. Death in the islands is treated here outside of institutional contexts like hospitals, as an event in the community and the home, which is managed primarily by the women of the family. Focusing on the roles, responsibilities and knowledge of women is logical in studying a life crisis where they were traditionally central actors. There are many fascinating aspects of the particular involvement and associations of women with death which are not, or are only barely, explored here owing to the constraints of time, space and scope.

When one considers the immense difficulties island women faced in their quotidian material lives in the past, especially in subsistence times, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the sense of their struggling just ‘to get by’, yet there is abundant evidence of women enjoying life and expressing themselves in inventive and creative ways. Various understandings of what being female or a woman means in a specific context are socially imposed and promulgated, some more authoritatively and rigidly than others, such as pervasive idealized notions of the duty of a mother or wife. In the everyday, women in the past, as in the present, would have engaged in negotiating these aspects of who they should be, dealing with and making sense of who they could be and were, in the construction of an identity as an islander and as a
gendered subjectivity. No singular discourse of femininity dominates any particular island period; island women have occupied various ranks and numerous roles, even within a seemingly homogeneous small township, and have negotiated networks of various relationships with others, over the life course. This research attempts to reach for a sense of how one constructs and can express personal gendered identity at specific sites, through particular media and channels.

Several forms of largely qualitative material are the substantive basis of this research. As in other countries where sizeable folklore and folklife archives and similar collections were accumulated in the last, and the early part of this, century, there is a great deal of recorded Scottish oral culture, folklore and descriptions of social life which have never been analyzed or have not been re-analyzed in recent years. As Finnegar (1992: 57) notes, such texts and descriptions often contain many more ‘clues’ than has been appreciated and that researchers can, with the appropriate ethnographic and historical sensitivity and awareness of theoretical issues, develop new insights from examining such materials. One motivation for this research is the fact that much of the previously recorded folklore from the Western Isles contains and communicates ideas of the feminine and expressions of identity by women that go undetected, are ignored, or are not apprehensible, in most research into this empirical material. It is important to examine the folklore in ways that can offer fresh understandings of how women are conceptualized as a category in the ‘mainstream’ of island culture, and generate new insight into their expressions and experiences of living a gendered identity. In this work I draw extensively upon, synthesize and re-examine directly descriptive and informative materials in published works and in the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh - customary routines, traditional beliefs, texts of Gaelic songs and accounts of performances. Tocher (1971-) is a periodical journal which makes the resources of the Archives accessible to a wider audience. It contains transcriptions of interviews about traditional lore, folk custom and belief, and local oral history, of songs and music, of oral narratives, proverbs, riddles, rhymes and games, items of material culture interest, biographical features on informants and fieldworkers, and photographs from the Archives. It offers readers an idea of what the collection contains. I also interpret modern ethnographic material, much of it deriving from my
own primary field research, which builds up the contemporary picture, reaching for an intertextuality in my work which privileges no particular type of data or single research methodology.

A synthesis and interpretation of relevant publications comprised an important early stage of the research process. In diaries, letters and memoirs, visitors who travelled through the Western Isles and other areas of the Gaidhealtachd, from mainly the eighteenth century, but sometimes earlier, down to the twentieth, occasionally comment on topics relevant to the cultural management of death and to bereavement as broadly conceived in this project. The information offered by them, albeit limited and frequently reported from particular outsider, and often highly subjective, perspectives, is valuable; many such writers have the mixed advantages of being outsiders who find the ideas and events sufficiently interesting to deserve documentation. Various authors, mainly from the second half of the nineteenth century into the present, offer information and their opinions on contemporary and past vernacular social custom and on non-institutionally sanctioned beliefs. Many later commentators have a status which is closer to that of an insider or which is, at least, more ambiguous, and writings by authors who regarded themselves as historians, students of comparative mythology or folklorists are drawn upon in this work. Contemporaneous accounts in the twentieth century of Hebridean culture include academic studies from anthropological and sociological positions (e.g. Burnett 1997; Condry 1983; Dorian 1981; Ennew 1980; Macdonald 1994, 1997; Mewett 1982, 1986; Parman 1972, 1976, 1990a, 1990b; Prattis 1987; Vallee 1954, 1955). I consider relevant material in some of these.

The pre-existing archival record of primary oral information comprises mainly interviews conducted by fieldworkers from the School of Scottish Studies, from the time of its founding in 1951, although there is also some earlier material in its collection. Researchers in the School’s Archives, like the users of similar ethnological institutions, inherit the consequences of the constraints under which such archives were amassed. In the 1950s especially, the School’s central role was one of collection: fieldworkers had the urgent task of rescuing traditional cultural and knowledge before they disappeared with the diminishing number of individuals who
were keeping them alive. There was, at the time, an intense awareness of the radical social changes which were being experienced by the rural, especially northern, communities the School concentrated on, and that a great deal of traditional culture had ceased to be transmitted and was rapidly being lost. Little effort could be expended on analysis of what was recorded when the demands for field collection were so great. As a result, there is now a wealth of primary resources in the Archives which has not been published, or which has, at most, been published in transcription with minimal comment, but which has not been subjected to further interpretation and uses.

Over time, the focus of the School has expanded to encompass any community in Scotland and Scottish communities overseas. A growing interest in urban ethnology is reflected well in recent research (by students and staff). Except in regard to specific subjects and projects, an overall sense of urgency is not present as a motivation for field research nowadays. Furthermore, the structure and personnel of the School have altered as it has evolved from an archive into an institution which is also a university teaching and research department, while increased public access to and awareness of its holdings have been facilitated in several ways. Staff now have to combine research with their teaching and administrative responsibilities. A considerable amount of new material entering the Archives comes from the work of undergraduate and postgraduate students and from researchers outwith the department.

The diverse archival materials which I bring together in this thesis belong to other generations. Most of the recordings dealing with relevant topics which I refer to here were made in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, with elderly informants whose personal and inherited knowledge of death customs and beliefs could extend back into the middle of the previous century. Much of the information I use occurs as brief portions of interviews which concern other topics too. The main limitations of this data from my perspective can be outlined. The burden of saving what was about to disappear meant that the contemporary situation was neglected so there are gaps to be filled in the record of recent years. Fortunately, the lesson of this has been learnt and researchers are wary of taking the present ‘for granted’. Few researchers in the past
were concerned with or sensitive to gendered dimensions of the subjects in which they were interested. Research into specifically female experiences was not deliberately undertaken in ways it is now: women's crafts, skills, expressive culture and local knowledge were investigated and valued, to an extent, but their less accessible, less quantifiable, personal experiences, and the ways in which these could differ from men's, were not. For example, a researcher would not necessarily ask about how the participation of men and women varied at funerals, questions that now have to be asked of the material in other ways; a male informant might not even be asked if women were at all present at an event. Significantly, most fieldworkers in the School's early days were men, although many of their sources were women: even if a male fieldworker had been interested in female experiences, he might have been reticent in the research situation and may not have been given access to the information sought.

Most of the catalogue of the School's Archives is kept on a database which in the future will be accessible via the World Wide Web, but there is still a body of material collected before the database started which has yet to be entered. For this, index cards have to be consulted. The Central Index for audio and manuscript holdings is an adaptation of the classification used by the Irish Folklore Commission which was originally adapted from the archive catalogue at Uppsala. The catalogue is too lengthy to describe in detail here, but the main classification divisions are: A - Language and names; B - Biography and genealogy; C - Geography and topography; D - Buildings; E - Living conditions; F - Basic production; G - Crafts and industries; H - Trade and exchange; J - Communications; K - Institutions; L - Social structure; M - Social life and custom; N - Seasonal customs; P - Games, sports, plays, dances; Q - Music; R - Song; S - Formal speech; T - Tales; U - Historical traditions; V - Traditional knowledge and belief; W - Supernatural powers; X - Supernatural beings. The subdivisions for each of these categories vary in number. The divisions of most relevance to this thesis are M, R, V, and X, but I also looked under others. Examples of sub-sections which I searched for material of interest include the following: M4 - Old age, death and burial; R1 - Gaelic song; X4 - Solitary spirits; X5 - Trooping fairies, the sluagh, sea fairies. The database can be explored by a combination of searches for words and phrases in the following fields: Native area/country (of the
informant); Catalogue name; Summary; Reference; First line of song; Informant/artiste; Additional comments; Title; Type of material; Fieldworkers. The results are displayed with the catalogue number, with details for the above terms fields, including the summary, and an indication of whether or not a transcription is available. I conducted a variety of database searches over the course of my research, combined with searches of the index card catalogue.

As well as data from interviews, elements of Gaelic songs, from published collections and from the School’s Sound Archive, are interpreted in this thesis along with contextualizing information. Songs in the School’s Archives are catalogued in the same way as other materials (see above) and by the first line or title. To find relevant verse, I searched the database for laments and waulking songs in general and for all songs from Lewis, by using appropriate search words and phrases in combinations of the search fields noted above. I also searched all the index cards cataloguing Gaelic songs by type of song and area. The poems I chose to consider in this thesis, in Chapter 8, are generally well established songs, texts of which have been published. Laments and waulking songs are discussed as important creations by women within a female tradition and as they provide details about the management of death. Although they were recorded from oral tradition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they often originate in, or reflect, much earlier times.

A certain amount of information about practices, attitudes and beliefs connected with the cultural management of death and related events, in the present or in the past within living memory, which is discussed in this work, has not previously been written about at length or recorded. Recent data which has been published often requires updating, expansion or analysis. Participant observation-based research on Lewis and correspondence and interviews with women supply much of my data about the recent past and the contemporary situation. At the outset of this project, I had not decided to focus on one life crisis and initially conducted preliminary investigation into women’s experiences of becoming wives and mothers, and traditional lore about marriage and birth; only some time later did I limit the scope of the research and decide to focus on subjects which converge at, or are part of the
sequence of events around, and as a consequence of, death. Much of my early research is, therefore, not used in this thesis, although it has been an important part of the process.

Over the course of this research, I visited Lewis many times, always staying at my parental home, in the village of North Tolsta, on the east coast of the island and fourteen miles north of Stornoway. This is my parents’ native township, I lived there for nine years and have continued to return there regularly, so I have considerable kinship connections and neighbourhood links. The nature of the research undertaken varied during these stays: sometimes I went home to work, to do research in Stornoway Town Library and interviews, to talk to people with a deliberate purpose in mind; at other times I tried to balance being there as a semi-villager and as an observer, so I would be regularly taking notes about things I thought were significant to my research; and on other occasions I was in North Tolsta ‘on holiday’, avoiding work. When I was there to work I would take written notes as soon as I could about observations and conversations I thought were relevant, or I took notes as these were happening, and I reviewed my notes regularly. The holiday periods were still very important as times when I was living in the village, visiting people for pleasure, and reminding myself of what life was like there. It was impossible to escape research entirely: some of the most interesting insights I gained into how death is dealt with in the islands came from casual interactions. Many of the points I make in this thesis come from an accumulation of data and comments, from combinations of notes taken at specific times or as general observations, so particular notes are not often referred to directly. I also found myself drawing extensively on accumulated passive knowledge I already had, and also returning at times to notes from six weeks of fieldwork in the summer of 1993, fifteen months before starting postgraduate research, when I received a research scholarship from the Carnegie Trust. I spent a lot of that time in the excellent local history section of Stornoway Town Library and the other element of this research came from being an observer of and participant in village life.

When I reappraise fieldnotes (especially older ones, such as those taken before the start of this research) for the present work, it is interesting how much my
understanding of life and culture on the island has changed and changes, so that I sometimes disagree with, or see as over-simplistic, opinions and observations that I have earlier noted. This relationship with fieldnotes evolves naturally and highlights the importance of 'headnotes', without which the written ones are of limited, or at least far less, value (Ottenburg 1990; Sanjek 1990: passim). Observation and participation are central field methods in this research and mean that many more women than those named herein are indirectly and passively involved, that even strangers have played a part. All of the recorded interviews throughout the research project were with women who come from or live in the Lewis village where I lived between 1980 and 1989. Other women, who were otherwise happy to be directly and informally questioned by me within the context of my research, declined to be recorded.

One of my earliest investigative tasks involved unstructured, tape recorded interviews with Lewis women I already knew where I asked for life stories. See as examples of these the two interviews which are used in the thesis, transcribed in full, in Appendix 6. I appealed for other research participants by placing letters in the local weekly newspapers, the Stornoway Gazette and the West Highland Free Press (see Appendix 1). Interestingly, most respondents to my vague request for people who could give me information about women’s lives in the islands were locals who have spent considerable portions of their lives away from the area or who live elsewhere. Two are not island indigenes but had married local men and moved to the islands. Because these women are geographically scattered I engaged them in my research through correspondence. Initially, I issued a loosely structured questionnaire of suggested topics for them to write about and questions to obtain basic biographical data. This gave me an idea of what they would be prepared to tell me. Appendix 2 contains this questionnaire and responses to it comprise Appendix 3, with other correspondence transcribed in Appendices 4 and 5. I also sent the questionnaire to some other women known to me on Lewis and some who did not wish to collaborate in taped interviews were happy to write to me. Others who originally offered to help retracted when the research emphasis on the personal and everyday was made clear.
Some villagers I interviewed (including a couple of men) are people whom I already knew well, others casually, some only by sight. Even amongst those very close to me it was difficult to persuade women to talk with a recorder running (c.f. Aamodt 1981: 140-41). I also faced a dilemma I had encountered before when seeking potential interviewees, that certain individuals will be repeatedly recommended by others, often by someone who at the same time is herself declining to be interviewed. Villagers have certain preconceptions about what researchers are interested in, especially if there is any reference to the past, and will direct the enquirer to a small number of locals who know ‘a lot about the old days’ or seanchas (tradition or history). Very often this means someone who is well read on local history more than anything else.12 People would refer me to certain books in lieu of the personal experience dimension,13 and when I emphasized that I was interested in the everyday culture often not contained in books, and individual experience and expression, the reaction was sometimes an amused one along the lines of ‘Oh, my dear, you wouldn’t get anything interesting from me’, ‘I’m just a fisherman’s wife. I’ve done nothing in my life.’

Correspondence enabled me to interact with informants whilst living in Edinburgh, but it has considerably more value too.14 Obviously, there are difficulties and dangers in research by letter-writing such as the possibility that the researcher will fall into objectifying the correspondent. The development of an interpersonal relationship is constrained and limited, especially with the absence of opportunities for spontaneous dialogue and non-verbal interaction. However, for certain projects and researchers, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. One obvious benefit is the greater ease of anonymity and confidentiality with correspondence. With specific relevance to Lewis, locals have a certain reputation for reserve and a desire not to be an attention-focus - and there are the usual risks of being outspoken in small communities.15 Not being in a face-to-face situation can, I think, encourage candidness in some correspondents and the letters I received are informal in tone. Research by correspondence means that a respondent has time to consider topics and questions, without silences that either side in an interview situation might feel they have to fill, and without being led onto another topic by the researcher or herself; she has more choice about how to respond. Letters allow the respondent to move between subjects,
returning to earlier ones that have been partially or not answered. My informants sometimes indicate in their letters or conversation that before answering letters they have discussed a subject with a family member or friend before responding and would mention the other woman's opinion or experiences too, so a situation of dialogue has been created outside of the research intentions.16 For the researcher, correspondence lessens the risk of her creating a negative effect in the relationship with the other women and of committing slips in her impression management; and she has more opportunity to respond thoughtfully and sensitively. The personality of the researcher to some degree influences the methodologies she selects. Correspondence and observation in the field were more comfortable, and, therefore, productive, research methods than arranged interviews with a recorder, objects which can make even someone who knows the researcher well feel awkward, more aware of the language they use and of what they are saying. I have gained much more from relaxed conversation in kitchens over coffee, while sharing a seat on public transport, incidental meetings in the open, from observation of others' interactions, and from letters than from scheduled interviews. The regular recording of fieldnotes included taking notes down about conversations (including those over the telephone), other interactions and observations as soon as I could after the event, if it was not possible to make notes at that time, both in Lewis and in Edinburgh.

In the chapters that follow, quotations which are not given an origin in a published reference, an archival source or in a recorded interview, but which are attributed to named individuals, are taken from personal correspondence. Transcripts of letters and some taped interviews are given in the appendices, with references to these supplied in the text, beside the quotation, or in chapter endnotes. I refer to the women and the men who have participated in this research by pseudonyms, although the majority were happy to be named and quoted, and I use first names only as the appropriate and expected cultural practice in the islands. Where a source for an observation is not indicated it should be assumed that it derives from fieldnotes, often from observation or spontaneous conversational interactions. References to materials in the Sound Archive are indicated by their catalogue numbers.17
To give details about the women who wrote to me or participated in interviews obscures the fact that there are many others who significantly contribute to this research but who have never committed words to paper or tape and of those who did only a few are directly quoted in these pages. My field experience involves very many more women who did not have the time or the desire to participate more directly but who have contributed. Further biographical details of informants are given in Appendix 3 in their responses to the questionnaire. A group of twenty-five women who corresponded with me has the following profile which broadly reflects the larger ‘group’ referred to in this project: the oldest was born in 1908, the youngest in 1949, and eighteen were born between 1923 and 1939; nineteen are natives of Lewis or have spent significant portions of their lives there, two are from Harris and four are connected with Skye; nine of the twenty-five have been nurses, four teachers, four office workers, two crofters, and six had mainly worked in service industries, although almost all have had a range of different employment; five are educated to degree level, and a couple have other professional qualifications (in counselling); several, mainly those who were in service industry jobs, left paid employment completely when they had children, and obviously several are retired. Religion is a central theme of this thesis and of these twenty-five women, seven belong to the Free Church, four to the Free Presbyterian Church, two to the Church of Scotland, and five are Protestant but do not specify a denomination, sometimes because they will attend more than one church; five say they have no religion, two believe in a spiritualist Christianity, one describes herself as ‘pagan’, and two declined to define their religion. All had Protestant parents, ten having been brought up in the Free Church and eight in the Free Presbyterian Church; eight are themselves confessing born-again members of those two churches.

A fundamental responsibility of the researcher is to deconstruct our own identity and take account of our role as an intersubjective participant in the process (e.g. Cohen 1994; Wolf 1996), whether or not that significantly informs the way we report on the experience and analysis. This awareness is obviously important in relations with people in the field, but should also be present when we handle materials, data, other people’s research, for how we select and interpret these is subjective. And the experience, in its turn, has an impact on who we are. Given that one of the primary
interests of my research is how individuals can culturally negotiate gendered identity, an account of my own self-reflexive involvement in the ongoing process of research and interpretation would be especially appropriate. Such a discussion could generate a chapter on its own, or provide a whole other layer of analysis throughout the thesis, but the academic convention seems to be that extended written exploration of researcher self-reflexivity is a prerogative earned from a preceding apprenticeship with 'straight' writing.19

What I provide here is, therefore, merely some minimal background to position myself in relation to the general research topic and to those whose experiences and expressiveness I rely upon, to the island community as the wider context; and to throw light on some of the ways that my own identity process influenced my entrance to the research, how the research has been undertaken and the analysis in which I continue to be engaged. A significant facet of my identity which is not really explored here is my relative belonging to Lewis, as a cultural locus, a community, and a concept. I was born in 1971, in Stornoway, but until 1980, when we returned to Lewis, my family lived in Inverness on the Moray Firth. Although my parents and their relatives and islander acquaintances in Inverness had conversationally used a lot of Gaelic, and we had spent many holidays on Lewis, my younger sister and I were not taught the language and neither of us had any interest in it at school, although my parents and I came to regret this. I inevitably picked up enough to hold a basic conversation, often the other person speaking in Gaelic while I responded in English. By the time I left Lewis to study at Edinburgh University in 1989, my indifference towards the culture of the islands had been gradually changing and I started learning Gaelic. I still have a complex, guilt-ridden relationship with the language which is incomprehensible to enthusiastic non-indigenous learners. My ambiguous, ambivalent, contradictory relationship with the islands makes me fairly typical of the kind of native who concerns herself or himself with studying, analyzing or writing about the place, but cannot quite accept settling there.

After graduating from Edinburgh University I worked for a year before returning to the School of Scottish Studies to begin postgraduate research. I wanted to explore some aspects of island women’s lives in the past and present through the use,
primarily, of the sorts of materials to which my undergraduate study introduced me: folk-songs, vernacular everyday culture, informal beliefs and customary routines, personal testimony and oral narrative. I was interested in transitional points in the life course, especially death, and in the cultural specificity of gender ideals and experience.

Membership of the culture one chooses to 'write' is generally taken to be advantageous in certain ways, although such a status is by no means unambiguous or unproblematic and it is a subject of ongoing debate (Aguilar 1981; Chapman 1992; Douglass 1992; Hayano 1979; Headland, Pike and Harris 1990; Messerschmidt 1981; Pitt Rivers 1992; Wolf 1996a). My position as a partial insider to the islands and especially 'my' village on Lewis is, I believe, beneficial to my research, despite the reservations occasional scholars may have about the legitimacy of insider research (e.g. Pina-Cabral 1992). Although certain issues stemming from my insiderness raise anxiety and could impede progress, I accept myself as an important research partner. My basic insiderness is maintained marginally in that I visit Lewis at least three times a year, and usually more often, sometimes for only a few days, a fortnight, or for as much as a month or two at a time. I keep in touch with relatives and friends there by regular telephone and written contact. But this means that I am a visitor, to an extent, given special treatment, and I owe much of my identity in the village now to who I am as a daughter. I am twenty-two years younger than my youngest correspondent and much of this thesis substantively refers to the experience of women in their seventies, sixties and fifties, and to prior generations. If I write as a Lewis woman, it is as one whose work is influenced by membership of another generation. Furthermore, most of these women's life experiences have been different to mine in their being married and mothers, often grandmothers, and some are widows; moreover, few island women before my generation had opportunities to proceed to higher education or any kind of career. Their attitudes and understandings of the world are frequently sufficiently divergent from mine to at times induce in me a kind of culture shock, but my ethnological training and inclination to research also make me an outsider in significant ways and 'qualify' me for the task. To an extent, I am an outsider to my subject area of death, having experienced very few bereavements and Rosaldo (1993b: 55) points out that the relative youth and
inexperience of grief characteristic of many anthropological researchers into death affect how they define, document and analyze the topic.

Spending so much time thinking about ideas of identity-performance and performativity has made me more aware of my own identity construction, that life is a constant process of meeting and confounding others' and my own expectations and understandings. In daily life, I am conscious of making compromises to satisfy other people, or of when I act in ways deemed inappropriate by others, but I can often surprise myself by refusing certain discursive routes or by an act of automatic conformity, despite what I might expect or hope of myself; I am often aware of trying to be one kind of woman but not another, and can feel inner conflict, despondency or anger at sometimes having little choice in this and in the ways others define and react to me. At this point I want to comment on particular examples of discernible performance in my interactions with people, outside of and within this research, that have salience in regard to methodological and ethical research issues.

In regard to two topics especially I responded to the pressures of others' expectations and wishes, and to my own general perceptions of what was most appropriate in a particular interpersonal context, by performing identity aspects fitting these as I judged them, identities not fully consistent with other facets of my sense of who I am, and, significantly, who I believe I would like to be. An intrinsic, unavoidable source of anxiety in much feminist-influenced or -motivated research is that the researcher often holds very different opinions and beliefs about sexism and gender from the women who participate in the research and are its 'subjects'. Most of the women who have helped me have perceptions of and attitudes towards feminism that are very different to my own which, after all, fundamentally shape how I interpret and engage with the material they have given me about themselves and their lives.

For example, in both everyday exchanges and the context of research interactions, most middle-aged and older island women tend to respond in criticism of women who have 'gone too far', who 'want to be like men', and with the opinion that this is unnatural, and even, some point out, un-Biblical, if topics are raised that relate to 'women's liberation', or 'feminism'. While most island women are grateful that women now have more control over their lives than in the past and have more varied
career and personal development prospects, many voice disapproval of greater social and sexual freedoms, and they can be dismissive of, even hostile to, feminism. I avoided the ‘F word’ in communication. Retrospectively the performance involved in maintaining this image of myself for them is significant and instances the sorts of duplicitous conformity to sexist normatives and general attitudes in which I have to engage, ‘despite “myself”’.

An issue which causes even more direct and immediate anxiety in the field is that of religious belief. Although most villagers would know that neither I nor my parents (who are nominally affiliated to the Free Church) attend church, they still hold basic assumptions about my religious ideas. Of course, a few of my correspondents, who know me only through letters, have no information (and none of them has ever asked) about this, although some have been very frank about their own beliefs. Christian locals will ask in conversation if I attend church in Edinburgh and many express, in one way or another, assumptions that I share fundamental Christian ideas with them. With some villagers I also sense that I might gain a certain credit and trust from the Church involvement of relatives in the past and present. There are very many islanders with whom I would never honestly discuss my spiritual beliefs and religious ideas, which certainly are not those of any church. In everyday life, to be candid about my lack of faith would threaten to damage my relationship with particular individuals, including some family members, who would be shocked and hurt if I were candid; in the context of research it could stop the exchange of letters, end an interview, turn an amiable conversation into argument or upset.

I deliberately and automatically dissemble (often simply by silence or by not volunteering information) my ‘real’ identity in terms of opinions about feminism or religious beliefs, and exploit the benefits accruing from the identity assembled for me by others. This precipitates not only personal guilt and anxiety, but also raises serious, perhaps insoluble, methodological dilemmas. For the sake of my research I need participants to be honest and trusting, and for my conscience want any such relationship to be as equal as possible, and yet in order to sustain this I have to be opaque, even dishonest, about basic aspects of whom I am. I ask them to openly express ideas which they accept as natural and unquestionable in order that I can
scrutinize and deconstruct these ideas. It is reassuring, however, to read about the encounters of feminist researchers with these and various other problems involving conscience and obstacles in the way of more balanced, closer-to-equal relationships with those who participate as research subjects and whom the researcher then ‘represents’, and to find that these dilemmas can be engaged in productive and instructive ways by others (e.g. Anderson and Jack 1991; Gluck and Patai 1991; Lal 1996; Lawless 1991, 1992; Letherby and Zdrodowski 1995; Saltzman 1993; Stacey 1991; Stack 1996; Visweswaran 1994; Walter 1995; D. Wolf 1996b 1996c; M. Wolf 1996; Zavella 1996). Like others (e.g. Visweswaran 1994; Zavella 1996) who have chosen to research communities of which they are partial insiders by virtue of family background, the research experience continues to offer me new understandings of aspects of my own and others’ insiderness. The experience increases my awareness of my outsidersness; of how much more complex are people’s perceptions of me than I expect; and of what I am doing when I claim an island identity and live in the process of maintaining a gendered self which is influenced by this.

The above description of the research process raises some methodological issues; others are discussed in Part 1 which reviews literature in folklore and ethnology, women’s studies and gender studies, as an introduction and explanation of the theoretical and conceptual orientations which inform the aims and the course of this research. Because I draw inspiration from disparate theoretical locations and disciplines, and would encourage others to do the same, certain themes are discussed at length. My understanding of culture and tradition (the central terms of ethnology and folkloristics) is performance-oriented. Given that many researchers in Scotland who engage in ethnological study are at most only aware of performance folkloristics, beyond that element of the approach which shares the pervasive general contextualism they tend to practise, I discuss at length some main currents in the performance orientation in Chapter 1. Prioritizing performances means that processes are more important than products, and this has affected the ways identity is understood, as one of the kinds of meaning which emerge from performances.

Chapter 2 concentrates on a theorization of gender, developed from notions of dramatic performance and linguistic performativity, and on a major performance
folkloristics approach to polysemous communication in women’s creative cultural expressions. Both the idea developed by the gender theorist Judith Butler of gender as an effect of actions, which operate with the signifying power of performative utterances, and the analysis of coding strategies, in verbal and other expressions argue that meanings (including identities) are never single or fixed. They are instead layered, ambiguous, dependent on intersubjective negotiation, changeable, and reliant on the recognition of the historically established meanings of the signifiers mobilized in a specific context. Many of the examples Butler employs to explore and substantiate her theory concern patent and dramatic transgressions and subversions of gender normatives. One of the aims of this thesis is to illustrate, in the performances, processes and presumed ideals which are implicated in particular traditions and conventions in the management of death on Lewis, that performance and performativity are also the ways of making gendered identities that appear to be entirely conventional and consistent with dominant heterosexual norms. My contrasting use of data from the past and present also underlines the temporality of idealized connections between gender and associated attributes and behaviours, which ‘in their time’ claim a natural, essential status, but which are exposed as fictions, changing to suit the dominant cultural discourses. The similarities between the way culture or tradition is understood in folkloristics and the way gender is deconstructed as performative allow a productive dialogue between these approaches. Discourse\textsuperscript{23} is a central concept in both as the process of culture, tradition, gender and identity. The specificity of conditions where discourses intersect, means that both investigations into the nature of tradition and into the deconstruction of gender identity need to emphasize localized, situated performances.

Chapters 3 to 8 attempt to reach for contextualized performances as they explore themes in the way death has been and is understood and experienced on Lewis and in other areas of the Gaidhealtachd. Chapter 3 largely serves to provide some minimal religious historical information for subsequent chapters; to outline some of the customs and beliefs maintained by islanders which did not belong to the doctrine and praxis of institutionalized religion, exemplifying folklore current in the last century and sometimes within living memory; and to give some insight into the local religious culture by the example of standards for women’s appearance, which also
exemplifies the performance of gender as it depends on the manipulation of outward appearance as recommended by scriptural interpretation. These three topics relate closely to the identities of Hebrideans. Subsequent chapters are thematically concentrated on various roles women assume around the experience of another’s death. Such roles are shaped according to cultural discourses on and of gender which rely on essentialist assertions about a universal female nature. Individual experiences, such as personal conflict and the sense of exerting effort to behave in a ‘natural’ way; the very possibility for acting ‘unnaturally’; historical developments of gender ideals; and the co-existence of contradictory normatives, inconsistent with the idea of a unitary essence, all expose the falsity of such claims and the fiction of gender ideals which generally serve the needs of sexist social organization at a particular time.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 investigate stages in a sequence of experiences of bereavement in the past and present, by focusing on the following main substantive topics: caring for others, dead and alive; other domestic roles at the time of the crisis as part of the conventional allocation of care-giving responsibilities to women; the different participation of women and men in Lewis wakes and funerals; and concepts and traditions in the mourning process as females are particularly implicated in the expression and experience of grief. Chapters 7 and 8 differ from the others by concentrating on long discontinued traditions: the performance of laments and other songs by women which evidence alternative understandings of, and responses to, death, and other practical and ritual roles for women in history, compared to recent and contemporary situations. New interpretations of existing texts and performance accounts open these up as sites of continued meaning-emergence that are more complex than usually perceived.

Generalizations which can be drawn of those involved in the spiritual, social and physical traditions around a death are consistent with gender-based roles surrounding other critical transitions in the life cycle. While women are engaged in often unpremeditated or highly practical ways in the kinds of interactions and behaviours around a death described in this work, they are simultaneously recreating and reproducing culture, sustaining its codes and bodies of knowledge, skills and ideas. This includes ideas and beliefs about the genders and, therefore, about the identities that individuals construct. The roles women take are recommended, even enforced,
by conventional ideas about gender that relate to emotions and religious authority. Marked, dramatic cultural displays and everyday mundane acts constitute signifying actions in performances of a fragmented self that is contextually contingent and gendered. Throughout the experience, the roles that women perform, in the cultural management of death, are seen to vary diachronically as the gender ideals which they express and in which they originate alter, exposing the temporal specificity of those ideals. In the synchronic frame, women’s experiences and communications of, and about, these are shown to be open to many interpretations, layered and impossible to describe fully.

1 The Gaidhealtachd is historically a variable concept rather than a fixed geographical location, referring to the parts of Scotland that have been or are identified as Gaelic in terms of culture and language, but it is also less specifically used to designate the Highlands and Islands and it is in this sense that I will use it throughout the thesis.

2 The term ‘folkloristics’ has been widely adopted in the USA where it was coined in order to distinguish the study of the subject from the actual activity, idea or object under scrutiny.

3 See references in the text below to works on the islands.

4 Rosaldo is highly critical of analysts who strive to find profound symbolic and social meaning in all death and mourning customs. As he points out, from his own experience, bereavement and ritual often fit ‘the platitudes and catalysts model better than that of micro-cosmic deep culture’ (1993b: 15), that ‘rituals do not always encapsulate deep cultural wisdom. At times they instead contain the wisdom of Polonius. Although certain rituals both reflect and create ultimate values, others simply bring people together and deliver a set of platitudes that enable them to go on with their lives’ (20).

5 This includes, for example, the material collected by Alexander Carmichael. See Campbell 1978, 1981; Carmichael 1900a, 1900b, 1940, 1941, 1954, 1971, 1994; MacCurdy 1959; Thompson 1966. Although recent discussion of his Carmina Gadelica has been dominated often by reappraisals critical of his and others’ editing of the published volumes taken from the manuscripts which are housed in Edinburgh University Library, the collection is an enormously valuable resource. Like John Francis Campbell and his team of narrative collectors, Carmichael was cognisant of the need to record details about his sources, to appreciate their lives in broad terms, crediting them for the time and trust they gave him, and to give the basic context for his materials. Unfortunately, this has not been the case with many other folklore fieldworkers.

6 The address for the School’s BASIS Webserver search form, which operates within Edinburgh University’s computer network, is: http://pentlands.ed.ac.uk:443/cgi/nph-bwcgis/BASIS/mndx/dba/allmndx/SF.

7 The PEARL (Providing Ethnological Archives for Research and Learning) Project provides samples of archival material on the Web.

8 For example, out next-door neighbour, a fisherman’s wife, lost two bachelor brothers in a twelve month period. They had provided her with important company during the week when her husband was at sea, visiting her regularly, especially at meal-times, and had given valuable practical help around the house. She was very upset by the first brother’s death, but the second was a blow from which she found it extremely hard to recover. My parents, sister and I all regularly call on her for a chat, and she will telephone or call across, if someone is outside, to invite whoever it is to come over for coffee, although she has no shortage of
visitors. I was in Lewis shortly after the second death and she had asked me visit. She was
keen to express her grief at length and openly, likening it to being widowed. This was an
informal event, and yet the way she spoke reminded me very strongly of how important
people beyond the nuclear family can be and of how grief for them can be as acute as for
those who are thought to be closest to one.

8 Ottenburg coined the term more than thirty years ago.

9 I had only undertaken five of these before I decided that I needed to spend time on trying
to focus my research more clearly. I expected at this point to return to recording life stories
after these first few, partly ‘exploratory’, ones, but my research methods changed as the
project developed.

10 At this point I was especially interested in their memories and thoughts about pregnancy,
birth and mothering.

11 For example, I was repeatedly advised to visit a former schoolteacher in her eighties, the
first woman born in our village to have attended university. She is widely travelled, single,
and independent of mind, well read and interested in other histories and cultures, and had a
reputation as a fierce and feared disciplinarian in her teaching days. Interviewing her was, I
admit, done almost out of a sense of obligation because people were surprised I had never
visited her before. She refused to let me use the recorder she had agreed to me bringing
when we had spoken a couple of times on the telephone and she directed my note-taking,
making sure I wrote down things she thought I should and instructing me not to write other
information. She has been interviewed by various local researchers in the past and seemed
confident that she could control the encounter, concentrating on particular subjects, about
which she spoke with authority, and making frequent cross-cultural comparisons. Most of
the information she gave me I had already read in books and she deemed some of my
questions as trivial and apparently unworthy of response. Although she was warmly
hospitable and good-humoured, and was keen to know more about me and my work, the
interaction was not directly valuable for my research as a source of information, although it
was a learning experience for me, and I left with a feeling of having spent the evening
perusing a compendium on island antiquities.

12 This was exacerbated because a late cousin of my paternal grandfather had published
histories of Lewis and my home village several years before (Macdonald 1984, 1990) and
had deposited materials in the School’s Archive. People would refer to the family
connection and repeatedly direct me to his work which is valuable but was not new to me.

13 Letherby and Zdrodowski (1995) have assessed positively, from their own experiences as
researchers, the methodological and epistemological implications of correspondence as a
source of primary data and a method for qualitative research, and especially feminist
research, in comparison to other qualitative methods like the interview.

14 One problem with research in an area like Lewis (and even the island generally) is that
even if the research participant does not know the researcher personally, interpersonal
networks and the knowledge that flows around them mean that, for example, it can be easy
for a local researcher to identify an unnamed person whom the informant deliberately does
not name, but about whom she might provide quite sensitive information; and even giving
basic details about someone can break down any anonymity at a local level.

15 Many women express gladness about their involvement because it made them think about
and discuss with others ideas and experiences not often spoken about, and that they enjoy
writing things down for someone else with an interest in what they have to say. Letherby
and Zdrodowski (1995: 585) agree, however, with Angela McRobbie that ‘it is patronizing
to expect to give anything back to the researched’, but they also found that women have
personal motivations in agreeing to write and these expectations are often met, writing
having quite different effects from talking about experience.
Discourse consists of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' [Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1974, 49]. Here discourses consist less of messages generated within a circumscribed linguistic and social system than as a means for determining the norms and limits of who can say what to whom and the relations of power created in their production and reception. . . . [T]he term discourse connotes a sense of situatedness, not just particular spatiotemporal and social location, but also specific strategies, institutional formations, and social relations that create effects of power' (Briggs 1993: 389-90, and passim; c.f. Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Basso 1990; Henriches et al. 1984: 105ff., 230ff.: Sarup 1996: 17, 71).
PART 1

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES
CHAPTER 1
CULTURE AS PERFORMANCE

Introduction

A principal purpose of this chapter is to position, in theoretical and methodological terms, the research, this writing and the researcher. It reviews writings and discussions that shape my broad apprehension of culture according to a performance-based, contextualist perspective, as developed within relevant fields of study. In Scotland, as in England, folklore, as a term for the discipline and for its object of study, has been unable to escape negative associations which have impeded its academic acceptance. By contrast, in the USA the kinds of cultural events and products, creative genres, symbolic and patterned behaviours, and bodies of knowledge which were, to give just one example, taught in the undergraduate degree in ‘Scottish Ethnology’ which I undertook and which I consider to be my area of concern, come within the remit of folklore studies or folkloristics. The forms of data which I use, the ways I interpret these, its very subject matter (a life crisis), and the emphasis on small-scale performances, locate this research project within that field. I outline here some of the main methodological and theoretical issues (addressed mainly by North American scholars) that have emerged from or been developed in the performance approach to informal and expressive culture as these influence my work. As a general perspective on culture, the performance-based one is particularly apposite for many of the issues which I try to explore about women as cultural participants and creators and about individual gendered identity.

Folkloristics, or ethnology, possesses significant potential for the exploration of creativity and self-expression, to revalue and redefine these as culturally important. This is partly because it challenges assumptions beyond its own sphere about what counts as ‘culture’, although feminists within it have also had to deconstruct androcentric privileges in the way a canon has been over time constructed within folkloristics. The performance orientation highlights the intersubjective relations central to a performance event; it prioritizes process over structure; and it makes it possible to document and analyze apparently mundane and minor activities and behaviours with the same methodologies as more evidently signifying, formal and
dramatic cultural events. It offers, because of these and other factors, a promising approach to investigating issues of identity as the outcome of interaction and reflexivity, whether it is the group identity of categories based on shared attributes, or more specific individual negotiation of variable discourses that contribute to the ongoing creation, the maintenance of, gendered identity.

Culture as performance
The performance-based paradigm, which emerged as dominant in folkloristics in the USA, in the 1970s, during one of the discipline’s periodic struggles with self-definition, has been described as constituting its most effective attempt ‘to achieve intellectual coherence, a unified body of theory, and a secure academic identity’ (Baron 1993: 228). This orientation broadly understands folklore and expressive culture as situated action with social and cultural effects, and requires the recording and consideration of the context in which the folklore occurs. It continues to be foundational to most conceptualizations of the objects of study and to research and hermeneutic endeavour within the field. The ‘performance approach’ has, of course, always been comprised of numerous perspectives and practices (sometimes conflicting ones) partly because performance studies developed across and within a number of disciplines with various objectives, taking disparate trajectories over time. Folklorists brought a concern with performance into their approaches to the conventional poetic, verbal and tradition-based research topics of the discipline - oral literature, other marked speech genres, customs, crafts. Additionally, through an increased engagement with more ‘ethnographic’ methodologies and ideas, which allowed cultural phenomena to be seen in cultural and social contexts that were not limited to the immediate event and its recording, performance studies also fostered concerns for more reflexive, more self-consciously analytical approaches to the personal elements in traditional texts and ethnographic records.

Initially, the main lines in such folkloristics evolved from dialogue with, and reaction to, work within phenomenological, symbolic interactionist and ethnomethodological sociologies, sociolinguistics, and linguistic and processual symbolic anthropology. In broad terms, taking an overview that covers the last two and a half decades, and
many disciplinary orientations within the arts and social sciences, ‘performance-based research shares some of the central goals of deconstruction, reader-response and reception theories, hermeneutics, the “poetics and politics” of ethnographic texts, and cultural studies’ (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 60). There is, however, such basic transdisciplinary disparity over what constitutes ‘performance’ (almost as problematic a term as ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’), that substantial efforts need to be made to formulate common frames of reference in order for theorists and practitioners to compare and co-ordinate their work.⁴

Notions of cultural acts as performance and as processual, the hallmarks of the approach, were accepted in a climate of ongoing interrogation of central terms such as ‘the text’;⁵ ‘the folk’, ‘tradition’ (see e.g. Ben-Amos 1972, 1984; Finnegans 1992: 7; Vansina 1965), ‘transmission’; of the literary/oral and tradition/modernity oppositions; and of the criteria used to identify folklore that were based on a canon of genres. A similar concern to debate critical terminology also characterizes recent developments (especially in response to mass technological change) (Feintuch 1995b; Glassie 1995; Harris 1995; Hufford 1995; Kapchan 1995; Noyes 1995; Titon 1995 - all in Feintuch 1995a; Briggs and Shuman 1993b; Barry Macdonald 1997).

Contextualist folkloristics evolved alongside ethnographic research methodologies and standards,⁶ but the performance model also attempted to break down the text-context dichotomy (something that a great deal of contextualist work failed to overcome) by seeing the pair as, in many ways, mutually constitutive and creative.⁷ The text (the verbal transcription, the sound recording, the extracted description of a custom, as the core of comparativist research) is now seen as something that emerges through processes of interaction, between factors of traditional shared standards and epistemologies, between individual persons and circumstances.⁸ Ethnography, ethnology and folkloristics continue to address issues of the production processes involved in the (re)presentation of cultural material by researchers and the collection of oral and enacted culture.

Such emphases, concerns, and directions of folkloristics relate to, and compare with, other disciplines which have developed conceptualizations of social organization and
culture as being constituted in and of communicative interaction, sometimes connected with certain ideas about the construction of identity in the individual. Culture, tradition and subjectivity are conceptualized as the consequence of repeated and regular relations and behaviour between individuals, simultaneously involved in the constant process of shaping their own subjectivities, performing as ‘selves’, and reacting to ‘others’, and the conditions of any event.

Since the work of Erving Goffman\(^9\) and that of Gregory Bateson,\(^10\) social psychological explorations of individual identity have described the multiplicities of discourses and the roles that are negotiated and worked with, by the individual in interaction with multiple others, in an understanding of the creation of the self as a dialogic, self-creative process, in itself a discursive operation (see e.g. Manning 1980). Contextualists redefined folklore, in the midst of such conceptualizations and research, as one of the primary resources people use as a guide to conduct and self-presentation in everyday existence as culture-inhabitants and -producers, engaged in the perpetual creation of, and communication about, identities. Whether referring to a body of ‘traditional’ cultural knowledge, to modes of thought, or to kinds of expression with significant aesthetic dimensions,

‘The symbolic forms we call folklore are among the communicative means available to social actors as “equipment for living”.’ In these terms, the radical nexus of folklore and society lies in the situated use of folklore in the conduct and constitution of social life. (Bauman 1989a: 177;\(^11\) c.f. Abrahams 1972; Bauman 1972; Ben-Amos 1972)

This redefinition of the subjects and contexts of enquiry in the everyday could not be encompassed by existing generic classifications and the apparatus for handling these. Such a shifting of the parameters of the subject is part of the background for much of the present research, although I also look at marked performances as well as the everyday and unexceptional.

Performance folkloristics especially benefited from, and was able to engage in, developments in the examination of language as a primary means and way of being a social self and of understanding cultural organization and life. Some folklorists like Alan Dundes drew directly on the mentalistic structuralism of Chomskian
transformational-generative linguistics, seeing culture as primarily an information meta-system and humans as machines for producing symbol systems, linguistic or otherwise (Abrahams 1992). The debt of folkloristics to sociolinguistics was largely, however, to trends against such overly mechanistic models, and especially to the work of John Gumperz and Dell Hymes who, under the influence of the Prague School and its successors, focused on language as communicative codes and codings, constantly being recreated, reproductive, redefined, remobilized, and reapplied, within speech communities sharing ground rules for language-use and interpretation, and activated within the specific circumstances of any communicative act. Hymes, following particularly the lead of Roman Jakobson, who had earlier suggested extending the study of poetics to folklore materials in acknowledgement that verbal art is multifunctional and that aesthetic language occurs outwith recognized poetic, literary genres, in ‘normal’, and indeed casual, usage, explored a more processual idea of verbal behaviour and meaning in what became termed ‘the ethnography of speaking’ (Hymes 1972; 1975).

By studying instances of traditional oral genres and customary linguistic interactions, Hymes expanded the idea of the ‘speech community’ into that of the ‘performance community’ who share comprehension of the extra- and paralinguistic features of the event also, including those conventions of conduct and behaviour that could be described as traditional or folkloric. Performance consists of cultural behaviour that can be repeated, reported and interpreted by the performance community amongst which it happens. Hymes was concerned with the assumption of responsibility for knowing (or for competence in) tradition and, then, the assumption of responsibility for performance of tradition; but in contrast to Dundes’s idea of tradition as a meta-system of rules and structuring resources, tradition (or Tradition) does not exist, according to Hymes, without or outside of performance, ‘as something known independent of its existence as something done’ (1972: 69); it only comes into ‘lisible’ existence through performances, until we have evidence of tradition in performance it is only a potential. Prioritizing close and intensive field description, especially of small group interaction, ‘the ethnography of speaking’ further opened up the scope of study to include mundane and non-exceptional communication varieties which would, by previous genre-based criteria, have not usually been
recognized as suitable for, or worthy of, study. It urged for the primacy of emic definitional categorizations of verbal and non-verbal behaviour; and for a more reflexive engagement with other people in the field, and with the materials ‘collected’, by ethnographers. Once it is accepted as fundamental that very few interpersonal communications are significant in solely literal terms, but also are symbolic or signify in other ways, the performance idea, which initially was a means to separate aesthetic (or folkloric) communication from other varieties, can be used to validate for documentation and analysis virtually any interaction in a social context that entails semantic and semiotic systems beyond the literal.18

Elaborating his specific construal of performance in regard to aesthetic verbal activities and products, Richard Bauman (1978: e.g. 9-16) acknowledges a debt to Bateson’s19 formulation of the concept of interpretive ‘frames’ within which meanings are conveyed and deciphered, and especially to Goffman’s furthering of the idea in his studies of mundane situated interaction (e.g. Goffman 1974; Manning 1980). Frames20 are diachronically constituted, relying on previous usage, the communicator’s/performer’s knowledge of that history; they indicate that communication (for example, discourse in the verbal, conversational sense) is to be received in a particular way.21 According to Bauman, literal and performance frames22 exemplify two types of these interpretive structural systems alongside such communicative modes as insinuation, joking, imitation, translation, and quotation (10), although all of these are also frames that can be invoked with a performance ‘meta-frame’, although Bauman does not mention this. The idea of coding in folk culture that I discuss in the subsequent chapter rests on such a construal of interconnecting and interplaying keys, and these codes are used for extra and covert levels of signification that are not meant to be interpretable by all audience members. The performer has to negotiate multiple orders of meaning; the intersection and clash of frames around an event; the need for the performer to satisfy tradition in order to be understood; and the relation of the personal to the customary or the canonical. The performer must be practised or intimately aware of how to handle, according to the integrated, locally formulated frameworks within which types of aesthetic creativity occur, the required semiotic systems and citational behaviours. She or he must also possess basic knowledge of genre conventions, societal expectations of the person

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who fulfils a particular artistic or ceremonial role, and of the consequences of certain acts and actions.

An audience can consist of solely the performer her/himself, but, whether large or not, it is implicated in the creative process, the drama, in the understanding and making of framed meanings. Accepting that identity and culture are both phenomena that emerge minute by minute, the most minor gestural and verbal actions may be dramatic or performative. Clearly this is a much more dynamic, processual perspective, for viewing even the most conservative folklore genres or rigidly ceremonial cultural event, than most previous perspectives. It reiterates Hymes's idea of performance being the condition by which tradition exists as it is realized for and by human actors.

Another central trajectory in performance folkloristics concentrates very often (but not exclusively) on analyzing more public and formal festive events, where the shared knowledge and values of, possibly large, groups are displayed and interpreted in their actions and interactions. In its main principles and methodologies this approach is closely allied to the processual symbolic anthropology of Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, and others such as Roger Abrahams in folklore studies, who articulate a version of cultural life in terms of analogies to games, play and theatre.

Within Turner's ethnology, 'cultural performances', including, for instance, ritual ceremonies, story and legend-narrations, and gossiping, reflect and regulate behaviour (e.g. 1969, 1986). His work shares with the 'ethnography of speaking' a concern for the patterned, structured and symbolic in everyday, unmarked, apparently mundane, performances. Individuals constantly 'learn' culture and, therefore, create and maintain it through witnessing and participating in social dramas and ritual interactions wherein and whereby beliefs and conventions are enacted, repeated, reported, and interpreted. Through social interaction and participation in traditional cultural events, performers and audience-members can supposedly gain a coherent world-view, a sense of their roles and identity in a culture. As in Van Gennep's model for life cycle rites, crisis and liminality are crucial, central notions in Turner's work, conditions that facilitate and precipitate the most intense 'theatrical'
behaviours and conduct. Palmer and Jankowiak write that ‘much of daily life is routine cultural maintenance, appreciation of cultural forms, and elaboration of new forms even in the absence of motivating breaches of protocol’. They warn that a limited reading of Turner’s theory (easily committed because he focuses so often on elements of ‘immanent conflict or conflict in process’ in marked ceremonial and critical performances) can exclude the everyday performance, a fundamentally mistaken interpretation, for a performance theory needs also to encompass ‘conventional structures of consensus and cooperation’ (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 239). Indeed Turner, as they point out, did make clear that he regarded everyday social life, including speech and ‘the presentation of the self’ in mundane roles, as intrinsically performance, in addition to the theatrical and ceremonial events that were often his ethnographic foci.

Some issues in folkloristics and ethnology
A number of recent issues that problematize the premises and claims of earlier performance theory are of relevance and interest to me in seeking ways to better understand women’s experiences and creative expressions in island culture. They have been particularly pursued and engaged with by those who have exposed the failure of earlier performance folkloristics to tackle issues of representation and power, or to break from the core paradigms and canonical assumptions of the disciplinary mainstream. For example, an ethnographic approach which privileges contextualized data does not intrinsically solve the problem of false objectivity. Indeed, it often serves to obscure the fact that the fieldworker still relies on what she/he notices or ignores, or is capable of experiencing or reporting, and what she/he privileges because of its visibility or perceived authenticity in relation to some preconception of ‘tradition’, so many cultural performances would not even be recognized as such or accessible to the fieldworker who might fail even to appreciate this (especially with women’s culture). Faith in the multiperspectival potential of performance-concerned study has unfortunately hidden for many the reality that their methods still misrepresented, or were not being applied in attempts to represent at all, marginal, muted or subversive groups and their cultural acts, and undervalued, form-hybridizing, or ‘alternative’ or ‘uncanonical’ creations. With this and an array
of other background factors, few folklorists have been equipped or willing to tackle how the cultural discourses they study operate to maintain and reproduce systems of social dominance.\(^3\)

Gender, ethnicity and class are, inevitably, primary concerns for those who address the responsibility of all who seek to understand culture and everyday social life to deal also with political realities and wider issues. The extension of 'the folk' to include everyone, depending on situation and categorization, and of 'the field' to potentially refer to anywhere, are two of the disciplinary complications in questions of representation. There are questions such as that of for whom the representation of the ethnographic 'other' is ultimately made - and indeed why it should be constructed at all. Feminist anthropologists, folklorists and oral historians are often critical of much of the 'new ethnography's' (e.g. Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986) failures to escape the pitfalls of old paradigms and methods, despite its efforts and its engagement with issues of representation and power relations in the field that feminists had already been pushing as priorities for some time (e.g. see Behar and Gordon 1995). Attempts to forge more reciprocal relations in the fieldwork experience have involved experimentation with concerns related to these more philosophical, especially epistemological, issues (e.g. Lawless 1991, 1992).

One of the most recent and valuable statements on performance is made by Palmer and Jankowiak (1996), whose particular formulation of a theory of performance is based upon a definition of imagery in contemporary cognitive and interpretive anthropologies. This tenders insight into issues of: the embodiment of culture, as it is experienced and known; reflexivity; and intersubjectivity. They summarize how performance is currently defined within anthropological theory:

Performance is critical, reflexive and intersubjective. Culture-as-performance reflects or comments upon self and others. Performers project and register images and interpretations of themselves, of others, and of the life of the community itself. To the extent that performers are also audiences, they enter into reflexive and reciprocal processes of actors presenting themselves to one another, presenting each other to one another, and collectively presenting images of society to one another, as in many ceremonials and other dramatic public events. Collectively performed images may be presented as ritual, theatrical, or aesthetic commentaries on other domains of
Participants see or imagine the larger image in the collective performance, and they see themselves within that performance as actors, as conceptual products of its enactment, and as the targets of cultural commentary fashioned by performance.

This construal of performance allows equally for cooperative enterprises and for actors to contest with one another over the forms that performances and their cultural images should take. It accommodates Turner’s dramaturgical performances (or conflict-as-performance) of breach, crisis, and redress, as well as the more humdrum, but often artistic or aesthetic, performances of daily routines. (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 240)

Another source of inspiration for this piece of research are the essays in Theorizing Folklore: Toward New Perspectives on the Politics of Culture, edited by Charles Briggs and Amy Shuman (1993a). These represent an array of recent challenges to, and revisionary accounts of, mainstream disciplinary perspectives over the previous twenty years (especially in the early stages) of the dominance of the performance paradigm in folkloristics. They are critiques by folklorists, actively engaged with methodological concerns (as well as theorizing), within a broadly postmodernist attack upon ‘authoritative’ representation of an ‘other’, against the positivism still present in much ethnography and ethnology. They explore how knowledges are constructed as modes of legitimizing, and as supporting structures of, dominance and social inequity and inequality by groups implicated in particular power relations. A great deal of revisionary critiquing of disciplinary methodologies, theory and historiography is by feminists, including reassessment of existing work by women engaged in folkloristics (e.g., Babcock 1987; Farrer 1986; Fox 1993; Kodish 1993a, 1993b; Mills 1990, 1993; Mitchell 1993; Neustadt 1986; Ritchie 1993; Saltzman 1993; Shuman 1993; Stoeltje 1988a, 1988b; Webster 1986b; Yocom 1993b; Young and Turner 1993; many of the essays in Behar and Gordon 1995; Jackson et al. 1993: 77-104). Feminist folklorists investigating women’s cultural labour in ‘folk’ contexts and in wider society, and how this abuts, parallels and intersects with women’s economic and reproductive work, sometimes then question the labour divisions, the supposed suitability of certain fields of study to one gender more than the other (Collins 1990, especially Camitta), and the distribution of credit and recognition within their discipline.
In their editorial introduction to *Performance, Culture, and Identity* (Fine and Speer 1992a), Elizabeth Fine and Jean Haskell Speer prioritize the view that sharing identity is a central purpose of everyday and of more formalized performances (1992b: 9). This is a collection of essays which I have found encouraging and interesting. It spans such topics as the presentation of self and one’s cultural position within a specific traditional role by a male Appalachian storyteller (Oxford), and by a female Galician one (Valentine and Valentine), meaning-formation in farming stories about economic and agricultural crises (Carlin), and the needlework narration of exile experiences by Hmong refugee women (Conquergood). For complex and evident reasons, cultural identity, particularly as it relates to constructions of nationality and ethnicity, has become the most prominent, and a highly contested, concern within the fields of European ethnology, ethnography and folklore, as these more or less equate with folklore and some elements of cultural anthropological studies in the USA. A glance at the contents of continental ethnological journals, or at conference topics in the 1990s can illustrate the present ‘obsession’ with cultural identity issues. There should be no assumption in modern analysis that any stable, ultimately definable, cultural identity exists a priori from an event in which it is manifest, or from a describable ongoing context. Identity of any kind is contingent upon the negotiation of specific historically situated factors, and understandings of everyday and traditional events (such as that of Palmer and Jankowiak’s model which prioritizes elements of negotiation, contest and process) offer insight into the ongoing construction of identity as performance. Recent and contemporary theoretical directions continue to raise questions about fundamental intersubjective and reflexive aspects of performances. By implicating the fieldworker as a co-participant in the event, they demand the interrogation of our own identities too, as we understand them in regard to how we look back on fieldwork relationships and behaviours, and as we provide one of the subjectivities intersecting and interacting at, and producing meaning in, the performance.
Feminist folklore studies

Work on folklore that is expressly ‘feminist’ in its focus, methodologies or analysis, or that is more implicitly ‘feminist’ in the potential insights yielded or positions taken but may not describe itself as critical of gender and sex-based inequalities or dominance structures, takes, of course, varied trajectories throughout all areas of ethnological interest. It usually combines some of the features of ‘feminist folkloristics’ adumbrated in this brief review.

As in all the social sciences and humanities, when described at all in mainstream research, women’s lives are often treated as addenda to the main text of male experience and epistemology. A great deal of feminist or gynocentrically-oriented investigation into folklore, and more generally in anthropological spheres and literary studies, is, of course, founded upon the idea of ‘women’s culture’. This meta-concept notionally, at least, encompasses distinctly describable systems of values, ideals and ideas, and organizational structures that are contrastive, alternative, complementary or contradictory to the masculinely-informed discourses, that dominate as general culture, and which suppress and obscure ‘sub-cultures’. As in other disciplines, feminists in folkloristics and ethnology do not presume that there exists a universal feminine Weltanschauung, experience or character, but do assume, while generally aware of the dangers of falling into reductionism or essentializing, that in most societies women create and inhabit what fits the definitional criteria for a ‘culture’. Furthermore, much of its semantics and semiotics, its operation and structures, is not normally or ever accessible to men through regular interactions and communicative channels in the same ways it is to women. ‘Feminine’ or ‘female cultures’, shaped and informed with the particular relations of difference, separation and dominance between the sexes in a specific culture-area and time, reflect how women need to be adept and knowledgeable in the ways of the dominant culture, and of certain male subcultures, to participate in mixed, wider society. In the main, however, women, in, at least, tradition-oriented societies (for example, as the Hebrides into the early twentieth century might in many ways be characterized from a present day perspective), evaluate themselves and others, and form their sense of self within culturally specific formulations of gendering through their relations with other women more than with men. The individual female constructs and ‘knows’ her group
identity as a participant of various women’s subcultures, along lines of membership and affiliation with specific interpretive communities and subgroups.

Reclamatory documentation of girls’ and women’s folk cultures offers an empirical starting-point for redressing past and present neglect and the mistakes of androcentric models of culture and tradition that fail to recognize the differential uses by the genders of the same folklore genres, and much of the folklore that belongs solely or primarily to females. Drawing attention to women’s handlings which are distinct from men’s, of the same genres, challenges conventional male-focused accounts of a community’s or a whole culture’s life, the normative structures posited within various disciplinary sub-fields, such as oral narrative, folk-song, material culture and folklife, or folk drama studies, and analysis within these that leads to claimed conclusions about a local ‘worldview’. Revealing the different significations and functions of folklore forms within female and male interpretive and creative frames, and women’s creativity and expressions that employ traditionally male-associated modes, enriches and enhances understandings of genres and models. These can then be appreciated as more complex and flexible, multifaceted and multifunctional, than previously conceived.

Several of the contributors to Performance, Culture, and Identity (Fine and Speer 1992a) are folklorists and the articles illustrate methodological approaches and theoretical orientations in folkloristics and ethnoLOGY. Some of these have particular relevance for feminist perspectives, focusing on women’s performances and demonstrating how sensitive studies of these can disrupt existing disciplinary models, assumptions and practices. Langellier and Peterson’s contribution, ‘Spinstorying: An Analysis of Women Storytelling’, amongst other things, confirms the validity of the particular ‘contextualization’ framework described by Bauman and Briggs (1990).37 The study adds to a considerable body of scholarship on women’s traditional and non-traditional narrating that has radically challenged and undermined normative tenets and ideas of the study of storytelling and of conversation in everyday interaction. Like some of the feminist research into conversation analysis, their description of ‘spinstorying’ offers testament to ‘a group identity and group solidarity that challenges the male-dominated discourse that tends to particularize,
depreciate, regulate and silence women’s identity’ (Fine and Speer 1992b: 14), although this does not deny the importance of contestive and combative elements in women’s narrating of stories and personal experiences.38

In ‘Rehearsing for the Ultimate Audience’, Minister considers her elderly female informant’s use of conversational interaction and oral autobiography (or personal history), in not only presenting a strong individualized social identity, but also in her reflexive renegotiation of what she understands about herself at a late stage in her life when exteriorized versions of that self are limited, especially in comparison to those which would have been available to her during those periods of her life from which she retells particularly important experiences.39 Minister’s sensitive study is enhanced by her candid observations on the interactive relationship of herself and her older research subject as performers and each other’s audience, and by her discussion of her own continuing processes of self-discovery and identity-creation. This study exemplifies a more dialogic and reciprocal ethnography, and Minister also addresses the ethics of reporting and interpreting the presentation of self, the identity, the very life, of another.

‘Fabricating Culture: The Textile Art of Hmong Refugee Women’40 is Conquergood’s article (c.f. Peterson 1988) based on research into a particular range of traditional embroidered flower cloths, *paj ntaub*,41 that were produced in exile, a context in which cultural identity’s constitution in repetition and imitation is even more urgent than in settled environments. He explores how in decorative hangings that visually relate tales of escape, Hmong women tell their histories and of who they are before outsider (especially western) academics begin that task for them also, and he looks at the representation of personal meanings and views.42

These three and other contributions to Fine and Speer make interesting observations on particular ‘tradition’-mediated representations and constructions of identity, by and of women, and explore significant methodological issues. Although not all express feminist intentions, many have feminist value in so far as inhering within them are implicit or stated challenges to male-devised models and semantic systems, hegemonic assumptions and norms for material or interactive productions wherein
the formation of images and understandings of the self are emerging constantly. Using performance-based construals of, and approaches for studying, behaviour and conduct, they show how various identities are discursively produced at specific meaningful sites. The demonstrate how we can try to avoid essentializing, reifying or falsely stabilizing categories of identity, including those in the cultural construction of the ‘feminine’ and of ‘women’.

Recording women’s lives and words shows how their evaluations of cultural forms can contest and diverge from those of dominant discursive frames, exposing creative, expressive, productive forms previously unstudied and uncollected, or with little esteem within the wider community (in the overt estimations of women as well as men). This challenges canonical generic definitions hierarchized according to androcentric and masculinist ideas of context, function, performer-roles, textual structure and content - the visibility and formality of the performance, the association of certain genres with one sex or the other and their traditional ‘spheres’ being fundamental to all of this. Feminist folkloristics has generated fresh research subject-categories and redefined old ones and their interrelations, forcing reconceptualizations of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’, generating new terminologies. Conventional ‘classic’ folklore genres could not accommodate or offer analytical tools for much of the data and description collected from women’s performances, whether performers are exceptional tradition-bearers or ‘average’, unexceptional community-members. Personal experience narratives by women, in informal contexts with different audience-performer relations to those found in even typical conversation situations with men involved, do not fit conventional genres. Challenges to genre hierarchies expose the failings or omissions of existing taxonomies of verbal and other modes of expression, for describing and analyzing undervalued, often more spontaneous, expression and informal interactions in casual settings.

The concerns of some fieldworkers to explore ways of effecting more ‘egalitarian’ relationship models have led to attempts to achieve more reflexive and reciprocal possibilities through closer collaboration with ‘subjects in the field’ (ourselves included) in the gathering, interpretation and secondary presentation of data.
Focusing on women’s informal culture and everyday experiences often entails entering the domestic sphere and private and personal custom. Mounting a claim of equal value to the study of men’s labour and recreation, for the skills and knowledge intrinsic to running a home, raising a family, traditional work and the fulfilling of traditional female roles, and for casual interactive groups where regular conversation, or more heightened speech modes, are the expressive frames, shows that folklore exists where it was previously ignored, invisible, or defined otherwise, by observers unable to understand, or without access to, such contexts and forms. This can lead to women reaffirming or claiming for the first time the importance and worth of skills learnt informally, and which are often significant steps in their socialization into womanhood. There has been a great deal of US research into domestic material culture, historical and modern, and into idiosyncratic adaptations by individuals or groups that reveal additional facets of a particular traditional form or idiom. Performance folkloristics encompasses, for example, the ways household objects and folk art items are made, giving new perspectives on everyday routines and creative productions which would otherwise be ignored and eventually lost.

Female fieldworkers have written about their own and others’ personal difficulties, such as resistance or uneasiness, in coming to accept as subjects of study traditional domestic life, a sphere they have probably rejected in their own life-choices (e.g. Lawless 1991, 1992; Levin 1993; Yocom 1990, 1993a, 1993b; see Chapter 4). Ethnographers and folklorists have commented upon various factors related to this. They experience a need to challenge their own deep-seated assumptions about what is interesting and about the triviality of the domestic, which they have acquired with enculturation within mainstream society and as academics. This sometimes entails uncomfortable recognition of the degree to which they themselves work within masculinist discourses and contribute towards the maintenance of these. They recognize the need to see women, whom they could easily regard as extremely subordinated and exploited by the men in a particular community under study, not merely as victims but as actors with their own folk culture, domestic society and particular abilities, knowledges and powers which may be based on traditional roles and that these women are strategic and resourceful. They wrestle with the possibility that, by continuing to reject or undervalue women’s folklore and the domestic, they
may involve themselves in resistance and perhaps an internalized self-devaluation and -effacement in relation to certain facets of their identity, which they try to suppress and deny, that have been shaped according to negative conventional ideals of women, and how this has to be negotiated without denying other aspects of the ‘feminine’. They confront how much their own self-image is often defined contrastively with one of domesticity and the kinds of lives the, usually older, women they study have lived, how much they have constructed their identities (sometimes in determined rebellion) against such ways of life, often later seeing their mother, or other elder female relations, in their research partners and informants. And in research they have to balance their own roles, the effects of and reasons for their life choices, with entrance to a world that can feel at first claustrophobic and alien. For example, Yocom (1990; 1993a) explores candidly her personal engagement with her research in a Maine logging community where by day she worked, and by night socialized, with the men, feeling a relative intruder into the cosy, ‘safe’ domestic sphere; the physical hardship and frequent danger of loggers’ lives and the romanticizable figure of the woodsman attracted her much more, and only gradually and incidentally did she start giving significant attention to the women’s lives. Only with time and effort, and a great deal of reflection, did she come to accept topics from the lives of the women in the community as research topics to be really enjoyed.44

Attending more to emic (basically and principally this means women’s) perspectives on process, as feminist fieldworkers attempt to do, tackles aesthetically and functionally reifying perspectives on creative products which are based on the standards and idioms of outsiders or male insiders, and which negate, modify, or minimize women’s opinions, beliefs and aesthetics. More gynocentrically angled research reveals the folk epistemologies, the lore and shared conceptual systems behind practicable skills and performance competence, deepening appreciation and understanding of women’s cultures.

Feminist folklorists assert the value of informal lines of, and arenas for, the transmission of knowledge and personal experience and expression, including gossip. Marta Weigle, for instance, claims that embedded and entrenched within gossip are
fundamental shared and personal ‘truths’ which constitute everyday ‘mythology’ (c.f. Tebbutt 1995; Watkins and Danzi 1995). Even within a fairly homogeneous community, or ‘simple’, ‘traditional’ society, certain channels of female learning can be considerably less formalized and visible than male ones that are more likely to have contexts outside of the family or the home, and which can include a wider range of specialized roles. Obvious examples of subjects that rely on the researcher giving value and recognition to the folk knowledges that are central to daily life within women’s culture are folk medicine and lore about nutrition and health, housewifery and needlework skills, and topics based in female life cycle experiences (especially those linked to events in the biological life-course which can be, therefore, even more firmly characterized with the natural, the feminine, the private and insignificant) and the beliefs surrounding and underlying these (e.g. Callaway 1978; Chu 1980; Davis-Floyd 1993; Ehrenreich and English 1974; Helsti 1995; Kay 1982a, 1982b; Kerewsky-Halpern 1988; Kligman 1984; Lawless 1993; Lövakra 1989; Mulcahey 1993; Nic Suibhne 1992; Rundblad 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1982; Sharp 1986; Shuttle and Redgrove 1986; Skultans 1970; Tsoffar 1995; Young 1993).

By studying, and trying to understand from the ‘inside’, the researcher can become aware of meanings inaccessible without investigation into the creator’s or performer’s own thoughts and feelings. One of the most important feminist approaches in folklore studies, that concerned with coding in cultural expression, emphasizes that there can be read in the folklore and performances scrutinized the workings of an agenda to effect some positive change in life beyond the immediate context, whether or (usually) not the women involved see themselves as ‘grassroots activists’ at all or as critical of the relations between the sexes and of the status quo in their community. They might even deny the presence of any messages that do not seem to fit with an ostensibly innocuous domesticity, empty of any intelligible potential for political comment or subversion, in their lore, their performances, gatherings, and creations (e.g. see Ice 1993; Pershing 1993a, 1993b; Radner 1993; Yocom 1990, 1993). Often the communication of messages, that complicate and confound conventional meanings and understandings of a traditional expressive form, is accomplished through deliberate or unintentional encrypting. Coding is
discussed at length in Chapter 2 and its operation in women’s creative expressions connected with death is outlined and implied at various points in this thesis.

Another approach to folklore reinterprets and recontextualizes images and symbolic associations related to the genders in folkloric materials, especially in verbal traditions. Increasingly, it deals with representations in mass-mediated popular culture which have brought into focus visual representations. There have been investigations into the inherent sexism of stereotypes and archetypal ideals, and of the meanings and values implicit in much folklore, including attention to the ways in which those who use the folklore professionally, as scholars or publishers, add to and perpetuate these according to their own cultural milieus (Bacchilega and Jones 1993; Bottigheimer 1987; Cardigos 1996; Dégh 1994b; Feinstein 1986; Herrera-Sobek 1990; Kodish 1983; Robinson 1992; Stewart 1993; Stone 1986; Warner 1994), and to the gendered symbolism in festivals and other community ceremonies and rituals (Cowan 1994; Parman 1990b; Rieti 1995). Folklore indoctrinates, inculcates, encourages conformity or change, according to the rules of those in charge; it functions to normativize and naturalize. It is, therefore, in many ways like ideology, often ‘bearing intent’ to justify the oppression of women and smaller groups. Characters who can be regarded as providing role-models in narrative genres, the characteristics recommended in the wisdom of proverbs and in the imagery of song, female representations in visual art, and so on, serve much of the time to uphold masculinist discourse, in value-systems valorizing and privileging men and boys, even if folklore characters are generally unidimensional and inhabit an imaginary world. (In fairy tales the sticky end of the witch, a nonconformist and powerful female, provides a caveat, while the prince-winning by a paragon of passive femininity offers a promise of possibilities.) Invoking its very basis as inherited or justified by age establishes with even more legitimacy tradition’s acceptability and heuristic values in tradition-oriented communities. The folklorist must resist making over-simplistic conclusions about the connections between representations and the real social conditions of women, or assumptions about how images have been or are interpreted, formulated or adaptively employed by users. A quite different consequence of studying women’s culture relates to feminist action outside of academia, or the results of scholarly study returning back into ‘the open’ in the
deliberate deployment of traditional female skills, bodies of knowledge, and expressive forms in new ways, in order to enact or convey messages with a determined intent to foster awareness, to enlighten, to stimulate debate, or provoke action regarding the amelioration of women’s condition. The innocuous familiarity of folk traditions and of domestic crafts can make them subtle or very surprising vehicles for political expression, for what, if expressed more directly and literally, might face obstructive resistance. This is basic to the success of coding strategies.

Conclusion
The idea of culture as performance and process is the background to my understanding of gender as performance and process. One of the central aims of my research project is to gain insight into the individual’s sense and presentation of themselves as gendered, as feminine, and to do this within the overarching context of culture, and the more specific contexts of events in the informal management of death on the Isle of Lewis. Just as the next chapter discusses a conceptualization, pervading this thesis, that gender is not only performed, but that it is an identity which is constituted in the performances which are taken to be its products, many folklorists and ethnologists understand culture or tradition as existing because of the acts that are held to be its outcome, that it is performatively maintained. This chapter’s review of literature which influences my work and perspectives merely touches upon feminist research in folkloristics and related areas of anthropology. The next one, which adumbrates the view of gender which I take, focuses on the specific example of coding in women’s folk culture. Coding analysis offers non-deterministic conceptualizations of culture and tradition as meta-discourses in ways that are similar to how the evidence for the performativity of gender provides a view of gender discourse as a nexus, within which individual women negotiate and maintain ideas of identity, which are neither fully predetermined, nor immune to rejection and subversion.

1 At that time, fuller engagement with performance by US scholars in certain ways sharpened a contrast between a more text-oriented, comparativist approach characteristic of European scholarship and a more ‘anthropological’ American tendency. In the present, very broadly, much of the work of American folklorists is largely equivalent to that undertaken
by ethnomusicologists and folklorists in Europe, in some ways parallel to the comparability of North American cultural anthropology and social anthropology in Britain.

When published, the ground-breaking collection of essays, *Toward New Perspectives* (Paredes and Bauman 1972) exemplified a greater pluralism and engagement in representational issues in folkloristics than there had been before: although often portrayed as a group-statement of the premises of a nascently all-pervasive performance approach, not all of its thirteen contributors were performance-oriented in consistent ways, but the collection is worth mentioning and has been a focus for recent revisionary reassessments of the discipline in recent years (see the contributions to Briggs and Shuman 1993a). Fine (1984) describes the influences of other disciplines upon, and the development of the main concepts and practices of, performance folkloristics, and discusses, especially, examples from ethnopoetic scholarship on native American oral literature. In 1986, Limón and Young critically reviewed the published results of the performance orientation in ethnography and folklore studies, and suggested where the movement had failed and succeeded in its general aims up to their time of writing. The following are all important contributions in themselves to theory-making as well as being updates on the ongoing field: Bauman and Briggs 1990; Briggs 1993; Briggs and Shuman 1993; Palmer and Jankowiak 1996.

Writing for himself and other folklorists who were involved in the development of the performance-based methodologies and ideas in the early 1970s, Abrahams explains, 'We were primarily concerned with the shared expectations brought into *everyday exchanges*, and with the ways in which those expectations became more self-evident and *self-reflexive* under conditions of performance and celebration' (Abrahams 1992: 35, my emphasis). E.g. see the discussion by Palmer and Jankowiak (1996: 225-6).

Fine (1984) accounts for the changing status of the *text* in, particularly, American folkloristics and oral literature scholarship influenced by performance-based perspectives: the *text*'s many definitions; various research methodologies and standards and methods for rendering performances in print, including a discussion of the 'translation' of non-linguistic features along with conventional textual material.

Baron (1993) shows how a basic contextualist approach and research methodology featured in the work of a number of prominent American folklorists, before it was ever named as such, from as early as the 1930s, through the subsequent two decades. In the 1950s, for example, William Bascom's anthropological, functionalist view required setting folklore items in the context of daily life (in Bascom 1954 he 'as much as defined folklore as emergent and constituted in performance [in 'Verbal Art']') (Baron 1993: 239) while Alan Lomax, Herbert Halpert, and Richard Dorson were amongst those who underlined the primacy of intense ethnographic field methodologies in folklore research and prepared the ground for performance concepts. In her chapter 'The Development of the Text', Fine also makes this point (1984: especially 38-56).

Ben-Amos (1993) surveys a range of oppositional, part-whole, and metaphorical relationships that have been constructed for the ideas of text and context.

'The text' is not merely a finite transcribed record, to be compared with variants of its type, but is inseparable from some account of its production in the performance context in terms of styles and the formal artistic techniques employed (the 'textural' features), and of the social co-participation and co-operation occurring in, and other specific conditions of, its production (the 'context') that together make the event culturally meaningful (Dundes 1980 [1964]).

Acknowledged as an important influence by many folklorists and ethnologists even today, in 1959, Goffman (1969) had published *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which he analyzed micro-encounters, in largely work situations, and used a theatrical model in explicating his theory of how the individual presents and develops a sense and image of her/himself as a social actor who performs roles in interactive scenes. (See the essays in
Ditton (1980)). Kenneth Burke had in the 1940s been using a theatrical model to denote ideas of identity as a process to be continually performed or ‘done’ rather than as something to be possessed or achieved outright, and his dramatistic theories and view of language as symbolic action have had enormous influence, beyond his own fields of literary criticism and rhetoric. Goffman explicitly acknowledges his debt to, and affinity with, the work of Burke throughout his writing, for example, chapter 3 of The Presentation of Self relies heavily on Burke’s A Rhetoric of Motives (Goffman 1969 [59]: e.g. 170). Burke’s influence is apparent in the work of Geertz, Hymes, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Turner, and many others; on various of those engaged in folklore studies, like Abrahams, Bauman (e.g. 1989), and Fine and Speer (e.g. 1992: 4). Abrahams’ focus on the rhetorical elements of folklore, e.g., owes much to Burke’s work (e.g. Abrahams 1968: 145ff); and see, e.g., Bauman’s (1989: 177) quotation below which quotes from Burke.

10 E.g. Goffman’s Frame Analysis (1974), and Interaction Ritual (1972), obviously owe a great debt to Bateson who was largely responsible for acceptance of the term ‘frame’ in social science (Manning 1980: especially 273-4). Bauman’s use of ‘frame’ (see main text and notes below) is taken from Bateson and Goffman (especially Bauman 1978).

11 The quotation is taken from Kenneth Burke. 1941. ‘Literature as Equipment for Living’, in The Philosophy of Literary Form, 393-304. Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP.

12 Within his psychoanalytically based version of folkloristics, Dundes adapted Chomsky’s ideas of linguistic competence, the intrinsic knowledge of language structure and usage rules, of its basic ‘deep structures’; and of performance, any use of language, by which ‘surface structures’ are manifest, that which arises from language use, and, which, very often in fact, refers to deviations from generative grammar rules and is largely the result of non-linguistic factors such as intervening cognitive and physical processes. Dundes elaborated an analogous difference between knowing folklore materials and tools and knowing how to use these. Obviously, this is partly a development owing much to Saussure’s much earlier formulation of la langue and la parole.

13 Fine, e.g., describes the influence of the Prague School upon folklorists (1984: 31ff.); and see Fine and Speer (1992: 3) on Jakobson’s particular influence.


15 Hymes treated performance ‘as the expression of tradition within social context and placed it within the current trend that sees culture and discourse as process, almost to the exclusion of structure and tradition. But Hymes consciously attempted to balance notions of structure and process, treating performance as “the realization of known traditional materials,” but with emphasis “on the constitution of a social event, quite likely with emergent properties”’ (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 233, quoting from Hymes (1981), In Vain I Tried to Tell You. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 80-81). For an updated assessment of some of his work see ‘Dell Hymes and Performance as the Enactment of Poetic Forms’ (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 232-36).

In a way distinct from Chomsky’s usage, Hymes extended the notion of ‘competence’ to include the ability to employ language in social contexts that encompassed non-linguistic capacities and competences, all the knowledge behind a speech event; and, within his theory of language use and social action, ‘performance’ refers to actual language usage and interactions, and not ‘something mechanical or inferior, as in some linguistic discussion, but... something creative, realized, achieved, even transcendent of the ordinary course of events’ (1972: 13).
Richard Bauman, one of the principal theorists and practitioners of performance-based folkloristics, summarizes (1989: 177-8) three basic senses of performance and their applications, the first broadly referring to the situated and interactional 'doing' of culture, a general definition foundational to the others, and which Limón and Young describe as 'an approach indebted to the Marxian concept of praxis' (1986: 437). Characteristic of Bauman's own version of performance, his second definition, which is virtually identical in essence to that proposed by Hymes, describes 'verbal art': 'a special, artful mode of communication, the essence of which resides in the accountability to an audience for a display of communicative competence, subject to their evaluation for the skill and effectiveness by which the act of expression is accomplished' (1989: 177-8). This reflects his research interests in, predominantly, oral creativity and literature in performance, and a heavy debt to sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, although the ways in which he has developed the approach theoretically, even when phrased in the context of the oral, also relate easily to less than 'traditional' forms and to non-verbal expression. The third definition of performance that he describes is that exemplified in the work of Turner, Geertz and Abrahams (see below in text). In the work of Bauman (1972, 1975, 1978, 1986, 1989a, 1989b), the ideas of responsibility and competence are again stressed, the performer accepting to act in ways that are coherent and appropriate, and to exercise sufficiently the requisite communicative skills, having received the audience's permission to play. The audience are not only responsible for witnessing and responding to an event, but as reciprocal and responsive interactors with the performer (and with circumstantial elements) are also, of course, involved in the constitution of a performance, and, hence, in the creation of relevant cultural discourses. Shared experience and knowledge of modes of creative expression allow for greater intensity and the demands for special attention typical of a performance interaction. Bauman illustrates how intensity of performance features and effects is one criterion by which folkloric events may be included or not in a performative model (1972; 1978: 9, 123-4; 1986: 3; 1989).

MacDonald (1997: 58) points out parallels between such an understanding of tradition and Anthony Giddens' description of social structure.

Performance research extends to material products and productions too, of course, in studies that entail the manufacturing process and skills that are intrinsic to making useful and culturally meaningful the objects created.


Metacommunicative frames provide structures within which behaviour and interactions occur: a systemic set of culturally conventionalized communicative means cue or 'key' the frame, an array of guides for the accomplishment of performance and for the interpretation of meanings implicit in the performer's acts and words by receivers who constitute, on one level, a kind of collective that shares recognition and understanding of the overarching frame (Bauman 1978: 15).

Foley likens Bauman's meaning of 'frame' to what he calls the 'performance arena', 'the place or locus in which some specialized form of communication is uniquely licensed to take place' (1992: 282)

Performance framing can be presumed in a speech event if there are evident some or all of the following typical stylistic features and markers: special codes; figurative language; parallelistic structuring; paralinguistic features in the delivery and in the participants' behaviour as it conforms to traditional expectations; formulae indicative of particular genres; references and appeals implying recognition of evaluative standards; and a disclaimer of performance by the performer (Bauman 1978: 17-22).

Bauman's writing stresses the presence of an identifiable artistic element partly because of the materials with which he works.
24 ‘[P]erformance becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication’ (Bauman 1977: 124, emphasis in Bauman).

25 Abrahams’ approach and account emphasizes the socially organized processes of staging, the stylized behaviour of the performer, and her/his reciprocal relationship with the audience, who are simultaneously performers, involved in the celebrations and other public dramas to which Abrahams gave the name ‘enactments’ (1977). He also foregrounded the factor of negotiation in his model in terms of the relationship between what an individual could do as a being situated within certain cultural discourses, and how, at times when, and places where, the performance mode was activated, the assumptions and beliefs that constituted a framework-like part of a culture were rendered salient. Abrahams’ earlier development of a ‘rhetorical theory of folklore’ (1968) elucidates and partially serves as the basis for his particular enactment-centred view of folklore. Invoking, again, comparison and contrast with Chomsky’s ‘competence’ and ‘performance’, Abrahams opposed ‘tradition’, as an abstract rule and symbol system, against ‘performance’, as an individual’s realization in actions of standard canonical forms, themes, and structures in specific situations (1968; 1972; Hymes 1972: 47-50).

26 This conceptualization of performance and its methodologies have wider parameters than those found in the kind of approach employed by Bauman and others who concentrate on poetics or ethnopoetics, admitting cultural and social events excluded from a focus on ‘verbal art’ or musical performances.


28 Indeed Turner explicitly exhibits the influence of Van Gennep upon his own analysis, not least in that he provides a way to expand and elaborate Van Gennep’s triphasic structure for rites of passage and other crises. Turner identified four sequences in symbol-using social and cultural dramas: a breach of rule-bound behavioural norms precipitates a crisis for community cohesion, necessitating redressive action that takes the form, usually, of ritualized routines and ceremonial performances of aesthetic genres by people in specially designated roles; and this leads to resolution with the groups involved either settling into new formations, in a break with past circumstances, or with their reintegration into a relational structure that pre-existed the breach.

29 This is not to imply that there is any ‘correct’ representation, but to point out that faith in the version being offered often obscured others or even recognition of others being possible.

30 Although this has changed, the discipline remains to a degree extraordinarily, even aberrantly apolitical, one obstacle, almost certainly, to the greater acceptance and integration that folkloristics is sometimes aware it lacks within academia, whether located in the social sciences or the humanities.

31 They reassess the most prominent and influential ideas; or examine the circumstances of particular academic evolutionary stages; or they direct attention to those standpoints and ongoing positions and discourses that were omitted, dismissed or negated, especially those where gender, class, racial, or other power-based and marginal statuses, relations and identities were in some way a deciding factor. The collection exemplifies a range of contemporary theoretical debates and work that ‘has begun to transform the place of folkloristics within postmodern discussions of how modern mainstream culture has created its boundaries’ (Briggs and Shuman 1993b: 111). And, ‘since folklorists were instrumental in the construction of the dominant’s quintessential “other,” they occupy a unique position from which to comment on this process’ (ibid.).

32 Richard Bauman argues that all natural sociable interactions are fundamentally about the construction and negotiation of identity; in such interactions, performances, especially narratives, are vehicles ‘for the encoding and presentation of information about oneself in order to construct a personal and social image’ (Fine and Speer 1992b: 9, quoting from
Bauman 1986: 21). They continue in a somewhat optimistic and liberal vein here, however, that implies a rather simplified view of sustained aspects of identity as somehow intrinsically positive for the bearer: 'As one's identity develops in the dialectic between individual and society, those performances that have proven most useful, most confirming, and most coherent with one another become repeated and essential parts of an individual's "presentation of the self," to use Erving Goffman's phrase' (Haskell and Speer 1992: 9).

Their implied allowance of choice and agency, their ascription of stable elements, to the individual are generously humanistic and contrast with the poststructuralist views of the subject and identity in Judith Butler's work discussed below.

33 See discussion below in text.
34 Roth (1996) offers a contemporary discussion of terms such as folklore, ethnography, Volkskunde, ethnology in European scholarship. He uses the capitalized term 'European Ethnology' to refer to a specific field of enquiry, a usage I will not be employing here.
35 E.g. Stoklund 1995 is a number of Ethnologia Europaea devoted to Ethnic and National Identities, the essays in which point to similar studies and debates. In the 1980s historical and cultural patternings succeeded the localized community studies of the 1970s as the defining subject of European ethnography, to be replaced in the present decade by gendered, ethnic and national identity, and youth culture. Even when ethnicity is a marked element of a study-subject, the different political circumstances of the USA have obviously generated other foci, objectives and angles in cultural identity studies, although there are basic similarities with European ethnology in this and in investigation into other types of identity - gender, class-based, age-related, for example. Inevitably, in a postmodernist environment involving the tearing away from and dismantling of the signposts of established pathways for uncharted ones, it can seem difficult, even ironic, that researchers are trying to describe courses, such as these ones that they are attending to, in such detail (Frykman 1995: 5).
36 An up-date of de Caro's (1983) bibliography is long overdue.
37 In another development of the performance approach, Bauman and Briggs (1990) discuss at length some of the most salient conceptual reformulations in performance studies, those that continue to refigure 'text', 'context' and their relationship by shifting emphases onto 'contextualization', how contexts emerge from the negotiations between participating interactants as they produce and mobilize interpretive frameworks as settings for social interaction and use these to assess reflexively the speech, or other behaviours or folklore actions, within the discourses that emerge from and with the event. Consequences and possibilities of this paradigm modification include a more variable and sophisticated decentring of the narrator's voice or the actor's role-filling, and, also, therefore, access to new perspectives on relations and meanings beyond the performance. Another shift in ideas, with radical implications for fieldwork, which is explored by some ethnographers and folklorists writing when they are engaged in, and later on when writing about, field experiences, is a view encompassing the attitude that 'audiences are shaped by discourses in keeping with the differential involvement of members in what is said [or done]' (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 70). Further to this has been the adoption of terms allowing more complex and subtle differentiations between the products and the processes that become evident from and in ethnographic data-collection (72-8). Entextualization refers to the 'creation' of a text (or a unit of linguistic creation, a portion of speech, or a cultural production), extracted from the event, which implies a process of decontextualization that depends upon it being possible to loosen a performance text from 'the anchoring counterforces of context', but also relies on its retention of traces of its contextualized state for it to be at all significant. Following this, occurs recontextualization in the recentring of a discourse, performance or text, by the reporter of the event. 'The] investigation of the interrelated processes of entextualization, decontextualization (decentering), and recontextualization (recentering), opens a way toward constructing histories of performance: toward illuminating the larger
systemic structures in which performances play a constitutive role; and toward linking performances with other modes of language use as performances are decentered and recentered both within and across speech events - referred to, cited, evaluated, reported, looked back upon, replayed, and otherwise transformed in the production and reproduction of social life' (80). For theory-makers, the reorientation within anthropological and folklore studies 'represents a major step towards achieving an agent-centered view of performance', a context within which Bauman and Briggs situate their discussion (69).

38 Langellier's and Peterson's model for interpreting narratives can be applied for other marginalized groups of various identities.

39 'Through speech performances, the informant redefines herself, engaging, unconsciously or actively, with factors such as her physical condition, social expectations of someone of her seniority, and how she relates to other selves she has been in the past, all with the prospect of death and 'the ultimate audience' in proximity.

40 Conquergood's article focuses on the women who produce the 'story cloths' but men will sketch the designs that are then sewn by female relatives and in Thai refugee camps some men have learnt the skills of embroidery (Peterson 1988).

41 Pronounced pa ndau.

42 By probing into the public exhibition of such cloths in Chicago, Conquergood shows some of the effects of their being decontextualized and then recontextualized under another, alien aesthetic that types them according to a particular construal of 'folk art'. One outcome is that for the gallery audience the cloths are largely rendered apolitical and innocuous, undermining and negating much of the craftswomen's (performers') implied intentions and purposes in the creation (performance) in its original contexts, and eclipsing the rhetorical potential of the needlework stories by concentrating on their artistic value according to fixed outsider norms. Some of the issues raised by this study that, I feel, are pertinent to all consideration of folk culture are: the inherent dangers of outsiders 'folklorizing' a cultural product and (by culture, time, etc.) being perhaps destructive or negligent of its ethical, contestive, political, its subversive qualities; the particular perils of dealing with women's domestic customs and crafts (and their culture generally) in this regard; the need to pay attention to such cases where, from the researcher's perspective at least, the form and the content of a cultural phenomenon appear to be juxtaposed ironically or contradictorily, but where an insider might detect no incongruity; and also the trepidation of assigning intentions to the 'other'.

43 The Personal Narratives Group (1989) rejected the terms genres and models for describing life histories, personal experience narratives and anecdotes in favour of narrative forms, as a term allowing more flexibly for the complexity and varying shapes of the material they studied. They noted that genre implies adherence to the rules of fixed, discrete categories, and model, structures to be imitated; narrative forms seemed more amenable for the cross-disciplinary interpretation of personal experience stories (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 99). C.f. the coining of 'spinstorying' by Langellier and Peterson (1992) and the discussions in Farrer 1986.

44 In particular, Yocom researched the crafts involved in creating teddy bears for tourists that contrast so much with the chainsaw carvings of the Maine bear made by the men in a fraction of the time but for higher prices, and the dressing of dolls by the women for an annual parade by the girls of the town with their dolls and toy baby carriers. Dolls and soft toys spoke of a reversion to childhood, maternal ideology, housewifery, roles that Yocom had herself rejected, they spoke of who she could have become and even brought to the fore in her fieldwork her memories of a miscarriage. See the discussion of trivialization strategies as coded communication in the creation of the toys studied by Yocom (1990; 1993a).
46 Many of these examples deal with informal beliefs and practices connected with reproduction, pregnancy and birth, healing, menstruation and menopause, or other 'natural' points in the life cycle.
47 Some valuable studies may not actually express any overt feminist aims or agenda but nevertheless draw important attention to the enshrinement of patriarchal ideology in folklore and to the ways women resist these. (The Grimms, as an obvious, immediate example, have inevitably been easy targets of criticism while so often 'in the dock' for many other aspects of their editing.)
48 Crucially, researchers must try to understand why women themselves share in and keep extant negative images and role-depictions of females; how these images can be interpreted emically in ways alternative to those of the outsider analyzer; and how women positively manipulate, create strategic versions and can have 'secret' understandings of these that are obscured by the conventional surface ones accessible from etic perspectives.
49 Professional storytellers and writers (e.g. see Carter 1993; Weever 1980, on Toni Morrison; Hussain 1993; Mills 1995) have reshaped traditional narratives in complex ways and not just to offer positive female role models where before there were negative ones. Storytelling has been used therapeutically and in education for some time; modern lyrics set to traditional tunes can become anthems for women's campaign movements; crafts can provide symbols or instruments of demonstration in social struggles or protest (e.g. see Pershing 1993b). Although women can manipulate tradition and convention in all sorts of contexts, and appropriate the materials of male-dominated culture to their own ends, formal research into women's culture in the past adds to the available body of material, of knowledge, and uncovers suppressed subtexts and performances, allowing a new entry point into a tradition or sphere of culture from which women may have come to feel alienated or excluded.
CHAPTER 2
GENDER AS PERFORMATIVE AND CODING STRATEGIES

Introduction
The previous chapter dealt with some of the ways in which central disciplinary ideas like tradition, culture and identity are conceptualized as processual and performance in ethnology and folkloristics. This chapter reviews orientations and discussions that deal with gender and with women’s negotiation of identity in everyday and in unusual creative and expressive forms. Gender, being feminine or masculine, has been described by many analysts as performance, but Judith Butler, whose writings I draw on, goes beyond dramaturgical analogies, to explore the constitution of gender by signifying actions that function like performative utterances in speech act theory. This is not dissimilar to ways in which culture and tradition are understood by some folklore scholars as performatively realized through the repetition of signifying customary actions in appropriate contexts. The other main topic of this chapter is the operation of coded layers of meaning in cultural performances which allows one to communicate and create multi-faceted and ambiguous identities. It provides an expressive vehicle for complex, often covert and deniable protest against the values and expectations of sexist society. These two approaches, the former developed at a high level of abstract theorization, the other developed from analysis of documented performances, material objects and texts by folklore and literary scholars, can be productively combined in an enquiry into the ways in which Lewis women have and perform, negotiate and express, their identity/identities as gendered individuals.

The cultural construction of gender
A number of associative oppositional binarisms, that arose from cross-cultural ethnographic comparison, appear repeatedly as themes in anthropologically oriented work (e.g. Ardener 1978a, 1978b; Ortner 1974; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974), including folkloristics, which incorporates the idea of gender as constructed. These relate the female and the male, or, at another level, women and men, with the components of a range of particular binarisms. For example, the public sphere, rationality, the high arts, official formal religion, and the sacred can be characterized
by masculine associations, while private life, the irrational and instinctual, domestic or folk culture, informal religious expression, and the profane realm are connected with ideas of the feminine (e.g. see Ardener 1993b; Hirschon 1993; Sciama 1993). More detailed ethnographic and historical perspectives, and theoretical formulations enhanced by these, an insistence on intensively contextualized studies, greater attention to emic classificatory categorizations of cultural phenomena, and a general rejection (or, at least, a sustained critique of) structuralist approaches that offer metanarratives or carry the risk of universalizing tendencies, have led to more critical handling of such homologous concepts, as resources and as heuristic devices.

Work within which such associative binarisms appear is often based on a permutation of the basic constructivist model of gender and its relations to sex. Within various mobilizations of constructivism the distinction between sex and gender is sometimes treated as operationally analogous to pairs such as those mentioned. This has contributed to facets, and implications, of the sex/gender binary being reassessed as problematic in such usages. If sex is the nature to gender’s culture, and male is to culture as female is to nature, then sex, in some explanations, cannot help but carry associations with the female and then with women, and gender is identified with men and the male, as if some refinement of the raw of sex.¹ The concept of ‘nature’ as an elemental and primary realm, the passive and blank page upon which culture or the social inscribes itself, is, however, a constructed one with historical and political meanings.² One result of interrogating the sex/gender and nature/culture distinctions is the assertion that ‘sex’, as the initial, biological state existing prior to processes of engenderment, has, in fact, always itself had a gendered valency. In some accounts it is as impossible to conceptualize sex without invoking the cultural and the social, as it is for gender itself and sex sometimes emerges as fundamentally the same as gender;³ what was described as ‘raw’ is found to be ‘cooked’ after all.⁴ This should encourage critical awareness of the implications of theory-making that are not always initially obvious and possibly hidden levels of meaning; that final resolutions are never attainable; and that any theoretical apparatus raises as many questions as it answers.
Constructivism generally examines the processes by which the biologically sexed individual develops, through individuation, socialization, enculturation, as a subjectivity or a selfhood which is gendered, as a ‘her’ or a ‘him’, endowed with the identity of ‘woman’ or ‘man’. More complexly formulated versions of constructivism, critical of certain assumptions about how gender ‘happens’ or is ‘done’, which hide or deny additional values and dormant meanings in less sophisticated construction models, have gained from and added to empirical and theoretical explorations (generally grounded in poststructuralism) of the development of subjectivity, individuality, and self-awareness. Such approaches regard the subject as ‘dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these - the condition of being a subject’ (Henriques et al 1984: 3), and investigate the relations between the individual and society or culture, particularly through examining the concept of intersubjectivity (17). Rejection of the idea of gender as an identity inscribed or constructed upon a sex, as determined appropriate by biological ‘fact’, has led into explorations of where gender comes from. They raise questions concerning how gender construction as a conceptualized process relates to the material reality of life; how it accommodates historical and cultural variation in the constitution of recognized genders; and how it relates to the ontogeny and an ontology of the subject before and after its emergence as a gendered self.

As it should deny the irrevocability and inevitability of one of two gender outcomes, according to primary physical characteristics, the basic idea of construction makes apparent the potential that exists for individual and group negotiation and redefinition of those processes implicated in the emergence of gendered identities. By centrally implicating culture as the context of this process, constructivism has to find ways to allow for the possibility of agency, for renegotiation, for alternative versions and resistance. At the personal and political levels this has been and still is important for feminism, for groups marginalized by the binarist oppression of the heterosexual hegemony, and for others whose status it is claimed is a result of social processes following on from the so-called natural. Culturally situated studies, informed by concerns for emic perspectives and richly contextualized ethnography, provide empirical data reflecting the cultural variability in the constitution of
'women' and 'men'. Analysis of such material can aid in the general deconstructive investigation of these identity categories and warns us of totalizing claims that ignore cultural specificity and can lead into ethnocentrist assumptions.

There are particular dangers in over-straightforward accounts of construction, especially when these are presented as a 'model'. In the case of gender identity, the process can easily be reduced to one where culture or society (or power, language, discourse, or even 'tradition' in a folklorically focused study) can become a deterministic element, a replacement for biology, imposing gender on anatomically differentiated bodies, according to 'an inexorable cultural law' (Butler 1990: 8). If there is a failure to understand the processual and ongoing dynamic of construction, and the multiple, non-unitary and unstable character of the subject or if 'culture' is conceptualized as a transcendent, monolithic structuring force, which explains and determines the behaviour of groups and individuals, there is a danger of culture (or whatever metadiscursive network is invoked) being depicted as unilaterally 'doing' gendering to the individual; 'construction is reduced to determinism and implies the evacuation or displacement of human agency' (Butler 1993: 9). Processes of construction that involve larger forces, thus, tend to require the idea of a prior instigator and initiator. They fulfil this need, whether 'aware' of this or not, by personifying culture/society/discourse as an agential subject, acting upon an object that is to be gendered.

Performance-based folkloristics and ethnology offer ways of conceptualizing culture not as an impersonal force, but in ways that emphasize process and emergence. They show that culture or tradition only exists in the doing. The dangers of being trapped in a misdepiction of culture as imposing gender through various constructivist laws can be obviated, in the first, if a more dramatistic, discursive notion of culture is understood. A performance orientation that incorporates the idea of the individual, or of subjectivity, as multiple, and emergent through a nexus of overlapping and interacting discourses, refuses finite definitions of culture, tradition or the identities that it describes. Performance perspectives on identity take it not as a set of attributes or a status to be possessed, but as something arising from negotiation of various discourses, of acting styles, scripts, roles, of intersubjective relations. Although
coherent identities become formed and experienced through culture as performance and performed, this realm only exists, of course, by definition, with and within, and through the repetition and recall of, such performances by individuals, with identities which are only coming into existence through and in the performing of their 'bearers'.

Numerous attempts to describe and explain both cultural ideals of femininity and the category of 'woman' have found it useful to employ dramaturgical tropes and analogy, without even elaborating a theory of identity as performance. At the extremes, the stereotyping of women according to pressures to conform to a heterosexual aesthetic of physical attractiveness, to manage their bodies with the accentuation and the minimizing of certain features, the cosmeticizing of the proper female as the 'real woman', and exaggerated ideas of appropriate conduct, provide obvious examples for comparison with theatre. The greater display and variable manipulation of feminine as compared with masculine appearance, found cross-culturally and diachronically, illustrate this. At the same time, artifice, falsehood, vanity, and artificiality have been denigrative accusations levelled at women. Paradoxically, such criticisms may be targeted at the very efforts needed to maintain satisfactorily the appearance and fulfilment of prescribed roles, the very assumption of given masks, that are used to define one as 'feminine'. Beauvoir (1988 [1949]; Butler 1987) used theatrical metaphors to describe, for example, women's different behaviours and conduct in public and private spheres; both Riviere (1986 [1929]; Heath 1986) and Lacan drew extended analogy between the masquerade and femininity in their very different psychoanalytical accounts; Goffman employed occasional examples of the theatricality required in fulfilling certain ideals of womanliness as illustrations of his general arguments; and authors continue to develop ideas of femininity as performance (e.g. Walkerdine 1993).

**Gender as performative process**

The notion of gender as constituted through performances acted in intersecting, overlapping theatres of discourse has been originally and provocatively developed by the poststructuralist theorist of gender and sexuality, Judith Butler. Her complex
elaboration of a theory of gender as a performative construction (1990) informs certain levels of this research. Butler engages philosophy, gender studies and women's studies, politics, psychoanalysis, cultural studies and literary theory, in subtle intertextual analyses which have stimulated debate and influenced work in various disciplinary contexts. Her work has tremendous value and implications for empirically based research and analysis, in progressive political thought and activism, and in cultural representation. Her recent investigation (1997) of the power of speech as action, in terms of censorship, free expression and hate speech, has obvious legal and political relevance, and relates to ontological issues in terms of understanding selfhood. Butler's subversive deconstructions of the fictions which support gender as 'natural' and regulate sexualities (1990, 1993) are important to feminist, and lesbian and gay activism and have been taken up in diverse ways in research, for example, by historians, anthropologists, in cultural, literary and women's studies, and have attracted the attention of some folklorists (see Duggan 1998; Fortier 1996; Mills 1993; Noyes 1995; Visweswaran 1994). That Butler's theorization of gender identities as performance and performative, and of the generative authority of linguistic and other signifying acts, should be of value and importance to ethnologists and folklorists is made patent in the discussion below. Her anti-humanist conceptions of subjectivity and agency, and the implications and consequences of these for understanding gender and for feminism, particularly engage and interest many theorists (e.g. see Benhabib 1995a, 1995b; Lovibond 1996: 103).

Butler's theorization opens up challenging new avenues for researchers examining the construction of different kinds of identities. Her work is relevant to some of the exploration undertaken in this research into how the individual engages in and experiences the process of being a gendered self, examined in a specific cultural context, into aspects of how one negotiates being female in the discursive networks of Hebridean culture. The data I interpret offer evidential instances of gender being performance and an identity which only emerges and is maintained because of such performances that depend on gender signifiers, which are comprehensible as such, through reference to past enactments.
Before I outline Butler’s performative theory of gender, it is essential to consider her attitude to ‘identity’ as a concept on an ontological level and as a particular political issue within and for feminism (rather than the individual experience of knowing and being a self which is what identity generally means in this work), specifically with reference to the problem of the basic ‘incommensurability of the “feminine” or “woman” with any living being’ (1994: 19; c.f. 1993: 208-222), and as inherently tied with and to concepts of subjectivity and agency. In Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), in which she elaborates her thesis of gender construction at length, she explicitly rejects any foundationalist identity categories, including versions of sex, gender and ‘women’, that claim a stable set of attributes or any essential associations. Butler asks about the extent to which ‘identity’ is normative, produced by regulatory, governing practices, rather than descriptive of experience (16-17). One of the primary purposes of Gender Trouble is to examine the operation of these regulatory practices that divide and distinguish, allow for intelligibility, and create the appearance of coherence and logicality. Any analysis or use of identity carries the risk of accepting definitions that are reductive, essentializing, normative and regulatory in their effects if it cannot be amenable to resignification; if it cannot take account of the indeterminacy of sex and gender, and the possibilities of renegotiating and subverting these, especially in positions other feminisms fail to avoid marginalizing or excluding; and if it cannot accept the potential invidiousness of certain identity categories when deployed politically, and that all identities are the outcomes of inter- and intra-discursive emergence and at root fictive. Recourse to identity categorizations can be counterproductive, or even dangerous, for the users and for those referred to, if undertaken without awareness also of the exclusion which is always involved; of who might be excluded; and of the forces which permit or impel identity formulation and are, thus, operant in identity politics.

The implicit paradox of feminism is that while the category of ‘woman’ has to be deconstructed to be better understood as a position, and to reveal those factors which effect subordination and those that may be remobilized to ameliorate and alleviate women’s place in masculinist culture or society, feminism, politically and
practically, requires the maintenance of some common identity category around
which women can rally so that ‘the project’ can have any meaning at all. There has to
be some way of accepting a reconciliation, between the theoretical and the practical,
between the idea of identity, as a status and a process constituted in discourse, and
some normative (but not normativizing) claim that can conceptualize a focus for
feminism, or any other identity movement.20 This highlights the problems of the
relationship between abstract theorization and practice in the material world. Most
theorists engaged in deconstructing notions of an essential, substantive ‘women’ or
‘femininity’ or ‘the female’, nevertheless, ultimately defer to the need to retain some
common concept of ‘women’.21 For Butler, “women” within political discourse can
never fully describe that which it names... because the term marks a dense
intersection of social relations that cannot be summarized through the terms of
identity’ (1993: 218). This is not, however, the end of the subject of feminism:

To understand “women” as a permanent site of contest, or as a
feminist site of antagonistic struggle, is to presume that there can be
no closure on the category and that, for politically significant reasons,
there ought never to be. That the category can never be descriptive is
the very condition of its political efficacy. In this sense, what is
lamented as disunity and factionalization from the perspective
informed by the descriptivist ideal is affirmed by the anti-descriptivist
perspective as the open and democratizing potential of the category.
(1993: 221, emphasis in original; c.f., e.g., 1990: 32)

Even Butler, a determined rejecter of foundationalist assumptions, of any notion of
an abiding universalism in identity, recognizes the political requirement for
hypothetically unifying categories.22 The performative theory which she sets out in
Gender Trouble (1990), offers a highly productive operational and theoretical
approach to analyzing gender at the level of small-scale, localized, specific
situations. This makes it suitable for applying to the sorts of events and processes,
the performances, which are often the focus of folklorists and ethnologists.

Underlying various historically and ethnographically informed social theories of
gender is an understanding of gender as a status that is never to be fully achieved or
possessed and as the result of a set of relations in a specific context (e.g. see Butler
1990: 10). Gender is not substantive but ‘designates a dense site of significations that
contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix’ (Butler 1993: 238).23 Gender is an effect
of intersecting discourses, a process compelled and constrained by regulatory practices that govern the conditions for the coherence, intelligibility and validity of the conventional binary, and which sustain normative ideals of this model. It is the repetition over time of stylized acts and behaviours, in conformity to regulatory frameworks, which endows gender with the appearance of substance and a natural basis (1990: 33). Repetition and reiteration are central to gender performativity and bring the analysis directly to the mundane and conventional.

[G]ender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices, which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction. (138)

Butler’s notion of the emergence of gender examines and exposes the historicity of the discourses and the social and collective engagement involved. Her enquiry into the constitution of gender as performative considers not only the mechanisms and manner of such construction, but also whether these imply universal gender-productive laws according to physiological sex differences; whether these involve a determinism that denies the possibilities of change and of agency; and whether it is possible to describe a ‘where’, a ‘how’ and a ‘when’ for gender (7-8). Any performance, or the concept of gender itself, is a contingent collective social and temporal construction process relying on the experience, repetition and interpretation of recognized meanings in mundane and ritualized behaviours, stylizations and interactions (140). Conditions vary and, so too, do gender performances, the discourses that can be performatively engaged, the meanings that can be produced; ‘gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time’ (140), a dramatic and performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; “the internal” is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody. (141)

Butler’s subsequent writings, elaborating upon the theory expounded in Gender Trouble, reiterate the notion that a gendered identity is not merely constructed through performances of roles and scripts, the assumption of masks. This is not least of all because ideas of masking and masquerade presuppose an intentional subject
behind the act, a notion incompatible with Butler's poststructuralism. Such a misconstrual of the basic premises of her theorization by some interpreters results from a particular reading of her frames of reference, her vocabulary and its sometimes ambiguity, which can lead to interpretations that rely on Goffmanesque theatrical ideas of the presentation of the self and the formation of social identities, with analogies to the stage, masks, props, scripts and roles. This misunderstanding underpins many critiques of Butler's conceptualizations of 'agency' and 'subjectivity'. Much of Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex' (1993) is concerned with explicating further, extending ideas in, and responding to various receptions of, Gender Trouble. Her meaning of 'performativity' is further clarified there, in her second essay in Feminist Contentions (1995b), and in Excitable Speech (1997), as being derived from speech act theory on illocutionary and perlocutionary performative utterances, as developed by J.L. Austin (1975 [1962]). The denotation of the term 'performativity' is adapted from linguistic usage to include non-linguistic expression in the realm of actions, gestures, presentations of the body, and so on (see Bauman and Briggs 1990: 62ff.). It also requires consideration of the part played by Butler's theorization of the unconscious in her theory of gender. For this she makes particular recourse to Lacanian and Freudian work. Butler understatedly warns that the 'reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake' (1993: 234; 95), and she points out in the earlier work that 'The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial' (1990: 141). I nevertheless do, to some extent, agree with Benhabib (e.g. 1995b: 120, n.4), that the distinction is often made insufficiently explicit in Butler's language, and that the two concepts can obscure and confuse one another in her usage. This is especially the case because her examples of gender performativity, in particular drag, are described dramatically and she employs metaphors from theatre, even when referring to gender performance in mundane routine contexts and normative gender enactments.

As a performative in linguistic usage is an authoritative utterance that, in the appropriate institutional and conventional context, produces the effects or situation that it signifies or articulates, so the discursively-situated acts that constitute gender are performativé. The power of performativity inheres in the reiteration of a norm
or convention; its efficacy in the present relies on its recognition as a citation, as something endorsed by past usages, enforcements, and on its ability to conceal and dissimulate such reliance, such sourcing of its power. Performatives succeed because they repeat coded or iterable utterances in ways that are not overt or usually commented upon (1993: 226). Performativity exemplifies the power of discourse to produce, to engender, that which it names. Performatives function with the 'accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force'; discourse has a history which conditions contemporary usages, and this history decentres the subject as an exclusive point of origin or owner of what is said (227). The performance of gender lies in the fulfilment of roles and aspirations towards ideals through the enactment of signifying and citational behaviours, which reiterate and, therefore, sustain norms and rules, the acts, gestures, the stylizations of the body, the presentations of the self, the assumption of positions, the expression of desires, that can be understood within a theatrical frame of literal and metaphorical reference.

Butler analyzes at length the subversive signifying carried out in transgressions of gender norms. Transvestism, which often hyperbolizes idealized feminine or masculine identities, attributes and meanings, can itself invoke and exploit explicit dramaturgical references. This is also true, however, of everyday actions which conform to binary gender norms: the mundane but nevertheless ritualized gestures, interactions, habits and communication that combine in the 'presentation of self'. This is not only an acting expressive of an identity constructed in the particular context of the event. Performances of gendered identities implicitly pretend to the existence of some prior essence or core that they express or by which they are precipitated, but this is an illusory effect; systems of signification 'fabricate' and sustain the idea of a 'real' gender (1990: 136). Gender can only become apparent in the ongoing results of performative construction, its existence is only discernible as the emergent outcome of the ritualized reiteration of norms and of gender-indexical and -signifying behaviours. Gender is a product of discourse but masquerades as the cause.

The repetition, ubiquity and status of gender normatives create the impression of naturalness and inevitability for heterosexual norms. The performance of masculinity
or femininity, of sex, of womanliness or manhood, occurs under compulsion, limitation, taboo, threats and opposition (1993: 95, 231-42) - and, of course for, promises and offers - within heterosexuality especially. Gender performance, can be seen as an actual survival strategy within a system that compulsorily decides what identities are legitimate and expressible (1990: 139).

Butler’s Foucauldian genealogical enquiry in Gender Trouble into the constitution of gender takes, as empirical subjects for analysis, explicit instances of the theatricality possible with, and abiding in, gender ideas when they are embodied and enacted. She acknowledges that this requires linking discursive ‘performance’ and ‘performativeness’ with her use of ‘performance’ in its more general dramaturgical sense (1993: 236).33 Drag contradicts the supposed connection between the materiality of bodies with a sex and cultural, coherent unitary identities that are backgrounded by a consistent field of meanings; drag destabilizes the presumed distinctions and relations between what is ‘natural’, interior, essential, and that which is ‘cultural’/‘social’, exterior and artificial. Its discongruity exposes the universality of the opposed binary of ‘women’ and ‘men’ as a fiction. The sometimes consciously, overtly dramatic aims of drag can include a strong element of parody. Normative gender is, at one level, an impersonation of an ideal that can only have meaning and exposure when individuals ‘do’ the impersonating; it is an imitation and drag parodies the idea of any notion of an original to be copied or as the source of ‘proper’ genders, revealing that non-transgressive gender identity ‘is a production which... postures as an imitation’ (1990: 138; c.f. 137, 146-7). ‘In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency’ (137, emphasis in Butler). To expose the compulsory binarism of heterosexual hegemony as performative is to challenge its claim to be natural, inevitable and original, and to reveal its anxiety that its idealizations can never be achieved (1993: 125). This anxiety necessitates, and abides in, the ubiquitous, perpetual repetition of performances, and motivates the oppressive pathologizing, eradication attempts, and, at least, the disputing and marginalization, of contradictory or transgressive identities and their expressions.34 It is in, of course, its suggestions of alternatives, and negotiation, and survival after the denial of norms, that much of drag’s potential political subversiveness lies (although this claim requires, of course,
qualification). Such a challenge as this raises questions about the basic ideas of most constructivist models.35

The subject and agency in gender performance36

It is important to maintain awareness of Butler’s scrupulous poststructuralist opposition to the notion of an essential human core with a rational, discrete nature, the humanist notion of the subject, of selfhood and, hence, of agency, of that which is ultimately responsible for all that is social and cultural.37 Models of construction, which, for instance, could be described as ‘liberal humanist’ and presume that there is an ontologically pre-existing and voluntarist subject, which instrumentally is responsible for, or in effect must consent to, its own gendering by the operation of gendering mechanisms, represent an untenable foundationalism for Butler (1993: 7). Such ‘foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject’ guarantee ‘a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract’ (3). She considers the humanistic notion of the subject to be antithetical to feminism and comparable projects against oppressive discourses and hegemonic systems, and as fundamentally and ultimately a possible block to the emancipatory aims of feminism by, often inadvertently, disallowing any hopes for potential renegotiation or resignification. Equally, Butler warns, however, of constructivist accounts that mock any allowance of agency by over-privileging the force of cultural determinism (7).38

Generally described, poststructuralist deconstruction of the unitary subject, which is basic to Butler’s work, regards the subject as not only situated within, but as the result of, discourse, an emergent product (e.g. Butler 1995a, 1995b). The subject and, therefore, any notion of an agent, are conceptualized as positions within discourse or a nexus of discourses;39 there is no ‘I’ who is behind discourse or exercises its will or intention through discourse. To understand the subject as a position, as situated, can imply that there is something outside of the positioning, the locating process, something that can exist and be intelligible without or outside of discourse. This cannot be, however, if the subject is constituted by discourse. There is no ‘doer’ of gender performance; the gendered subject only becomes apprehensible,
comprehensible, with its gendering.\textsuperscript{40} Repetitious performance, the imitative reiteration 'is not performed \textit{by} a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition of the subject' (95, emphasis in Butler).\textsuperscript{41}

The issue of agency is obviously critical and central to feminism and to understanding gender and the mechanisms of oppressive and normative gendering processes. If in a theory of gender there is no place for the will or intention of the individual, if the implication is that identities are discursively determined by cultural or social forces, then there can be little possibility for change, for liberation from inequitable structures. Much of Benhabib's disagreement with Butler lies in the former's conclusion that the 'theory of performativity. . . still presupposes a remarkably deterministic view of individuation and socialization processes' (1995b:110).\textsuperscript{42} Such radically poststructuralist views of the subject as Butler's appear to Benhabib to make change inconceivable and to be unhelpful, even incompatible, with feminism; a view denying the gendered subject a capacity for self-reflexivity and will, as Benhabib understands these, denies then the potential for change and undermines feminism's claims (1995a; Fraser 1995a, 1995b). According to Fraser's summary (1995a: 66), Benhabib's opinion is that even if poststructuralism could offer a theory of individual agency, its anti-essentialism and uncompromising nominalism (evidenced so well in Butler's objection to identity categories) would leave the category 'women' invalid and empty. Benhabib rejects the idea that the subject in poststructuralism, construed as a position in language, can actually change scripts. Butler repudiates this with her claim that to be constituted by discourse does not mean that one is fully determined by it with no allowance for agency (1990: 142-3; 1995a: 46), and that

\begin{quote}
the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked, resisted? (1995a: 46)
\end{quote}

Butler makes it clear that her notion of gender or sex performativity does not deny all idea of any agency, but that "the agency denoted by the performativity of "sex" [or of gender] will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes' (1993: 15). She calls for
a rethinking of “agency” as resignification’ (1995b: 137): the subject of Butler’s theorization possesses or exercises agency in the evidence of discursive change. Although her theorization is highly abstract, Butler does, through particular interpretations of transgressions and subversions of, and exceptions to, identity, offer empirical grounds for her claims about agency and the potential for resignification which her theory implies. There is an agency lisible and evident within the realized potential for renegotiating the repetitions of gender performance (the agency evidenced by the transgressive element of drag, or in our frequent confounding of, and failures to meet, gender expectations in everyday life), and in the multiplicity of gender identities in nexus at that temporal locality at which a gendered subject becomes discernible. Agency is found where discourse, as something historical, is renewed, where resignification occurs; it depends on subjects never being constituted finally or unitarily (despite their illusory appearances); it does not belong to, or inhere in, any doer ‘beyond’ or ‘behind’ the deed:

For the deed will be itself and the legacy of conventions which it reengages, but also the future possibilities that it opens up; the ‘doer’ will be the uncertain working of the discursive possibilities by which it itself is worked. (1995b: 135)

Benhabib credits Butler’s views as ‘among the most original and provocative writings by feminists on the crisis and question of subjectivity’ (1995b: 108). That her dispute (1995a and 1995b) with Butler’s performative theory centrally concerns agency and the subject, ‘should come as no surprise, insofar as questions of subjectivity and the challenge to our traditional understandings of selfhood and agency are crucial to the current juncture of philosophy and feminist theory’ (ibid.; c.f. Lovibond). In the discussions staged in Feminist Contentions, Butler responds to what she sees as frequent ‘misreadings’ of her work - for example, she counters Benhabib’s attribution to her of ‘a theory of the self’, claiming that what she offers is a theory of gender and that the self cannot be reduced to gender (1995b:133) - and extends and elaborates upon her understandings of agency and subjectivity, how she conceptualizes agency when there is no subject initiating or actually doing its gendering in the cultural field.
For Butler, Benhabib’s interpretation of her work exemplifies presumptions that her understanding of the subject amounts to an extreme version of the postmodernist thesis of ‘the death of man/the subject’. In contrast, Lovibond describes Butler’s idea as a ‘recuperation’ of the terms ‘agency’ and ‘intention’, achieved by the way in which Butler
dissociates them from their liberal-humanist connotations of absolute externality to the processes of discursive constitution of the subject. Yet in so far as agency (of a kind relevant to the democratic or emancipatory project) remains conceivable, the subject must retain at any rate a relative externality to the social or discursive relations that constitute it. (1996: 112, emphasis in Lovibond)

A crucial element for grasping this, is to reach a conceptualization of agency which ‘demands that we understand it in a different way, namely as immanent - not transcendent - with respect to nature’, and that, as Butler ‘replaces the matrix of natural determination with that of discursive constitution’, she politicizes the issue (1996: 113, emphasis in Lovibond). She is thus able to assert her claim that the agency implied in her theorization of gender, based in her poststructuralist conception of the subject, and informed by psychoanalysis, actually offers a new, enhanced idea of human agency that can enable and promote feminist commitments and aims (Duggan 1997; Visweswaran 1994: 82).

Coding in women’s culture
Having discussed above some of the most salient aspects of Butler’s theorization, from a perspective concerned with the cultural and social (rather than the psychoanalytical or philosophical) levels of her work, I turn here to the analysis of coding strategies. This major approach in performance folkloristics has been used to interpret women’s expressions and performances in cultural modes. The detection and interpretation of ‘what might be called cryptic or encrypted performances, of things expressible in deniable forms’ (Mills 1993: 179), has produced the most operationally and analytically powerful stream in recent feminist folkloristics. This is well reflected in the number of studies where such interpretation is applied; in the perceptible influence of the idea upon work which may not overtly or primarily be presented as about coding, or which may not use the terminology of the approach;
and in debates conducted around this issue from around the time that Joan Radner and Susan Lanser first published a ground-breaking essay on coding in 1987 (see Jackson 1987). A revised version of this article appeared in Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture (Radner 1993; see Mills 1997), a volume of studies which exemplify the approach (see Bourke; Keyes; Mulcahy; Pershing; Radner and Lanser; Stewart; and Yocom - all 1993; c.f. Hollis, Pershing and Young 1993; Kimpton 1993). Feminist Messages has become a core resource in the teaching of gender and folklore. 'What has been accomplished in this book invites continued effort toward an integrated theory of deniability in cultural production, a “theory mayonnaise” to meld more thoroughly the oil and water of psychological and rhetorical (i.e. political) theories of expressive culture' (Mills 1997: 348). Coding-focused analysis offers productive methods for unearthing and exploring various levels of meaning which are indirectly implied, suggested or ambiguous, but which may not be easily apprehensible through other approaches. Representations of gender, and expressions of group and individual identity, which are not singular, overt, easily defined, or meaningful in the same way to different interpreters, are examples of such variously framed orders of meaning.

The gender performativity thesis enables hermeneutic interrogation of performances, behaviour and conduct that can empirically confirm Butler’s propositions. I hope to demonstrate that such investigation can be productively intermeshed with this approach from feminist folkloristics, where my research is concerned with evidence of performed gender and with the mundane repetitions that contribute to the maintenance of a consistent identity. Attention to the deployment or presence of coding levels offers a valuable and powerful structure for interpreting culturally grounded performances, everyday interactions and other behaviours, where a perspective formed with mainstream categorizations and analyses runs the risk of carrying masculinist assumptions and it is an approach that has already been valuably employed for other muted and suppressed culture groups.47 Radner and Lanser note that many studies use alternative terminologies to describe tactics and levels of meaning they call ‘coding’:

[O]thers both inside and outside of feminism have given name to some practices that we would call coding: Barbara Babcock’s
‘inversion,’ Maya Angelou’s ‘Principle of Reverse,’ Luce Irigarary’s ‘mimicry,’ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s ‘palimpsest,’ Marie Maclean’s ‘oppositional practices,’ the concept of signifying in African-American culture, and so forth. (Radner and Lanser 1993: 10)

‘Coding’ refers to the ways in which multiple coherent meanings are enfolded in a performance or text which are not equally intended to be accessible to all receivers of the communication or audience members. This means that men unversed in sign systems and creative frameworks within women’s culture are either unequipped to pick up, or unable to reach, certain subtexts and covert meanings that the performer - or simply the individual in everyday situations - has encoded. As they are hidden behind more generally perceivable messages and interpretable signs, the sender can deny their presence, an important factor in why and how codes are used. Research into coding offers ‘a strong critique of non-contestive models of performance as a general phenomenon, which have neglected issues of power, resistance, context, and effacement, including self-effacement’ (Mills 1993: 179). ‘Code’ not only denotes a linguistic rule system (as in ‘code-switching’), but ‘a set of signals - words, forms, behaviours, signifiers of some kind - that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages’ (Radner and Lanser 1993: 3). In performance terms, the code-user can assume that different audience-members and fellow actors possess different kinds of competence in, and knowledge of, framing levels or types, and of specific cultural discourses, in which performance may occur; she assumes responsibility to create and act within relevant frameworks, through different male- and female-formed cultural discourses. This does not entail or imply the attribution of intention, deliberation or awareness to the performer of encoded communication, and folklorists have been especially interested in such cases.

Clearly, any interpreter, whether witnessing or participating in the creative, communicative event, or considering a record of it removed from the initial context, must be acutely aware of attributing contestive or affirmative intentions and motives to the performer which she may not possess, or of which she is, or would rather remain, unaware, or that she perhaps cannot admit to. Radner and Lanser believe it is theoretically feasible to argue that intentionality is built into communicative contexts; with careful and respectful scholarship
grounded in the *specific cultural context* of the performance, it seems feasible to posit at least the possibility that an act of coding has occurred. (1993: 9, emphasis in original)

This is an approach I adopt in the analysis of certain performance modes I discuss in this thesis. Coding can arise *explicitly* (in coded written literature and communication especially), or may be the result of a group *complicity* developing a code system in advance (as with passwords, metaphorical systems, special names, that receivers may not even be aware are present until made cognisant that coding is happening) (5). Many feminist folklorists deal with forms of *implicit* coding when it is not easy or possible to ascertain whether deliberate encoding has occurred, ‘acts whose very codedness is arguable’(6). These often occur in contexts of dominance, oppression or risk for the performer, where she may be expressing a viewpoint or oppositional stance that cannot be made overtly, or that cannot even be suggested through more superficial frames of meaning as this could result in real difficulties for her and perhaps others, or serious taboo-violation (9).

Radner and Lanser offer a classification of the most commonly used coding tactics and methods to facilitate easier recognition of covert feminist and otherwise drowned-out or unheard messages, adding that they propose these examples ‘as contestable sites of meaning, recognizing with Chris Weedon that while all meanings may be provisional, even provisional meanings have “real effects”’(10). The coding strategies they describe are: *appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization, and incompetence* (10-23).

*Appropriation* (10-13) This occurs when women adapt forms or materials usually identified as belonging to male culture or androcentric images of the feminine, for example, when a woman transgresses role-assignation by working with creative forms which belong to a position that is traditionally masculine. Appropriative coding can range from the simple reshaping of male expressive forms and images, through undermining of these, to their parody, where the use of humour renders the message more ambiguous and offers the option to deny or to minimize the appearance of intent. It might also be undertaken because of the higher status of a form due to its association with masculine culture.
**Juxtaposition** (13-14) This entails the ironic arrangement of performances, texts or objects in ways that can be powerfully meaningful, taking instances of particular genres or themes that have relatively straightforward functions and significations in their more usual contexts, and then placing them against others in a new environment where they develop alternative levels of meaning. Repetition of folklore items through transmission and material objects represent better opportunities for juxtaposition than temporal performances and more transitory creations. 54

**Distraction** (15-16) Stylistic features in written literature and the attention-grabbing of compelling ideas in personal expression and claims, can effect distraction, but folklore performances superbly illustrate this strategy in very direct ways. Musical elements, the sheer racket of co-occurring activities, and stylistic markers in the expressive performance modes employed (e.g. paralinguistic features like rhythm and repetition), can all focus interest away from or obscure the coded messages that a capable receiver can carefully listen for. Drowning-out is an especially well documented mode of coding in women’s song performances, particularly occupation-related genres where various features of the text and context blur, hide, or provide distraction from, the possibly resistant or subversive meanings of the words. 55 Distraction is a significant source of polysemy in labour song and lament performances discussed in later chapters.

**Indirection** (16-19) Also described as distancing, this is probably the most frequently found mediation method for oral and written encoding, covering a wide range of strategies, prominent among them being metaphor, impersonation, and hedging. Obviously metaphor is widely used to transmit meaning which is otherwise tabooed or difficult to express openly and unmodified, and is an important feature of all genres of oral literature, whether used intentionally or not. Impersonation operates when someone claims a distance from the words expressed by uttering them while temporarily using an invented voice of another. This is a tactic employed, for example, when a woman retells a legend that ostensibly might be seen to reflect the values of the androcentric mainstream and male experiences, but which, according to other orders of meaning, accessible to able interpreters, offers female responses and
objections to the more overt messages that promote masculinist messages or serve male domination.\textsuperscript{56} It also must have been present in women’s performances of Gaelic songs created by others or composed in the voice of another person. Various tropes, litotes, ellipses and euphemism, an impersonal tone, passive constructions and qualifiers, are all methods of verbal hedging used to lessen the impact of, or to make more equivocal, messages sent at a coded level that are critical of women’s position and treatment, or tell of personal experiences or opinions, in written and oral literature.\textsuperscript{57}

Trivialization (19-20) This coding mode can be present when women employ genres, or ways of expression, or when they gather in contexts, which the dominant culture regards as irrelevant, insignificant, or innocuous. It can convey covert criticism of prevailing conditions, or facilitate hidden streams of dialogue between women. By reiterating the conventional logic and opinion about a mode of expression (e.g. by insisting conversation is ‘just gossip’ or ‘women’s talk’), or by working within traditions identified as domestic and, hence, trivial and harmless, women can direct away from their activities and creations the attention of those possibly unsympathetic to their messages.\textsuperscript{58} Instances of trivialization are being recognized more often in collected folklore and everyday interaction as more ‘feminine’ genres and domestic contexts are being recorded and studied. It is a tactic used constantly in individual and group female self-effacement in mundane relations.

Incompetence (20-23) This encoding strategy (which is not specifically referred to elsewhere in this work) is exemplified in the conventional declaration of incompetence that women writers, particularly in the eighteenth century with the rise of the novel, included in prefaces to their publications, even when working under male pseudonyms. Articulating what her readership would generally assume - that her work would be inferior and that women had less claim to authoring, she excused herself for her writerly presumptions, lowered the audience’s expectations, and primed them for surprise if her work did please (22). Claims to incompetence at ‘feminine’ activities take a range of different forms with various outcomes and potentially encoded intentions. One might be unable to refuse roles and tasks, but can more easily be excused after claiming inability. As with literary claims of
incompetence, assertions of, and excusing oneself for, a deficit of the requisite skills or knowledge can be made by females appropriating male performances, rights and roles.59

Radner and Lanser discuss the complex issues of how to differentiate between consciousness and intentionality in regard to the effects of retrospect, when even the performer may recognize covert intentionality on her part which she was not conscious of at the time of the act, or to how one may unconsciously aim to convey certain messages by using coding devices in the first place (6).60 Obviously, for any outsider-interpreter to ascribe intention, to claim that any encoding is present in a cultural performance, requires them to be knowledgeable of contextualization and recontextualization effects.61 All the essays in Feminist Messages convince that it is plausible to infer that implicit in the material crafts, the traditional performances, the personal narratives and the texts they analyze in context, are covert comments critical of particular elements of female subordination and oppression in that culture. Although most of the women studied would never identify their actions or intentions as such, they have been sending out ‘feminist messages’, which, when decoded, may be used as spurs to accomplish enhanced, or, at least, alternative kinds of, consciousness of how one is feminine and of what this means, with possibly positive consequences for change.

In cases where a researcher is analyzing the lives and creations of living women, with whom she may have close and personal associations, and to whom she has obligations, moral and social, the issue of exposing implicit messages is an enormously fraught one. Messages are transmitted in code for particular reasons, and revealing to women their roles in their own and each others’ continued subordination, which may well be the outcome, may not always be helpful psychologically, emotionally or socially. Open statement of hidden views, experiences, thoughts and feelings might even endanger or further alienate women who are already isolated and relatively disempowered, especially in particularly tense communities where male domination is strongly characteristic of social relations. Even in the absence of men, the metadiscursive constraints of general culture and the frequent economic and social-status related dependence of women on men
necessitate the use of coding and self-censorship, even if female-only company can allow freer, or at least different, expressions of identity and experience.

Most of the women discussed in these essays would not call themselves feminists, and their meetings are not the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s. They do not intend to decode all the potentially disturbing meanings in their own words and actions or to tease out and highlight the strands of oppression in their lives. On the contrary, although they may speak more freely among themselves than any would in the family or in the community, their friendships are for comfort, not revolution, for cooperation in an established pattern of life, not its deconstruction. So there may be necessary silences in such groups - silences that come not only from the members; choices not to speak (out of feelings of privacy, propriety, shame) but also from their subconscious and necessary choices not to know. Since open acknowledgement of inequity and domination can be disturbing and painful, this awareness may not be welcome. (Radner 1993: 77, introduction to part 2, 'Women Together')

The roles we accept in everyday life are acted through and produce representational modes, voices and coding resources, that we manipulate or must deal with, and which are the results of multiple discourses of identities we ‘work’ within in order to create a consistent and coherent sense of self and images of ourselves that we present to the outside. We do, of course, employ, deliberately or inadvertently, alternative and multi-layered, ambiguous or conflicting messages about who we are to select recipients and interpreters, assuming, with some degree of risk, that we have an idea of who will pick out what, and how they will understand these particular components of the complex identities that emerge through our performances and actions. When messages about one’s identity, coded or explicit, disagree with, contradict, invert or subvert the conventional cultural logic that invents images and roles of gender, the centrality of performance to the construction of one’s identity as gendered is exposed. Coding-focused approaches offer a way to examine how women represent and reflect on who they are within and through interactive and expressive behaviours in culture that are not decipherable according to the languages and value systems of sexist hegemony. Given that performance offers the performer a particular rhetorical power (e.g. Abrahams 1968 and widespread affirmation of this since then), presumably she has a certain, discursively constrained and event-circumscribed, capacity to effect or instigate social and personal transformation. Folkloric data provides plenty of evidence of the potential power to change which is traditionally
ascribed to a performer: the shaman, priest, lamenter, midwife, diviner, any ritual specialist, and others who take temporary performance roles and who are relatively positioned liminally, are figures who may be respected, feared, marginalized, or all of these, as possible agents of disruption and change in the community, or even in supernatural existence beyond the human.

**Conclusion**

Folklore performances embrace both marked, dramatic, structured enactments where there is some separation from ‘ordinary’ behaviour and linguistic discourse (like drag performances), and the quotidian, repeated, but nevertheless patterned and signifying behaviours (our daily being a woman with its successes and failures, our conformity or resistance, in even the most brief acts). At both extremes of formality, folklore constitutes a vernacular epistemology underlying the ideas and beliefs expressed in its performances, it is our ‘equipment for living’, as we perpetually emerge and re-emerge as gendered selves. Identity has been privileged as an issue for performance-based studies of communication and expression: whatever else we may be communicating (about), we are always communicating (about) ourselves; and it is just as important that the communication is reflexive as it is that it is interpersonal, intersubjective. Some messages about the performer’s gendered identity appear straightforward: they are easily intelligible as, and therefore contribute to the maintenance and promotion of, the ideals of gender categorization according to the specific cultural and social milieu. Others are less easily accessible or lisible, perhaps because they are mediated through encrypted forms of communication and meaning-making, and because an identity is a multiplicity of possibilities formed in intersubjective relations with others. The polysemy, the multivocality, of a single performance testifies to the operation of processes of emergence and negotiation.

Coded, muted, ambiguous, hidden, deniable messages, that criticize the relative social positions of men and women, rebelling against or contradicting conventional culture-making rules and roles, are messages about identity and signifying actions that constitute identity. Without being expressible, and expressed, identity is unknown, and, so, does not exist. Encoded layers of meaning, whether intentionally
developed or not, can contrast, contradict, refute or reject ideals of the dominant, masculinist cultural, ethical, epistemological and power-based discourses that define the normative, ‘normal’ processes by which a person exists. Deniable messages in folklore or ethnographic material, by or about women, can be as radical in their consequences as, but are often obscure and moderate in comparison to, confrontational transgressions or subversions of gender norms such as those which Butler considers to support her thesis.

For folkloristics or ethnology generally, and quite apart from any concern with concepts like identity or gender, the potential and the realization of encoding evidence the levels of creativity that are possible within even highly restrictive, conservative cultural traditions which might not appear to carry such capacity for polysemy and ambiguity. Coding reveals: the capacity on the part of even the conventional ‘tradition-bearer’ for alternative intention and will-exertion; the ways that people acting overtly ‘according to the rules’, simultaneously question, contest and subvert norms and rewrite standards scripts enforced by dominant discourses; and that such potential for contestation and contradiction is inbuilt as necessary for culture as process and dynamic. It supports a view of performers as actors within, and shapers of, culture, and repudiates constructivist accounts featuring overly deterministic personifications of tradition, culture, society, discourse, or language, as forces shaping performance and individuals. Culture (or tradition) only exists as it is done, it is discursive, so it is not possible for it to determine the individual who ‘does’ it. As for gender performances, coding, for the scholar interested in defining the relations between culture/tradition and individuals, provides instances of identity creation that escape a full determination by external forces according to normative regimes. The process and practice of seeking out and decoding encrypted messages, and our own usages of coding strategies, provide evidence of the discursive resignification, as Butler would term it, which makes possible the continuation of culture as the dynamic, emergent, but historical and repetition-dependent, process envisaged in performance orientations towards cultural study. Coding furnishes us with, on a concrete level, evidence of the workings of, some kind of, agency.
Fraser is critical of Butler’s concentration on gender-bending, rather than ‘normal’
gender performances, underestimating the potential for extending Butler’s approach
to the latter, and highlighting instead the problems and limitations of emphasizing
the transgressive. Butler’s framework, Fraser argues, is ‘not well suited to the crucial
work of articulation, contextualization, and provisional totalization’, for dealing with
large-scale institutions like states and economies, because it ‘privileges the local, the
discrete, and the specific’ (1995b: 163). Here, in fact, lies much of the potential for
combining the gender-as-performance/-performative and the cultural tradition-as-
performance/-performative approaches. A methodology that assumes the existence of
coded layers of signification in daily life, the local and the specific, opens up an
empirical test-ground and then, I would assert, provides supportive substantive
evidence for Butler’s theorization of gender as a performative effect. Such an
approach underlies those parts of this research into the traditional management of
death in the Western Isles which aim to gain insight into aspects of identity as
expressed and known by women who live within discourses of femininity which
have arisen within that particular cultural environment. In the chapters that follow,
attention to the multiple messages communicated in customary and conventional
behaviours and Butler’s idea of gender as performative often inform the ways in
which I understand such topics as composition and performance within traditional
song genres, and behaviours in specific contexts like wakes and funerals and
throughout the grieving process.

1 Butler has posed the question, raised by many others too, ‘Is sex to gender as feminine is
to masculine?’ (Butler 1993: 4). This refers back, as have many other parallels and
permutations, to Ortner’s question, ‘Is female to nature as male is to culture?’ (1974), which
stimulated a great deal of ground-breaking anthropological research and debate.
2 Butler is only one of many theorists who have pointed this out that this idealization of
nature is relatively modern with certain value-laden associations, especially in its relations
with the social (1993: 4-5); c.f. Hollway 1993, referring to E. Keller’s Reflections on
Gender and Science (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1985), on the relations between science and
nature since the seventeenth century when the epistemological model of nature as passive,
suppressed and determined by mechanical laws took over from older idealizations, and how
this was part of the reconstruction and reaffirmation of negative stereotypes of females.
3 E.g. Monique Wittig claims that there is no real distinction between gender and sex, the
latter being a naturalized and politically invested gendered category (Butler 1990: ‘Monique
4 Butler (1990: 36-41) outlines some of the main implications and consequences for
constructivism in relying on the distinctions of structuralist anthropology, particularly Lévi-
Strauss’ work, and describes the criticism, grounded in wider compared cultural evidence,
of universalist models that fail to account for, in this particular case, ‘the multiplicity of cultural configurations of nature’ (37).

Changing the Subject. Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity (Henriques et al 1984) is a collection of essays engaging with the criticisms undertaken in the early 1980s of many of the conventional central assumptions about subjectivity in psychology and related fields. The three sections of the book have useful introductions that summarize the essays, discuss more generally the issues these studies deal with more directly, and offer descriptions of the main terms and debates. Section 1, ‘From the individual to the social - a bridge too far’ deals with perspectives on the social/individual dualism that is the foundation of many constructivist accounts of subjectivity and the problems of this model; the second section, ‘Constructing the subject’, shows how the presocial unitary individual of humanism, that gave past social psychologies a subject, is an historical product, and how particular discourses of rationality are produced through and dependent upon particular technologies and practices; ‘Theorizing the subject’, section 3, discusses the value of, and the problems and questions raised by, poststructuralist deconstruction of the subject as an agent and explores the status of the subject as a discursively-positioned and meaningful entity. This section includes a chapter by Wendy Hollway, ‘Gender difference and the production of subjectivity’ (1984: 227-263), that analyzes the production of differentially gendered subjectivities within heterosexual couple relations to give insight into, amongst other things, the emotional investment made by individuals in accepting, or negotiating, positions within discourses of masculinity and femininity that involve power and the formation and maintenance of consistent and coherent identities.

Henriques et al. warn also of what they call a kind of ‘discourse determinism’ that implies people are mechanically positioned in discourse, disregarding possibilities of change, resistance, motivation (1984: 204).

Butler points out that it is also this way of thinking that informs misinterpretations of Foucault’s treatment of ‘power’ as a personification (1993: 9)

This is, of course, also the case for various ethnic, national, small group, non role-based identities.


For example, Goffman quotes, Beauvoir’s descriptions of the preparation undertaken ‘in the wings’ by the middle-class woman before she emerges to perform according to cultural codes of attractiveness and conduct (e.g. Goffman 1969 [1959]: 98, 114, 141, 207-8); and he refers to evidence from women, in research by Mirra Komarovsky, of the ‘negative idealization’, the claiming of a position inferior to the actually inhabited in a given situation, undertaken in conforming to an image of inferiority of intelligence, intellect, practical and academic proficiency and knowledge that was very much part of the heterosexual dating game for young Americans in the 1950s (34; 208). He includes examples of young women downplaying their skills and intelligence in heterosexual relations taken from the article ‘Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles’ (186-8), in the American Journal of Sociology LII, by Komarovsky, one of the ‘founding mothers’ of feminist sociology (Reinharz 1993: 425). Goffman credits American teenagers who ‘act dumb’ to catch and keep a boyfriend with ‘a profound psychic discipline’ (34), and recognizes the tension and alienation that arise from such mismatching between the role explicitly played out and the performer’s awareness of what she is doing and her alternative understanding of who she is and quotes an American college student who describes the complexity of emotions aroused by her performance of ‘playing dumb’ on a date - a mixture of distaste and guilt for her ‘hypocrisy’ as she perceives it, satisfaction at the act performed, at fooling and actually feeling superior to her date, contempt, condescension or resentment towards him, and confusion with why she should be doing this. She was well aware of the game element involved, that the boy could be aware of her acting and maybe become uneasy or contemptuous of her “for stooping to
such tricks’ (208). One of Goffman’s illustrations of ‘negative idealization’ that involves class and economic status came from Shetland informants whose grandfathers had refrained from making visible improvements to their crofts as these could have prompted the landowner to raise rents; such action resultant from the same deterrent to raising standards was also a factor in the Hebrides and all over the Highlands (e.g. 1969 [1959]: 34).

11 I focus on those layers and elements of Butler’s work which are most relevant to the aims of my research, and explore and exploit these as appropriate. I do not, therefore, consider, for example, her engagement with psychoanalytical theories, although some reference to the ways ‘agency’, ‘intention’ and ‘the subject’ appear in her work arises necessarily. Lacan, Freud, Kristeva and Wittig permeate Butler’s work, for example throughout Gender Trouble (1990), especially chapter 2, ‘Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix’ (35-78).

12 Duggan (1998) and other writers she cites have used the methods of deconstruction developed in Butler’s works to question cultural representations, in Duggan’s case particular historical versions of the lesbian in literature and other realms.

13 Fortier’s ‘troubles in the field’ (1996) stemmed from the ways in which people in the London Italian community she researched created identities for her and how these related to her own sense of self. Her engagement with the complexities of the multiple ambiguities in who she was expected to be and how she understood herself is informed by Butler’s idea of performative identity as a constant process in the everyday.

14 Reading Mills’ article (1993) was an important experience for me in deciding to undertake postgraduate research. She does not mention Butler in the text but includes Gender Trouble in her list of reading suggestions appended to this article addressed primarily to feminists in folklore studies.

15 Noyes (1995) briefly mentions Butler’s view of gender construction in an article on the concept of ‘group’, on identity, in contemporary American folkloristics. Butler’s work must partly filter through into folkloristics through general performance studies as well as from women’s and gender studies.

16 Visweswaran (1994: e.g. 69, 82) finds Butler’s arguments about the deconstruction of ‘the Subject’ helpful in finding ways to engage with issues in antihumanist theories and practices while allowing her ethnographic subjects to be subjects and to have agency. Butler claims that its deconstruction is not the end of the subject but an interrogation of the term and the authority belied in its use, and that allows to subjects an agency to reauthor and reauthorize discursively situated discursive positions.

17 See especially Butler (1993: 210-11, 218, and 1997) on names as political signifiers and their power.

18 Fraser says of Butler: ‘At the deepest level, she understands women’s liberation as liberation from identity, since she views identity as inherently oppressive.’ (1995a: 71, emphasis in Fraser)

19 Identity is a signifying practice, the result of discourses, historical and temporally specific, pluralistic organizations of language, that create and contest meaning and intelligibility, through the convergences and nexus in modalities of discursive possibilities (Butler 1990: 145).

20 ‘There is no privileged relation between the appellation “women” and what is actually the general political problem of how to construct cultures of solidarity that are not homogenizing or repressive’ (Fraser 1995a: 70).

21 As a prominent queer theorist as well as a feminist philosopher, Butler problematizes the category and associated interests that are the basis of feminism and explores questions about the political causes and consequences inhering in and generating identity categories that can be exposed through a Foucauldian genealogical critical enquiry. ‘A genealogical critique refuses to look for the origins of gender . . . ; rather genealogy investigates the political
stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin.’ (1990: viii-ix, emphasis in Butler). Butler also poses the question, with wider implications, of how the ‘failure’ (or the impossibility) of feminism to make claims about the identity of women, within its ‘field of representation’, also marks ‘the limit of representability as such’ (1994: 19).

22 As Schor points out ‘Previous theorists with otherwise impeccable anti-essentialist, contextualist, deconstructionist credentials have always laid down their arms in the name of politics’ (1995: 26), and Butler no less concedes ‘it remains politically necessary to lay claim to ‘women,’ ‘queer,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘lesbian,’ and to mark the differential relations of power through categories of race and ethnicity.” Quoting Gayatri Spivak - the self-same author of “strategic essentialism” - she seems to have come to acknowledge that “identity” is a necessary error” (27; quoting from Butler 1993: 229).

23 ‘Having’, ‘being’, or “becoming” a gender is a laborious process of becoming naturalized, which requires a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings’ (1990: 70, emphasis in Butler). The idea of gender as performance and as constructed might, if taking then that gender is artificial and fictional, imply or suppose that as an opposite there is something that is honestly ‘real’, factic, that sex has stable meanings that make gender consequences inevitable, but evidence of the variations possible in gender construction show that this is not by any means the case. ‘Sex’ is as ontologically fictive/fictitious as ‘gender’.

24 Goffman’s early work, especially through his theatrical model for understanding social identities and actions, relies on two particular basic ideas of the self (although he is not always consistent with these) that are found in his writing (e.g. Goffman 1969 [1959]; Lofland 1980: 39-47; Manning 1980: 258-60). Most explicitly articulated in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1969 [1959]), is a notion, recurrent throughout his work, concerning socially situated selves, the roles persons perform to have or to be official characters, the self as a context-dependent, ritual role that exists as it is done, and involves making and presenting images by and with appropriate actions according to the specific setting and interactants. This is the self he particularly explores in work contexts, public encounters, and when class-based roles are in play, and through performances wherein the individual incorporates and exemplifies the official accredited values of the society. This aspect of his early work shows the influence of Durkheim, and to a lesser extent Radcliffe-Brown, with an emphasis on treating behaviour as ritual, functioning to sustain group dynamics and coherence under the surface of events (Goffman 1969: 31). Contrasting with this, the other main ‘self’ in Goffman’s work encompasses the idea of the person who does the play-acting, the performer of the official role who creates a consistent or appropriate socialized image. There is always a discrepancy between these two selves for the player desires and attempts to be more or something other than the official self for which expression is permitted and it is for this tension, or lack of fit, that Goffman elaborated ideas such as that of role-distancing (see Lofland 1980: 41-43; c.f. Collins 1980). Much of the appeal of Goffman’s early work lies in his view of the social order as constructed and, therefore, as something that can be reshaped and negotiated with, his descriptions of defaulting and deviation from the roles that one is cast in (Lofland 1980: 47-8).

25 See the debates in Benhabib et al 1995, particularly Benhabib’s essays (1995a and 1995b) and Butler’s response (1995b, particularly 134-7); and discussion in the text below.

26 Bodies That Matter continues to examine ways to understand the power relations at work in ‘the constitutive and compelling status of gender norms’ (Butler 1993: x) without falling into the trap of cultural determinism. It goes beyond claims about the construction of gender in performance to interrogate the materiality and constructedness of bodies themselves, to question the very assumption that there are ‘sexes’ with intelligible, coherent, consistent
meanings; it looks at the ‘materialization’ needed to produce surface, fixity, boundary; and undertakes a genealogical enquiry into ‘sex’ and the configurations of power relations involved, how the ritualized repetition of norms also affects the stability of the materiality of ‘sex’, how the body itself is discursively constructed. ‘[T]he question is no longer, How is gender constituted as and through a certain interpretation of sex? (a question that leaves the “matter” of sex untheorized), but rather, Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized? ’ (1993: 10). Butler particularly invokes Foucault’s ideas about the production of bodies by regulatory governing ideals in forcible processes that are neither static nor factic (1), and which aim to consolidate and enforce the heterosexual imperative (2). She investigates what is left of ‘sex’ after gendering (5).

She discusses, and acknowledges her debt to, Austin’s pioneering How to Do Things with Words (1975 [1962]), and draws on Derrida’s reading of this, in ‘Signature, Event, Context’ in Limited, Inc. (Butler 1995b: especially 134-5). Ritual acts have been interpreted as performative in the Austinian sense by anthropologists like Stanley Tambiah (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 225).

‘Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, statements which not only perform an action, but confirm a binding power to the action produced.’ (1993: 225; c.f. 1997)

‘For a performative to work, it must draw upon and recite a set of linguistic conventions which have traditionally worked to bind or engage certain kinds of effects. The force or effect of a performative will be derived from its capacity to draw on and reencode the historicity of those conventions in a present act. This power of recitation is not a function of an individual’s intention, but is an effect of historically sedimented linguistic conventions.’ (Butler 1995b: 134; c.f. 1993: 106-7, and 224-6)

Butler refers particularly to Derrida’s discussions of citation and repetition as conventions and compulsory conformities that are the conditions of the success of performative locution (1993: 12-15, ‘226; 1995b: 134).

Butler’s understanding and use of ‘discourse’ is taken from specifically Foucault and, more generally, poststructuralist usage, and she explains this at many junctures in her work (e.g. 1995b: 143 n. 5).

‘[T]he tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions - and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe them.’ (Butler 1990: 140)

‘Lacan maintained that sex is a symbolic position that one assumes under the threat of punishment’, under constraints that ‘are operative in the very structure of language and, hence, in the constitutive relations of cultural life.’ (1993: 95-6)

She also examines other impersonations of one’s ‘opposite’ - e.g. the use of male names for female characters by the novelist Willa Cather that subverts or confuses the reader’s expectations.

‘The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment that is never quite carried out according to expectations, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. Moreover this embodying is a repeated process. And one might construe repetition as precisely that which undermines the conceit of the voluntarist mastery designated by the subject in language.’ (1993: 231)

‘[T]he transferability of a gender ideal or gender norm calls into question the abjecting power that it sustains. For an occupation or reterritorialization of a term that has been used
to abject a population can become a site of resistance. . . . And this has happened to a certain extent with the notion of “queer”. ’ (1993: 231)

36 Riviere’s and Lacan’s separate castings of femininity as a masquerade, Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born a woman but becomes one, social science constructivist accounts, and Butler’s sophisticated theorization of gender performativity, each raise, and can be posed, similar questions relating to subjectivity and agency. ‘What’/’who’ is it that undertakes the playing of scripts and roles? What assumes or is screened by masks in theatrically-framed accounts? What ‘does’ the constructing? Is the subject agentially involved, and, if so, how may this be? What is it the ‘doer’ ‘does’? Could the subject, or the agent, have had a gender, or a sex, beforehand? Butler discusses the implications of Lacan’s and Riviere’s analogies of masquerade. Although his structure is ambiguous, Lacan, she writes, seems to imply a prediscursive ontological femininity or feminine desire, whereas Riviere attempted a refusal to postulate a ‘womanliness’ prior to mimicry and masking (1990: 43-57).

37This opposition to the agency of humanism does not, however, fully preclude Butler from accommodating a different understanding of agency in her own work; see below in the text.

38 And of the dangers inherent in a constructivism that forecloses any agency but ends up nevertheless ‘presupposing the subject that it calls into question’ (1993: 7; c.f. 1990: 142-3).

39 Henriques et al offer one account: ‘the subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations. Thus . . . , the category ‘woman’ would itself be open to a questioning in terms of the different norms which circumscribe so-called women’s ‘roles’ in different practices. The approach which expects multiple positionings corresponding to multiple subjectivities - as mothers, wives, consumers, workers of one kind or another, etc. - must refer to the specificities of the different practices in order to describe the different positions and the different power relations played out in them. It cannot simply speak of a specific subject’s behaviour and attitudes or ascribe in advance the subject’s position according to class or gender’ (1984: 117). C.f. Butler’s description of how ‘the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once’ (1990: 145).

The poststructuralist idea of the deconstructed subject does raise conventionally many unresolved (unresolvable?) problems: ‘in this view the subject is composed of, or exists as, a set of multiple and contradictory positionings or subjectivities. But how are such fragments held together? Are we to assume, as some applications of post-structuralism have implied, that the individual subject is simply the sum total of all positions in discourse since birth? If this is the case, what accounts for the continuity of the subject, and the subjective experience of identity? What accounts for the predictability of people’s actions, as they repeatedly position themselves within particular discourses? Can peoples’ [sic] wishes and desires be encompassed in an account of discursive relations?’ (Henriques et al 1984: 204).


40 Not only is there no ‘I’ that precedes construction, it is unclear if there can be an ‘I’ before this: ‘Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the “I” neither precedes nor follows the process of gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves’ (1993: 7).

41 ‘To the extent that a performative appears to “express: a prior intention, a doer behind the deed, that prior agency is only legible as the effect of that utterance’ (1995b: 134, emphasis in Butler; c.f. 1993: 225ff. on the subject as unstable and incomplete). Butler, thus, sets the scene for elaboration of her performative theory: “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider Nietzsche’s
claim that "there is no 'being' without doing, effecting becoming: 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything"." (Butler 1990: 25, quoting from Nietzsche (1969), On the Genealogy of Morals (New York: Vintage, 45))

42 ‘Benhabib... proceeds to reduce "performative constitution" to a behaviorist model in which the term "expressions" are said to construct or fashion a social self (Goffman appears to be the model for such a theory). The notion of performativity that I use, however, is one that runs directly counter to the one that Benhabib describes as "we are no more than the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform" [Benhabib 1995b: 140].' (Butler 1995b: 134).

43 Fraser casts this perspective in a different way: ‘Butler also believes that people have what I shall call “critical capacities”; we are not pre-programmed pawns but are able to engage in novel action and to modify social conditions. Thus, I take her point here to be that critical capacities are culturally constructed... it is perfectly possible to give an account of the cultural construction of critical capacities. Thus, nothing in principle precludes that subjects are both culturally constructed and capable of critique’ (1995a: 66-7).

44 ‘Gender performativity involves the difficult labor of deriving agency from the very power regimes that constitute us, and which we oppose. This is, oddly enough, historical work, reworking the historicity of the signifier, and no recourse to quasi-transcendental selfhood and inflated concepts of History will help us in this most concrete and paradoxical of struggles.’ (1995b: 136, emphasis in Butler)

45 ‘To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. “Agency” is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed. That an “I” is founded through reciting the anonymous linguistic site of the “I”... implies that citation is not performed by a subject but is rather the invocation by which a subject comes into linguistic being; that this is a repeated process, an iterable procedure is precisely the condition of agency within discourse. If a subject were constituted once and for all, there would be no possibility of a reiteration of those constituting conventions or norms.’ (Butler 1995b: 135)

46 From the Hollis, Pershing and Young (1993) collection see Davis-Floyd; Fox; Ice; Kodish; Lawless; Levin; Mitchell; Pershing; Saltzman; Shuman; Yocom; Young; and Young and Turner. Several of these studies engage in the detection and analysis of coded levels of signification in women’s folklore.

47 The particular and considerable debt owed to African-Americanist scholarship by feminist studies, and the interchange of ideas between the two fields and their overlaps, is acknowledged within American feminist folkloristics. In the case of coding, for example, there has been research into coding in song and speech amongst groups of black slaves to communicate what could not be expressed in front of whites.

48 Mills prefers to discuss fundamental ideas of polysemy and multivocality: polysemy is described as ‘the multiple interpretive possibilities of proposition or other communicative act’, that are latent and can be gauged only through actual interpretation and responses by receivers or the revealed intentions of the message formulator; multivocality is the normal situation in any group wherein and whereby multiple interpretations arise that are either harmonious, irrelevant to one another, or contestive in perhaps even irreconcilable conflict, if they are exposed to one another. Mill points out the irony residing in the contrast between the discipline’s claimed emphasis on a multiplicity of voices in such core ideas as variants in oral literature and, for example, theoretical structurings such as the actual privileging of certain voices over others the pursuit of ur-texts by comparativist text-based scholars and the prioritizing of certain genres.

49 Explicit, complicite and implicit are epithets that Radner and Lanser use to discriminate between basic possible ways of coding.
Some of these have similarities also with the following types of frames that Bauman identifies in addition to the literal and performance frames, although they can all occur within the context of a performance structure: 'insinuation, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as having a covert and indirect relation to the meaning of the utterance; joking, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as not seriously meaning what they might otherwise mean; imitation, in which the manner of speaking is to be interpreted as being modeled after that of another person or persons; translation, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as the equivalent of words originally spoken in another language or code; quotation, in which the words spoken are to be interpreted as the words of someone other than the speaker' (Bauman 1978: 10). He goes on to give examples of performance and other speech frames in a number of cultures (11-14).

One example cited is that of the Irish Gaelic storyteller Peig Sayers (see Delargy 1945), whose legend and tale repertoire largely consisted of genres and types usually only narrated by men, often in male-only company or in contexts where women were not expected to play active participatory roles. Peig Sayers had learnt most of these from her father and, although his renditions were not recorded, comparison with versions of the same narratives by relatives and neighbours suggest that she did radically alter stylistics features and emphases in the content to direct attention to the oppressed condition of women around her. For instance: ‘Her extensive detailing of the patient sufferings of wife and widow in the story of the widow who rescues her husband from Hell (AT 425J), contrasted with the cursory treatment of these same topics in other local versions, seems to reflect her own sensibility’ (Radner and Lanser 1993: 11). It is not surprising that she wanted to tell about women’s hard lot in the Blasket Islands at that time and she did in fact reflect on how difficult and miserable her life had often been, once mentioning that since marrying she had never been content. She was exceptional in her community, and as a female storyteller who was given regard and status through the interest shown by outsider male folklorists, albeit for her narrations of male-associated tales and legends, at a time when scholars esteemed male oral narrative traditions and did not even recognize less formalized female forms of cultural performances as such.

Studies of appropriation strategies in Feminist Messages include: Keyes’ examination of how female rap artists imitated the hard-edged images and presentation styles of male musicians to claim a position in the industry, but could, once professionally established, contradict and counter male rappers’ representations of and attitudes towards women; and Pershing’s investigation of a parodic reinvention by a group of quilters of a particular image that reflected a traditional, stereotypical ideal of the feminine.

A bridal quilt, pieced, patched, and quilted by a group of women and presented to one of its members on the occasion of her marriage may represent an ironic coded message as it covers her marriage bed; symbolic of the group’s intimacy, it becomes a reminder of the bride’s removal from that intimacy by her new primary duties to her husband’ (Radner and Lanser 1993: 13).


E.g. Stewart (1993) demonstrates the alternative ends to those of men for which women have used the Anglo-American ballad: the impersonal ‘Child ballads’, when transmitted and performed among women, can offer shared knowledges and warnings for women about their well-being, lessons from the songs, and also a sympathetic acknowledgement of how hard life can be.

Hedging has, of course, been identified as one of the prime characteristics of ‘women’s language’, although such theories continue to be revised, particularly in view of the limitations of the data (often taken mostly from white, middle-class American women) that

past theorists of ‘women’s language’ relied upon and then generalized from (e.g. Tannen 1994: 33-34).

38 Summarizing trivialization in regard to Yocom’s study in the collection, Radner and Lanser write: ‘Although their woodsmen husbands laugh impatiently, a group of middle-aged women in a Maine logging community continue to knit doll clothes and dress baby dolls for display and sale. Margaret R. Yocom has shown how these women enact their longing for the days of childhood and motherhood and express their own aesthetic and cultural values in resisting the pressures of tourism and social change.’ (1993: 19-20)

39 Lawless’ extensive research with female Pentecostal ministers has, repeatedly, illustrated their use of incompetence claims and impersonation of a male voice to secure their right to preach (e.g. Lawless 1991, 1992, 1993).

60 The editors discuss at length Susan Glaspell’s short story ‘A Jury of Her Peers’ (1917), asking whether Minnie Cartwright had intentionally, unconsciously or not, buried codings about her condition within the material traces of her behaviour that become clues for the other two women to decode once they start to engage in an interpretation located within women’s culture. This story has been widely analyzed by feminist critics, for example, Annette Kolodny (1986). Amongst other things, Kolodny takes into account the different readings a male would bring to the text, even given that the decoding actions of the women are laid out, implying the alternative meaning and value systems of the sexes, and the implications of the decoding of Minnie Cartwright’s domestic environment for her and for the other characters.

61 The pa ndau discussed by Conquergood provide an interesting case where the complexities of intention and of identifying definable encoding strategies exemplify the perils inhering in any etic interpretation. Of course, there is no doubt that the Hmong tell explicit stories of expulsion and exile in their embroideries of scenes that suggest violence and depict guns and motion, and express their group aspirations in the cloths that depict a unified Laos that includes other ethnic groups (Peterson 1988). What is contestable, however, is the spirit in which, or the aims with which they construct these visual narratives: as ‘mere’ commemoration; as insider determined versions of events deliberately made then to contrast with outsider ones; to foster political, cultural and awareness; as catharsis; as moral defiance? How can one name the codes they have used without knowledge of the traditionary context, without imposing ethnocentric assumptions? One interpretation could argue that they have deployed trivialization by figuring the political and historical through a feminine handicraft medium, presuming that within their culture these cloths are given low relatively value, like embroidery in most western situations. Perhaps, the artistically pleasing form is deliberately used to distract, or is there the use of ironic juxtaposition? Without detailed enquiry to elicit emically formulated explanations and individuals’ thoughts from the women and men one could not assert any of these potential interpretive claims, especially since the pa ndau have been aestheticized to the modification of their ethical purpose or content, recontextualized with their political content and significations buffered. Campaigners fighting for the return of the Hmong to their lands in Laos have commissioned special cloths that have been sold to raise funds for their cause.
PART 2

DEATH ON LEWIS:
THE SEQUENCE OF EXPERIENCE
CHAPTER 3
THE BACKGROUND OF BELIEF AND CUSTOM

Introduction
This chapter aims to establish a context for several themes which run through the thesis. It briefly explains some aspects of spiritual beliefs on Lewis which affect how mortality and individual deaths are comprehended and responded to. Taking religion as, fundamentally, the human acknowledgement of supernatural forces and the endeavour to manage mortal relations with these, the folk cosmology and ritual which mixed paganism and survivals of older Christianities and continued, generally only vestigially, into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the islands, are considered here alongside the contemporary dominant forms of established Christianity. The nineteenth century radically evangelized the Gaidhealtachd (excluding the Roman Catholic districts) into a stronghold of a fervent, stern, puritanical, fundamentalist Presbyterianism. Traces and memories of older ideas endured, however, in, for example, the life crisis and calendar routines, belief in second sight and the evil eye, domestic medicine and the daily habits of Hebrideans. This constituted a layer of ‘folk’ or ‘para-religious’ belief, which existed almost as a subculture to the institutionally sanctioned and sanctified cosmology and praxis of the Churches (c.f Thomas 1991), and, in connection with death, as a ‘popular underground eschatology’ (Brown 1979). These very different belief systems, their theologies and epistemologies, have shaped what death has meant and means on Lewis.

The first section of the chapter accounts some historical stages in the development of the present religious environment and an explanation of categories of church affiliation which constitute a hierarchy within village life. I then consider some phenomena, like vocabulary items, rites of passage, other customs, and traditional supernatural beliefs, which often reflect a provenance and motivations in vernacular, ‘folk’ cosmology or in orthodox Christian ideology. A topic related to the theme of mourning is that of women’s personal appearance, a discussion of which I include in the present chapter because of its relevance to religious and spiritual identity.

Tir an t-soisgeul - Land of the Gospel
The post-Reformation course of Highland religion, like that of the rest of Scotland (Brown 1988, 1992, 1995; Drummond and Bulloch 1975, 1978; Forrester and Murray 1984; MacInnes 1951), is one of schism and conflict, local disputes and issues
complicating the tumultuous national picture. Like those other distinctively ‘Highland’ features, crofting and depopulation, the ‘traditional’ north-west Presbyterianism, of principally the Free Church, but also of the Highland Church of Scotland and the Free Presbyterian Church, and the associated social and cultural ambience, only started to develop significantly in the eighteenth century. Older native culture and recent layers of folk belief reflect a history and prehistory of Celtic and Norse paganism, and various species of Christianity in the influence of the Celtic Church, Roman Catholicism and Episcopalianism. By the end of the eighteenth century, Presbyterianism prevailed but it lacked popular support and loyalty, not least of all because ministers of the Kirk’s ‘Moderate’ faction dominated Highland pulpits. Such men were removed from the real concerns and worsening social and economic situation of the people and tended to be more sympathetic to landlords, while often ignorant of local culture and sometimes with little Gaelic. The Statistical Accounts indicate the sparseness of ecclesiastical services and resources deployed in the Gaidhealtachd, revealing and explaining conditions which influenced general spiritual ideas and ritual observances in daily life and times of crisis. This is particularly pertinent to the relatively weak presence of the Protestant authorities in the cultural management of death in previous centuries which facilitated the continuation of practices and of beliefs that seem quite contrary to the ideology of Presbyterianism. Churches in the Gaidhealtachd are opposed even now to anything but the bare minimum of ritual and symbolism in worship. The area was very poorly served with churches until the establishment of the Free Church with the Disruption of 1843, the most momentous event in Scottish religion since the Reformation. At the General Assembly of that year one third of all ministers walked out of the Kirk, along with approximately fifty per cent of adherents. An estimated fifth of the departing ministers had regularly preached in Gaelic, a rough indication of the extent of Highland involvement in this rebellion, and on Lewis approximately only 500 people out of 20,000 remained in the Established Church.

It is impossible to generalize about how religious Scottish people really were before then, especially given that, while the Church of Scotland might be heavily involved in their lives, this tended to be as the civil bastion of the law and the main agent of social control. The evidence of ‘folk’ belief and vernacular religion clearly indicates that into the twentieth century people were able to live their lives according to two quite different cosmologies (c.f. Brown 1979). Although other areas, notably Easter Ross, had been revitalized earlier, it was only in the nineteenth century that the distinctive religious
identity of the islands really began to evolve as the result of evangelical revivals led by lay preachers and some ministers (MacInnes 1951).

Support for and responsiveness to nineteenth century revivalism had less grounding in the spiritual inclinations of the people than in social and economic factors rooted in the cataclysmic changes of the eighteenth century in terms of land-use, relations between the classes, the collapse of an entire social structure (especially after 1745), which left the people leaderless and disorientated in the face of the Clearances, critical congestion on the land and disasters such as crop failures. Few historians decline the consensus that the events which climaxed with the majority of Highland and Island congregations deserting the Church of Scotland amounted to a popular revolution rooted in class conflict and the crisis of cultural disintegration, rather than in purely religious issues, as far as the crofting counties were concerned. Various writers have developed this analysis, particularly Hunter (1974, 1987; c.f. Brown 1988, 1995; Macdonald 1990: 112-115).

The preachers, laymen (notably na Daoine) and schoolteachers who instigated a series of dramatic revivals which began to sweep through the region in the early decades of the nineteenth century were staunchly puritanical and orientated towards the ordinary people, often being from those same ranks. Their evangelizing impact was immeasurably enhanced and intensified by the completion of the publication of the Scriptures in Gaelic in 1801 and by the efforts of bodies like the Gaelic Schools Society and of independent catechists which enabled many to read and interpret the Bible for themselves for the first time. In turn, restless spiritual energy and religious curiosity fed people's desire to acquire literacy skills (e.g. Durkacz 1983: especially 126ff.; Withers 1988; Withrington 1988). Islanders became critical of what they heard from the Kirk's pulpits and gained a self-confidence to express themselves on religious matters which directly aided the later development of the strengths needed in the Land Wars. The first major Lewis revival was in 1822, Bliadna 'n aoamaidh (Ian fhaomaidh), 'the Year of the Swooning', when the 'awakened souls' displayed behaviours that came to be characteristic of Hebridean evangelical fervour: trances and convulsions, prophetic dreams, religious ecstasies, temporary insanity. The effects of this and subsequent revivals were responsible for sweeping away or suppressing many traditional beliefs and customs. Evangelical religion offered the people a new purpose and new standards, a way to transcend the harsh reality of their material lives. Furthermore, in the doctrinal proclamations of many preachers were embodied the aspirations towards social justice which were nascent in
the crofting communities: the millennium would bring divinely instated equality and end the wrongdoings of landlords and other oppressors of the peasantry.

The course of Presbyterianism became destructively fissiparous again in the 1890s. In a second disruption, of 1892-93, the Free Presbyterian Church was formed by seceders from the Free Church. Most Free Church congregations amalgamated with the United Presbyterian Church in 1900 to create the United Free Church of Scotland, the mass of which merged with the Church of Scotland in 1929. The Free Church in Lewis and similar areas remained separate from these unions. Such fissures and mergers have generated bitter disputes, fracturing communities and families over the decades. In recent years, including during the course of this research, there have been periods of dissent and friction sufficient to threaten the unity of the Free Church.

The Churches and nineteenth century evangelicals have been justly blamed for the destruction at that time of much indigenous Gaelic culture, offering no alternatives to fill the gap they created. Although one view is that they simply accelerated the demise of a culture which could not survive the disintegration of the traditional social order, this absolves Presbyterianism too easily. It is notable that in Catholic districts narrative, song and musical traditions endured into recent times, even into the present, that were utterly suppressed and often destroyed in areas like Lewis and Harris which, to a significant extent, lost traditional musical and oral narrative skills and materials and even much folk history. The effect of having all non-religious recreation denied them, having their communities’ former creativity condemned as foolish, even as ‘the works of the Devil’, had radical effects on the local cultural atmosphere and the psychology of the people, a trauma from which the culture has yet to recover entirely. It is perhaps ironic that a movement which did so much to enable and empower the peasantry to struggle against the abject conditions of exploitation prevailing before the crofting legislation of 1880s, which gave them the confidence and political determination to organize and protest against class abuse, has itself been an agent of oppression and often a block to progress with its conservative theology and practice. The thoroughness and passion with which the nineteenth century evangelists and their followers rejected their own history and indigenous culture, and the permeation and strength of their doctrinaire puritanism and pietism, meant that, to an extent, islanders had no other recourse for the construction of a Lewis identity (and other area identities) than the means supplied by the local brand of religion.
Religion still infuses everyday life for many islanders to a degree found in very few Scottish communities (Brown 1992) and ecclesiastical affairs interest even those with little or no religious faith for issues like Sabbatarianism and internal church politics can affect the whole community. The pervasiveness of religion in contemporary island identity and culture is an issue which inevitably tends to particularly occupy the attention of modern ethnographers from outside the area (see Ennew 1980; Macdonald 1997: especially 163-87; Parman 1972, 1990a, 1990b). Within the Presbyterian churches on Lewis today there are various levels of association with a church and of one’s devotion. Excluding those who have migrated into the area from outside the islands, most village households can be nominally connected with one of the three main denominations. Church attendance has declined in recent decades but is still high.10 The extent to which congregants and others observe the traditional Highland Sabbath is difficult to gauge as many people are careful to maintain an appearance of conformity outside of the home regardless of how they might behave in their private space.11 The convention of holding family worship once or twice daily, which began with the revivals, has faded since the mid-century when practising households were the rule rather than the exception of today.12 A group which adheres more closely to the ethos and purpose of the church than associates (who perhaps only occasionally or regularly attend Sunday services) attends weekday services and prayer meetings, and are often described as leantuinn, ‘following’ or ‘adhering’.13 ‘Followers’ are often actively engaged in seeking conversion, becoming born again, and generally comprise a considerable number of middle-aged and older villagers, who are more often female rather than male. Some have their struggle rewarded but others are converted suddenly, often with an epiphanic experience or after a period of psychological distress and confusion, without any prior spiritual searching. Those who have been chosen, according to the doctrine of election, are described as ciiramach, literally ‘careful’,14 and must lead the circumscribed life of a convert – they become ‘good living’. Only those who bear evidence of having the ciiram can apply to have their candidacy for taking communion examined by the Kirk Session. Many ciiramach people never present themselves to be considered by the elders for communicant membership, which always consists of a very small proportion of a congregation. Once someone has participated in the Lord’s Supper, at one of their parish’s twice yearly communion seasons, or na h-òrduidhean,15 they are said to be comanach,16 and must live as a role model to other believers and testify to their Christian status and faith in all their conduct. Na h-òrduidhean is the main religious festival in the calendar of the island churches, an important symbol of local identity and culture, as well as a social focus for ‘members’ (a term used specifically for
communicants) and mere adherents alike (Owen 1957; Parman, 1990a: 146-152, 1990b). Small-scale revivals have occurred in the present century (for example in the 1920s and 1949-53, both phases of severe economic hardship on Lewis) and still occasionally occur when a number of people become followers or are converted in a short space of time. Modern ‘awakenings’ have few similarities to the dramatic nineteenth-century scenes of faintings, convulsions and prophesy and sometimes seem more like periodic trends in the social circle opportunities being chosen by people.17

**Mortuary customs and beliefs**

Provided here is a brief selection of examples of thanatological customs and beliefs which belong to folk or vernacular culture in the Western Isles and comparable areas of mainland Scotland. The sources I draw on are writings, mainly from the eighteenth century and later, by travellers, antiquarians, folklorists, diarists and historians,18 and archival material gathered over the last fifty years by the School of Scottish Studies from oral testimony in research into the past and the contemporary scene. As with the other crisis points in the life cycle, many of the traditional procedures for dealing appropriately with a death depended on women’s individual and group labour which was infused and motivated by shared knowledge of customary precepts and conventional responses to such situations. I hope to make clear how central were skills and knowledge that would have belonged principally, or even exclusively, to females. A great deal of the available data relates to ideas and practices that by this century had been (often pejoratively or romantically) designated by non-practitioners as ‘folklore’ or ‘superstition’, because they were not officially sanctioned within church doctrine, or because knowledge of these was passed on informally and learnt as part of the process of knowing the ‘proper’ routine, attitude or behaviour in a particular situation. Such practices have for those who maintain them historical validation as tradition through the memory and experiences of the community. This is an area where cross-cultural ethnological analysis can provide fascinating comparison and new insight.

As a transformative stage in the life cycle, death is principally critical for two categories: if a group believes in an eternal soul, death is the transformation of an individual to a new state; and the surviving group is changed by the departure of a member, needing, therefore, to reshape and redefine itself, to re-establish the integrity it had previously possessed. Defunct ideas and discontinued practices, which appear pagan to the Christian believer or primitive to the modern onlooker, were once sensible and expected
within either the logic of secular understanding or that of folk religion or 'para-religion'. For an individual constantly engaged in the process of forming and maintaining her identity, participation in, and the experience of, rites of passage and other customary routines contribute to her ongoing constitution as an individual and a social being. Acting out and transmitting knowledge, and internalizing, accepting and altering informally passed-on beliefs are part of learning who one is and who one can be within the culture. The life crises are obvious points of learning certain behaviours which stand for specific identity meanings although the individual is involved in this process of becoming gendered all the time.

In modern Gaelic usage, in Lewis and Harris, bàsailch is probably the most common verb for humans dying, although it still only applies to animals in most other areas. Caochail is widely used and also means 'change; travel', and there are a range of phrases in currency such as fhuair e bàs, 'he died' (from faigh bàs, literally 'get (a) death'); tha am bàs oirre, 'she is dying' (literally '(the) death is on her'); and the examples chaidh an anail aiste, 'she died' ('the breath went out of her'), and chaidh as dhi, 'she died; she was killed' ('went out from unto her'), both use chaidh the past perfect of falbh which can independently mean 'perish' as well as carrying more ordinary meanings of 'go, depart, walk'. There are a number of other verbs that, like caochail, connote an alteration in state, the crossing of boundaries or departure: siubhail means 'go, move, travel, depart', and is the usual word employed in Islay; teasd and eug primarily convey 'die, depart', or 'fail', and eug is the usual verb used in, for example, Barra; and muth, meaning 'change, deteriorate, kill, destroy, shift', is not common now. People might also talk of death as being taken away by God. Euphemistic and other figurative phrases use metaphors of separation and movement, just as in other languages. Water, as an iconic symbol of passage, inevitably features in an area once inhabited by Celtic and Norse cultures that believed in island otherworlds, but these sometimes have a Biblical significance or tone: the deceased is described as going thar abhainn lòrdan ('across the River Jordan') or thar bruachan lòrdan ('the banks of the Jordan'), phrases that especially turn up in prayers and addresses at funerals, or as crossing abhuinn dubh a' bhàis ('the black river of death'), cuan mòr na duibhne ('the great sea of darkness'), or beanntaibh na bith-bhuantachd ('the mountains of eternity') (Carmichael 1900a: 116). A spatial conceptualization of the otherworld provides many mythologies with the idea of death as the entry to another, imagined country having particular parallels with the world of the living and other supernatural dimensions: in Gaelic folklore the otherworld is
closely related to the fairyworld and sometimes mirrors that of the living in terms of categories of inhabitants, or adversely in the reversal of certain rules of mortal belief.

Death by natural causes, amongst one’s relatives or friends, and in familiar surroundings, has generally been the expectation of most people. This has meant that one’s final wishes would probably at least be listened to, and the last offices performed appropriately. The dying needed to have some idea of what those surviving after them could be expected to do, literally, with their remains and to ensure their welfare in the afterlife. To deny someone fulfilment of the requirements for a complete death, proper obsequial ceremonies and treatments, according to their own or, if different, the survivors’ culture, has been the ultimate act of disrespect in many societies towards one’s enemy and to those who have offended the moral order or transgressed societal norms - murderers and other felons, heretics, witches,22 and in the past suicides;23 it denies them recognition as natural, human, and may block their continued existence in the afterworld of spirits, or even prevent their reincarnation. Categories of what might be termed the ‘innocent, restless’ dead, which can be characterized as indefinitely existing in a liminal condition and as potential revenants, included uncompensated victims of crime, the parturient (and sometimes the pregnant) woman, the mother who has died before post-natal saining, and the unbaptized child (see especially O’ Connor 1991; Pentikäinen 1989).24 These classes of the dead lacked a stable identity and spiritual status within the doctrine of the churches and folk eschatology, creating difficulties in the way the community conceptualized itself and its relations with ancestors and with the supranormal. Exemplifying how actions and attitudes towards the dead have depended, in many cultures, on a taxonomy based on kinds of death, survivors have attempted to resolve some of these problems by giving such groups special post-mortem treatment. Conforming carefully to accepted custom, and acting out shared beliefs, are essential, however, for the well-being of any deceased individual and of the community.

After those involved had decided that someone for whom they were caring was to die imminently and that they could no further prolong life, they often felt in the past that they had a responsibility to ease the struggle if they could do so.25 Sympathetic magic was practised in an attempt to shorten the physical and spiritual suffering of the dying, whose soul might be reluctant to depart. Doors were opened and locks and knots undone to mimic and encourage the disentangling of the body and soul, with a similar intention to the customs of opening windows to help the soul be freed at the time of death itself and of ensuring all ties were cut and pins removed from the shroud before burial.
Weeping at the bedside was thought also to detain the soul, but perhaps this was as much to discourage others from unintentionally upsetting the dying person if she or he were conscious. Stopping clocks in the room or the whole house at the time of death, and other measures that are still continued (such as drawing curtains), explicitly indicate a suspension of and division from ordinary, everyday life. Normal time was replaced by another, and, mundanely, the regulated rhythm of outdoor labour ceased in most townships until after the funeral, and certain forms of indoor work also stopped. The dead community member moved beyond linear, mortal time into the eternal, and hovered around the living. Initially, the soul was easily confused and misled, and this could partly explain the custom in many cultures of covering mirrors and other surfaces that might reflect or shadow it, a custom widespread into the 1960s in Scotland and one that still continues in some areas. The death of one individual analogously would seem to stand for all terminable life, and for the end of the world, and re-enacted the first death, for the Christian community, a result of disobedience in Eden; 'Death creates both a spatial and temporal metonymy between the local and the universal’ (Seremetakis 1991: 226) at various points. Blocking out natural light, or draping walls and furniture with white, redefines the room or house (but covering or removal of ornaments and hanging white sheets on the walls latterly seem to have functioned more in giving dignity to the room and emphasizing the transience of the worldly): it becomes a site of crisis, polluted and unstable; space is used unusually and its contents and fragile boundaries are the focus of various rites and restrictions. Such simple acts produce separation and transformation, as the deceased and the chief mourners enter a liminal dimension, van Gennep’s (1960 [1908]) second stage.28

Fears of contamination are understandable enough, especially if disease had caused the death or if the corpse had started to decompose. But more important in the past (and a factor even now in people’s subconsciously formed reactions to death, despite rationalist ideas and humanist attitudes) was to avoid indirect physical and metaphysical pollution by ‘Death’, as a force that could deleteriously affect the vitality of others, and could wreak havoc, once boundaries between it and ‘Life’ opened-up. Biblical doctrine, of course, supported much older fears of death: ‘He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days’ (Numbers 19: 11); ‘This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent [within a dwelling] all that come into the tent and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days’ (Numbers 19: 14). There was much fear of the agency of the soul which did not leave the body immediately, (usually not until after interment, but often 40 days after death, or much longer, in many cultures), and might not be willing to give up
its earthly environment, even acting against the living and causing real harm. For official western belief, Old Testament tenets and Orthodox Judaic practice enshrined the fears of pollution by menstruation or the post-partum condition which occur in many cultures and are in many cases comparable to a culture’s fear of pollution by death, disease or decay. It was common, until a few decades ago, for people to burn all the clothing and perhaps the bed-linen of someone who was thought to have died from cancer, as well as from other diseases such as tuberculosis, partly from a lack of knowledge about the pathology of cancer, but also as a surviving fear of contamination by diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera and fevers.

Concepts of the soul
In contrast to past views that the departure of the soul and its incorporation into the afterlife took some time (that death itself, as passage from the living world, was gradual), modern western views, humanistic or otherwise, normally regard actual death as instantaneous, and have evolved from specific conceptions of the individual as a bounded entity. Mourning is now what really determines how long the dead are felt to have significant relations with the living and this is largely then an individual issue, beyond any shared belief system. Even in Presbyterian communities a folk belief persisted that the soul lingered in transition for a number of days, a pre-Christian idea of the returning dead, and wherever it is that the soul goes after death, there is still the Final Judgement at the end of the world, so even ultimate destinations are ambivalent. One of the easiest ways to conceptualize this version of the afterlife is simply to accept the dead as sleeping until the Last Day.

When considering past non-Christian concepts of the soul that have motivated island mortuary custom (without going into ancient theology and the pagan pantheon), we have to confront the belief in the sluagh (‘the host’), the spirits of the dead, who were often ambiguously identified as, or with, the fairies (sithichean). However, the two terms seem to have been used for different phenomena in many ways (sluagh would not usually refer to the fairies who could interact with mortals in the daytime, for example). Despite various theories as to their origin (for example, that the sithichean were angels cast out of heaven for disobedience, but not evil enough to be sent to serve the devil), the essentially pagan belief in the sluagh and the sithichean lasted into this century in some areas, blending with a Christian inventory of the supernatural. Mortals feared the hostility and ambiguous status of the sluagh, who could, like the devil, abduct the soul
before burial if due precautions were neglected. Until it could be assumed that the soul had crossed into its proper and final destination - heaven, hell, purgatory or limbo - there was, therefore, the danger of its theft, especially if the deceased was one of the 'statusless dead', or if the person's deeds led others to expect that her or his soul might be in torment. Capture by the sluagh seems in some of the oral tradition to be almost equivalent to damnation before judgement or the chance to atone; it meant the soul would have no peace and could disrupt the world of the living. The idea of the spirit riding the winds at night as part of 'the host', although frightening, was probably easier to conceive than the image of a fiery, spatially and temporally infinite hell, wholly separate from the earth. However, sufficient oral testimony survives from the nineteenth century to support earlier evidence that, within the folk religion of the Gaels, death was understood as passing over into the world of the sluagh or sithichean, that these were the spirits of the dead (e.g. Low 1996: 44-45; Wentz 1911: 84-116). Descriptions of the fairy host’s night-time movements seem to have been replaced by accounts of phantom funerals which were similarly said to transport physically mortals who had strayed into their path, and experiences of which were recorded in personal narratives and treated as a variety of second sight. The viewer was usually able to recognize the apparitions of local people in the ghostly cortège and deduce whose future funeral was being represented.

Certain older beliefs of the Celtic and Norse peoples who had settled the islands were incorporated and absorbed into Christian (Celtic, Roman Catholic, and Reformed) folk cosmology and religious praxis. Traditional beliefs and observances might even show traces of ancient Celtic head-cults in the idea of the skull as the site of the soul, but much more common and relevant here was the idea of the soul being contained in, or even basically the same as, one’s breath. The spirit could leave the body as a white vapour, or as smoke (e.g. Henderson 1911: 45-46), or as a ball of light (Carmichael 1900a: 117). The noun deò means ‘breath, air; “the vital spark”; light ray’; the expression thug i suas an deò translates as ‘she gave up the breath/"the vital spark"’. Like words in other languages for ‘breath’, ‘soul’, ‘spirit’ and ‘god’ that are connected, deò seems etymologically similar to dia, ‘god’. Anam, ‘soul, spirit; mind’, also connotes ‘breath; life; courage’, and can be a term of endearment. It should be compared to anail, one of the most commonly used Gaelic words for ‘breath; a rest; breeze’.

The Gaelic vocabulary used recently and presently for the immortal component of humans shows how various its manifestations could be, including of course as a ghost of some kind, as a wraith or doppelganger, or, when it temporarily left the body during
sleep, in the form of an insect or mouse.40 When it departed for the afterworld the soul could appear in the shape of a bee,41 and Carmichael recorded the belief that an angel incarnated as a particular kind of butterfly, the dealan-De (literally ‘lightning’ or ‘electricity of God’), came to fetch the soul to heaven (1941: 4).42 In Catholic areas and other parts before people fully accepted Protestantism and gradually lost faith in the saints, the tradition of St. Michael guiding the dead featured prominently in Gaelic blessings and hymns (Carmichael 1900a: 116-119, 208-09; 1940: 374-391). In areas that had long been Protestant, Carmichael, in the late nineteenth century was able to record invocations to the angels and St. Michael.43 Folk tradition reveals the implicit contradictions that can lie between how people regard their own deceased and the official eschatological views of the community. As in many cultures, one principle has been that the good earn themselves easy peaceful deaths that those who have led sinful lives are denied; their moral character and the fate of their souls may be exhibited in the condition of the grave. This was, of course, not a belief which people would invoke for every death, but only seriously perhaps for individuals of unusually extreme, good or bad, character. Such ideas are central to Highland and Island orally transmitted historical, local legends about factors and bailiffs who are remembered for their harsh treatment of tenants.44 For example, there are stories of how Patrick Sellar was eaten alive by maggots, of a factor infested with lice at the time of his demise, and of how no grass would grow on the grave of another person centrally implicated in clearance outrages (MacArthur 1990:138; Tocher 2, 16 (1973-74): 281-99; Tocher 3, 17 (1975-76): 22-39).

Contradictions between what people profess to accept in terms of received official ideology, and those beliefs they declare in their actions and come to hold through their personal experiences, is a crucial eschatological issue, which the community negotiates, despite apparent incompatibility and counter-ideas. For example, Presbyterians (I am referring to community members who, at least, nominally belong to a Presbyterian denomination, but who are not necessarily professed believers with church membership) who would declare, in accordance with church discourse, that at death the soul is immediately judged and that only those who have been born-again are sent to heaven, cannot imagine a loved one being condemned to hell, regardless of how religious or ‘worthy’ in the eyes of official religion that person had been. It is virtually unimaginable that they would verbally express belief in or acceptance of such an outcome, unless they were very extreme in their views. Highland Presbyterianism does not allow prayer of any
kind that could be construed as being on behalf of the dead so no comfort can exist that the efforts of the living might improve the fate of the departed soul. One source of solace lies in the conviction that conversion can occur at any time before death and be beyond the knowledge of those who are around the dying: no-one else knows the relationship between an individual and God, whether her or his salvation has been predestined, regardless of the life they have lived up until then. The possibility of last-minute redemption becomes in the minds of the bereaved a probability. ‘Villagers’ discourse about the Last Days, the resurrection, and final judgement was not consistent with their apparent belief that deceased relatives and friends go directly to Paradise at death,’ observed Delaney of her Turkish Muslim village, continuing, ‘This inconsistency they have with many others of all religions’ (1991: 316). As a twentieth-century Russian Orthodox believer living in Finland, Marina Takalo, as one example, held that more important than any notion of Hell was whether or not someone was condemned to unrest as a revenant or rested peacefully (Pentikäinen 1978: 161, 208, 333).

Customs around the actual funeral make clear that the soul often needed help to be incorporated into the afterlife and to surrender contact with the living. Rituals performed at Samhuinn (Halloween) especially aimed to protect against and to repel returning spirits, although people were, of course, ambivalent: the feared dead theoretically would include people they had known. Nowadays, although many believe that in the past the dead and the living had a closer relationship, and most families can recount stories of older or deceased members’ experiences of wraiths, ghosts and other spirits, alongside stories of premonitions and psychic communication, most current concepts of the soul come from Christian doctrine or modern notions of the human essence that are not necessarily related to religious ideas. Most islanders do believe in some kind of soul and afterlife. For devout Presbyterians the soul of the born-again Christian, who is a member of the elect minority of the ‘saved’, goes immediately to heaven and there should be anguish that others are destined for hell. Naturally, this has a powerful influence on behaviour and a sense of one’s place within the universe. Islanders have been commemorated with headstones since the mid-nineteenth century depending on what they could afford or produce, and possibly on access to a stonemason, and before these with small, unengraved stone markers, or wooden ones with perhaps the name and date. The body retains post-mortem significance at least as long as a marker or the memory that it was once a person lasts.
The relatively low level of involvement in funerals and wakes by Protestant clergy until the nineteenth century allowed death in Scotland to be managed according to, in many respects, informal, ‘folk’ and pre-Reformation practices and beliefs. In the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church, the ordained clergy have a minimal role in formal mortuary ceremony, and older customs and ideas survived later than with respect to many other areas of life which were controlled more consistently by the Churches. This means that the cultural management of death, at the start of the twentieth century, was a particularly rich subject area for the study of para-religion and folk ritual in Highland and Island communities.

**Personal appearance: religious and gendered identity**

This section sets the scene for the discussion of mourning wear in Chapter 6 and comments on some aspects of female identity and gender ideals in Lewis society, providing the basis for a contrast with the appearance of lamenters, described in Chapters 7 and 8. Within a culture semiotic inventories link particular items of clothing and other aspects of appearance (including inalienables and more manipulable elements like hairstyles, the use of cosmetics, gesture and posture) with particular meanings. According to sign systems consistently recognized and mobilized by a community, one’s appearance can convey polysemous layers of information to others and be the basis for inference about a person’s character, constituting a broad contingency of communicative possibilities, alongside any aesthetic needs of the wearer. 48 Clothing and other elements of adornment provide a possible barrier of messages, in addition to being an obvious protective physical buffer and filter, between the intimate, internal and the public, social realms, mediating between the wearer’s desires and motives and the requirement to acknowledge and conduct oneself in accordance with the language of personal appearance. Even an individual’s deliberate manipulation to transmit certain ideas and information that might not strictly correspond to a ‘reality’ of who she/he otherwise is, has to be undertaken with signs that belong to a repertoire sustained within the culture. The process of creating, having an appearance, is a performance in which the assumption of certain items, the use of these props, is the mobilization of symbols to communicate ‘facts’ about the wearer. The prioritizing of semioticizing processes is an approach to culture that can be incorporated into more general analysis compatible with the emphasis in performance theory on process and emergence (Langlois 1985; Parmentier 1994). What has been called ethnosemiotics, 49 the adaptation of a general semiotic methodology to the analysis of ‘everyday fact’, seems a particularly apt, effective way of interpreting...
codes of clothing in small group contexts and for relatively homogeneous rural communities like Lewis villages, especially in the past, where the variety of languages of personal appearance within which one might choose to communicate is more limited than in complex urban environments.50

The partial dependence of gender on the performative power of clothing signals is exemplified by drag and people’s reliance on dress for constructing an identity for themselves as being of one gender. People feel ‘more feminine’ or ‘more masculine’ (and all that these imply) when wearing certain garments - and their realization that others’ responses to them are influenced by this. Appearance, as it can be contrived and altered, is not only an expression of identity, it is the embodiment of identity necessary for it to mean anything, and is a core element of communicative negotiation both between different individuals and for the individual over who they are. Vestimentary signs function and are used by the wearer in ways that help to sustain and maintain an ongoing construction process of identity; they repeat, reaffirm, resignify the aspects of gender they suggest, are iterations of components of gender discourse within a culture. Clothing is one of the material sides of gender’s performativity examined by Butler (1990, 1993). Garments and other elements of personal appearance function as ‘performatives’: certain items indicate not just that the wearer is one gender (or has one particular identity), but, in effect, define that person, make them that gender (or other identity); like performatives in lingual communication, clothing items generate (more than) what they mean, achieve a reality effect signalling not just ‘this person is bearing a token of a gender’, but that ‘this person is a product of, belongs within femininity, and, therefore, must be female’; they constitute individuals as entities existing within particular discursive matrices.51

In the working processes of gender normatives, clothing symbols are conventionally purported to be based upon natural facts. The styles which are normatively regarded as permissible to the female change during and in connection with the life cycle, and, traditionally, many rites of passage ceremonially incorporate and effect these appearance changes coinciding with a life crisis alteration in status, changes which are demanded and abrupt, such as the temporary or permanent assumption of deep mourning by widows in the past. Others are more gradual and made not through any ritual, but are just as compellingly normative: the individual knows that part of her behaviour in a certain role involves her wearing the appropriate ‘costume’ even if that includes clothes that are not well suited to her activities. In the islands the cultural discourses within which
women negotiate and construct gendered identity include networks of religious and spiritual ideas which affect the value of signs in the vestimentary language.

The Western Isles have not, of course, been isolated from the outside world in terms of the clothing generally worn; most people wear much the same as others in comparable areas of Scotland. Even in the early years of this century islanders used mail order catalogues for clothing and other manufactured goods. It is often too easy for outsiders, and indeed for insiders also, to perceive and then focus upon aspects of Highlands and Island life that differ markedly from elsewhere, overstating these and distorting the picture with negligent inattention to what is similar. As they have varied over time, vestimentary codes reflect a general cultural and ideological construction of femininity in the islands that can be seen beyond the crisis of a death. There are some fairly distinctive features of local practice and understandings of personal appearance to which I draw attention as these relate to gender identity in cultural discourses that specifically concern spiritual constitution and religious status as well as secular identity. I will refer to the present day and some past clothing conventions because these are often thrown into relief by questions of social and religious identity in the context of death and bereavement.

Involvement in outdoor work, the exposure to often harsh weather and the physical environment influence the ways in which island women dress and style their appearance. Given that their opportunities for a social life outside of church circles and the domestic sphere are still limited, especially outside of the town of Stornoway, older and middle-aged Lewis women still have very few occasions for 'dressing-up'. But there is more operating here than just these obvious material factors to limit options for the majority of women: there is evidence here of an ideology in clothing habits of what it is to appear feminine according to what might be termed 'traditional' ideas, that, for example, trousers and short hair are not 'feminine'. In the past poverty and remoteness governed the greater uniformity of appearance manipulation, but that history also represents to many a time when there was more moral rectitude, obedience to and respect for the church, as well as closer family and communal ties, and a higher degree of social homogeneity. To show off greater wealth or access to material goods could be seen in the past as mounting a challenge to this last feature of island life; it rebels against a communal reluctance to engage in competition with others, or to display social aspirations, that has been noted by many observers of island culture up to the present and often leads to overly facile assertions that 'there is no class system in the islands'. Other
hierarchies have operated in similar distinguishing ways in recent decades, the structure related to one’s spiritual status being the most obvious one.

Island village women of the oldest, disappearing generation generally never wear make-up and many will not have done so since young adulthood, if ever at all; very many keep their long hair braided and pinned up, in a chignon or a simple roll. Middle-aged women show more variation in all aspects of their appearance. Women who have been in non-manual employment, particularly if this could be regarded as a ‘career’ (rather than ‘just a job’), and who are, therefore, more likely to have extra-domestic interests and spheres of activity, do tend to wear more make-up, fashionable or varied dress, and are more likely to change their hair colour and style than older woman and housewives and at-home mothers. Organized gatherings for worship require more formal, better quality wear than would be normally expected for most types of labour and general leisure time. A suit, or a formal jacket and trousers, with a tie, and perhaps a coat, is usual for men and even young boys for church attendance; most church elders and many other older men also don a formal hat. Elders and deacons dress thus for formal visits to parishioners and other business conducted as part of their church role. No distinction is otherwise made between males according to their station in the religious hierarchy, although a communicant would be expected to dress conventionally at all times and suitably for the context.

For women dress has had, especially in the past, the potential to denote, or to overtly indicate, one’s confessional status as well as communicating various other messages about who one is in relation to the rest of society. The two most distinctively local denominations on Lewis do, to an extent, maintain dress-codes that differ from those of others, like the Church of Scotland or the Roman Catholic Church, and from the habits of urban, and even rural mainland, Free Church and Free Presbyterian congregations, who tend to be more lenient in such matters. Island Free Presbyterian standards are far more stringent, sometimes reflecting past expectations within the Free Church; the latter has gradually modified its views and adherents’ practices, although there are still older people whose views may not differ too noticeably from those of orthodox Free Presbyterians on certain issues. I must point out that the Churches (especially the Free Church in recent times) have recognized the need to adapt. This has, however, been regarded by some as, at best, a necessary evil rather than easily accepted modernization and relaxation, and by many as undesirable (see Appendix 5C-5G). Nan contrasts the stringency of past standards with more liberal contemporary ones: ‘In 1959, when I
returned home [from the mainland], I had a dark red coloured coat which I was not permitted to wear to church as it was considered by my Christian superiors to be too bright! At that time I went to the Gaelic prayer meeting wearing cream coloured shoes and was severely reprimanded by the elder at the door, and advised not to wear them to church again. These were traditions that were wrong (not all traditions are good). . . . It was the permissiveness of the mid-60s that permeated the church, and although many requirements were over strict, the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction. Incidentally, other rules about personal conduct are as equally important to a true Christian.' Elsewhere she writes, 'A Christian should pray for guidance in dress.' (Appendix 5C.4). Furthermore, communicants of either of the Churches are judged not only by their spiritual peers with the cùram, but also by people in general.55

In modern practice, hair length is treated differently in the two Churches, the Free Presbyterian adhering more closely to the Biblical recommendations of St Paul,56 and prepared to deny women communicant status if they contravene the rule, while even in conservative Free Church parishes short-haired women take communion freely.57 In contrast to the current treatment of hair, old Gaelic song and oral literature prioritize hair as one of the features focused upon in the attractions of the opposite sex (see Chapter 8). Females, but not males, are still usually expected to cover their heads when in church; indeed, some older women, usually older communicants, will cover their heads with a headscarf or shawl for any prayer, for example in family worship or when saying grace before eating. In Stornoway uncovered heads are tolerated at Free Church services, just as they attract no comment in mainland congregations, but the majority still wear a hat.58

The status and definition of the genders have been justified, demanded, by the Biblical template, used to excuse and validate subordination, oppression, exploitation - a spiritual determinism operating behind others. Younger women and girls do not differ from their peers elsewhere in Scotland. Amongst Free Presbyterians long hair is, and at one time in the Free Church was, de rigueur for women communicants of all ages.59 In Paul’s teachings the subordinate and less divine origins of women are explicit. He has been given a centrality in particular streams of Protestant thinking, such as that of Highland Presbyterianism. so that tenets of his have been focal to many cultural discourses on gender rooted in a scripturally-based ontology. Contravention of scriptural regulations for the assumption of clothing and other markers deemed to belong to one sex only is often implicated in conversation concerning falling moral standards, sexual promiscuity, non-heterosexuality, and so on, which these Churches condemn.60
Murdina, a Free Church communicant, wrote, ‘I don’t think my way of dress can in any way relate to my degree of faith... On the other hand, I don’t like wearing anything that draws attention to myself, yet I wouldn’t want to appear dowdy. Plain, simple and neat. My faith in the Lord is strong and I wouldn’t want to dishonour that or him’ (Appendix 5D). Although as a person she embodies kindness and a tolerance sometimes lacking in more doctrinaire church-members, Murdina represents what is probably now a conservative Lewis Free Churchism. She does not criticize mainland congregations where women attend services without head-coverings; she places considerable value on everyday custom; and she values stability and convention, with gradual change where needed. Going to church without a hat, she believes, ‘would not be acceptable here in any of the churches. I wouldn’t want to see our church changed from its styles of appearance, but as I am an old 75 year old granny you will forgive me.’ For Kenneth, a Free Church elder in his early fifties in a village which has in the past sustained amongst the largest and staunchest rural congregations on Lewis for both denominations, hair length cannot be ruled upon, far less used to bar someone from communion, but people should be advised according to the Bible’s claims to convey God’s ‘perspective’ on this; hair length ‘should manifest and draw a line between the sexes so that a woman is easily identified as being just that; likewise a man by his somewhat short hair’ (Appendix 5G). (His own young adult daughters, who had an intensely religious upbringing, have short hair and are interested in fashion and personal appearance.) Kenneth, however, has, like many Free Church and Free Presbyterian adherents I know, more doctrinaire ideas about head-covering: ‘Women’s heads should be covered at all times of worship as commanded by God himself. All these things are plain enough in scripture but the people of today are less obedient to God’s command than they were in the past.’

Although some congregants evidently see the island Free Churches as little different from more tolerant urban ones, the evidence from many middle-aged and most older island communicants is that in practice island congregations are still less liberal and adhere more to literal interpretations of the Bible and to past custom, which is for many an important component of the Church in the islands and part of associates’ identity construction and maintenance. Codes regarding hair length and appropriate dress for worship are often observed out of a desire to avoid causing offence to the more conservative minority than out of a belief in the ideas supposedly behind the practices.

A preference for sober, unobtrusive presentation accords with the Presbyterian ethos, and the particular limitations on female appearance stem from a conservative idea based
on the assumption that femininity is inherent and naturally oppositional to masculinity; there should also ideally be very little variation with age per se for mortality should always be in one’s consideration, even if there is some leeway given to youth for experimentation if one is not a committed Christian. One’s appearance as a marker of status beyond confessional aspects, manifests, of course, one’s social situation, age and gender, and, as with other issues of social and cultural role, women’s appearance, the simple wearing of a wedding ring or widow’s weeds, has been used to demonstrate their relationship with significant male others, primarily the male spouse. Passage between phases in the life cycle has relatively little significance to the island churches compared to one’s devotional status which is the paramount issue, conversion being the most important crisis and passage experience. Changes in one’s visual presentation accompanying movement through life crises largely occur outside of the church sphere, except that one’s piety and closeness to the church can intensify particular phenomena, as I point out in my discussion of mourning dress. It seems to be that the island widow who assumes long-term mourning wear, and may often also involve herself more closely with the church than before, is subconsciously seeking to recuperate part of the identity she has lost by enhancing her spiritual condition and her religious status, negotiating a new identity.

The wearing of trousers by women has been singled out as a site for taboo for the devout in the Free Presbyterian, and to a lesser extent the Free, Church (see Appendix 4). Some Free Church communicants insist that they have no strong views at all on others wearing trousers, but have definite different standards for wear inside religious institutions. Women, who are adherents but not full members, do wear trousers outside of church events. This issue concerns again the demarcation of the genders according to what is ‘natural’, ordained by God, and Free and Free Presbyterian Church members I have asked about this insist that the Bible clearly prohibits women wearing men’s clothing and that trousers should be classed as such. The morality implied in dress behaviour is interesting in regard to gender identity: clothing should be in line with perceived physical ‘facts’ which identify people in polar moieties; it might even be seen as an issue in itself that the physical should be at all so important to fundamentally spiritual concerns. Clearly the ideas founded upon interpretations of Biblical prescriptions and proscriptions and the expressed opinions and beliefs of individuals speaking for themselves and their Churches testify to how the material or bodily has metaphysical, spiritual significance; conformity to vestimentary codes is moral, one acting within a religiously based discourse of gender; the body and its physical
wrappings must harmonize with an ontological ‘truth’ embedded in which is, of course, the female’s subservient position in the hierarchy established by the Creation. After outlining his views on female dress, Kenneth continues,

All those things show what a woman’s place should be in society before God. She should be unobtrusive, not loud or clamorous, not seeking to rule over the man, manifesting a quiet inward beauty of holiness to be seen, all of her life and lifestyle to be a rebuke to the ungodly, with the older women of the church setting an example worthy to be followed by the young. (Appendix 5G)⁶⁹

His interpretation of Biblical rules about the relative status of women is supported, not surprisingly, by many Free Church and Free Presbyterian women I know or with whom I have been in correspondence. For example, Nan asserted that ‘Despite the clamour by so-called liberated women for equality - and even superiority to men, the Lord does not give them that place. . . It is plainly stated [in the Bible] that women should keep silent in church. Whoever (female) claims to have a call to preach, etc., most certainly did not get the call from God.’⁷⁰ For a strict, theoretically based view, then, in wearing trousers, male styles of dress, having short hair, a woman is pretending to have masculine qualities; this is not hers to claim and is a disruption of the gender order constructed by God.

Extracting the secular implications from this religiously framed version of the argument, one again sees the notion of performance coming through - without material props, one cannot play the ‘right part’. The very idea that a right part exists is undermined, however, by its construction in performance in the physical, dismantling its status as veracious; ‘truth’ of identity is contingent on its manifestations in line with the specific constructing discourse. In the case above it is one partly founded on an account of divinely executed anthropogony. The wearing of clothes, according to vestimentary codes or rhetorics of dress, is like the uttering of performative locutions, achieving an effect; these ‘speech acts’ in dress and behaviour are meaningful and coherent, intelligible, as far as the ‘speakers’ and ‘listeners’ recognize their existence within, as part of, a discourse of gender identity. What I want to highlight here, and will pick up on again in Chapter 6, is that the identity of the pious woman and the widow are conflated to a degree by women themselves, especially in the way they construct their identity through personal appearance. The image of either is redolent for islanders today of a past, symbolic of a mythologized tradition which is the ground for a particular version of Lewis identity. Piety and grief seem to be so often connected, as have been grief and madness in the figure of the lamenter, whose striking appearance and behaviour seems the opposite of the restrained and sober Christian.
Conclusion
The conservative Protestantism of Lewis can have a profound influence on an individual’s sense of mortality and ideas about the afterlife, even when it may have less influence on other aspects of her world view. The doctrine of the elect is difficult to reconcile with the concept of free will for believers, and for many islanders their post-mortem fate is a consuming interest that occupies them intellectually, emotionally, and in actions. In the first few decades of the twentieth century when the oldest women with whom I have worked in this research were born, the area, although thoroughly Free Church-dominated, retained many signs of the older belief systems and the ways in which islanders managed death often provide examples of this. Practices in the cultural management of death, which seem minor in themselves or merely routine, materialize evidence of how islanders have conceptualized relations between the human and the divine, incarnate and non-corporeal, profane and sacred. Many of the customs described and others would have been duties for the women who assumed the kinds of caring roles described in the next chapter, while beliefs about the soul and afterlife influenced the procedures at wakes and funerals, mourning responses, the content of laments and performances by keening women. Furthermore, Presbyterianism constructs its own variant construction options for gender identities grounded in theological discourse,71 including ideas about how women should behave and look. This is relevant to death in the ways women, especially widows, have partly negotiated their new identity and signalled their bereaved status through a special way of dress which seems to recall an older image of the pious woman.

1 Lewis Christians have given this name to their island. It is used with varying indications of a siege mentality, with a sense of it being one of the last places where God and the Bible are respected as they should be.

2 Although it is the Free and Free Presbyterian denominations that people regard as Gaelic, in its ethos and praxis the Church of Scotland in the Gaidhealtachd tends to be somewhat more doctrinaire, conservative and demanding of members than Kirk congregations elsewhere, apparently bearing traces of the effects of the 1900 and 1929 mergers.

3 The last denomination was adhered to in a considerable proportion of the Gaidhealtachd in the seventeenth century and in many areas survived the reinstatement of Presbytery in 1690 so that the main Highland project of the Kirk in the eighteenth century was the suppression of Episcopalianism, especially after the Jacobite insurrections.

4 For example, in 1841, there were approximately 240 church seats per 1000 people in the Gaidhealtachd; the Disruption precipitated determined church building campaigns by the main denominations and by 1851 there were around 474 seats per 1000 of the population (Brown 1995: 312-13). See also, for example, the Statistical Account and New Statistical Account.

5 Macaulay’s (n.d.) account of religion in Lewis up to the Disruption is inevitably partisan being written by a Free Church minister, but the evidence he cites often highlights how far outside of the ambit of institutional religion the islands were well into the eighteenth century. Macdonald.
gives a quite different summary of some of the main events in Lewis religious history (1990: 107-115).

One of the most interesting features of Highland evangelism was the emergence of *na Daoine*, 'the Men' (the gender specificity apposite), native, often peregrinatory, lay preachers, frequently individuals whose sacredness and skills had been identified for encouragement by a sympathetic minister, but who also had the potential to subvert the authority of conservative clergy and lead local revivals (Hunter 1974; MacInnes 1951: 211-220). In Easter Ross, an area particularly associated with the Men, they distinguished themselves as those believers invited to speak at the Friday meetings before communion Sunday, emerging from such apprenticeships as powerful authoritarian spiritual leaders, known for austerity, strict Sabbatarianism, and their verbal skills, combining mysticism with homely illustration or abstruse expression in their preaching of a severe puritanism utterly intolerant of native secular and spiritual culture. Their identity as a fraternity and their individual membership they marked by growing their hair longer than normal and adopting distinctive, old fashioned garments. Certain Men were reputed and claimed to have special close communication with God, powers of prophecy, and many went through intense personal struggles with Satan and other demons. Their style of leadership and rhetoric are said to have provided an example to the leaders in the land struggles; *na Daoine* seem to have been the first native leadership the Gaels had which emerged from the 'ordinary' ranks. In Lewis and other areas of the north-west today there are still believers who reproduce certain characteristics associated with *na Daoine*, although they have usually found a more mundane, circumscribed roles as church elders and deacons.

In the first volume of the *Carmina Gadelica* there is a good illustration of how far many Gaels in the nineteenth century had come to reject utterly their native culture and heritage and to condemn their forbears for ignorance and irreligion (Carmichael 1900: xxv-xxvii). This inevitably had radical effects on the behaviour of the people in everyday life and their whole creation of an identity. Observers contrasted the post-revitalization gravity and quietness of islanders with their former reputation for having a general love of song, music, stories, games and sports (e.g. Crofters Commission 1902: xcvi; Nicolson 1994: e.g. 272-73).

Thompson Wailey and Lummis (1983) delineate an overwhelmingly bleak picture of recent (1970s and 1980s) Lewis society, especially in their chapter, 'The chiliasm of despair: Lewis', attributing the lack of native economic enterprise and social dynamism to the local Presbyterian ethos. While I can agree with many of their observations, they do over-generalize at points. Their depiction of typical family life as governed by despotic fathers who oppress wives and children alike in emotionally hobbled homes is irrelevant to most of my generation who would not recognize their personal experiences in it.

Until a few years it was often said that the fate of Gaelic depended on the fortunes of the Free Church, the main public arena where the language was used formally, but in many congregations where English sermons would have been the exception that language has taken over to meet the needs of non-Gaelic-speaking congregants. Gaelic's survival is now dependent largely on state education and the mass media, and its health in population concentrations as much as the vitality of small communities.

For example, in the early 1980s, 53% of the population of the Western Isles and Lochalsh District (Skye and adjacent parts of the mainland) attended Sunday services or Sunday school compared with the Scottish average of 17% (Brown 1992: 56), and on Lewis and Harris a sample of 709 people produced the following percentages for adherence: Free Church - 49%; Church of Scotland - 22%; Free Presbyterian - 9%; other - 20%, including those claiming no religious adherence - 16% (Blaxter et al. 1982: 73).

Many non-believers do not want to offend others or to incur the censure of Christian community leaders and members of the Lord's Day Observance Society.

In many sitting rooms still, the main books on display are publications on religious themes, personal conversions, or careers in religion, on theology and of sermons, denomination histories, and biographies of ministers. Religious households often give photographs of favourite ministers pride of place on display.

Alternatively *leantaimh, leantail*. Lean. a' *leantuinn*, follow, pursue; adhere.

*Cùramach* (adj.), careful, anxious. *Cùram*, -ain, -an (masc. n.). 'Tha *cùram* oirre/tha i fo *chùram*'; 'She is converted', literally 'The *cùram* is on her/ she is under (the) *cùram*. 'Cùram/aich' are commonly used in English conversation.
This term is also used in English to refer to the five days, Thursday through to Monday, around the celebration of communion (òrdugh, -uigh, -uighean (masc. n.), rite; decree; arrangement).

Comann is the ordinary Gaelic word for a society or fellowship, and comanachadh, -aidh (masc. n.) refers to the Sacrament of, and participation in, the Lord's Supper.

I can recall several spates of peers in their teens and twenties becoming born again while I was at school in the 1980s; many of those who followed the trend while it was strong subsequently 'lost the cùram' when alternative recreation presented itself, or, often, when they left the island for higher education.

Given the constraints of space, it would be impossible to cite all references in relevant works listed in the Bibliography which relate to death or are pertinent to more general customs and beliefs mentioned in this chapter. Specific references are provided in the text where appropriate. The following list is of works of various forms which have been useful in the production of this chapter: Bennett’s (1992) compilation of writings on the life cycle; Bowman 1986; Buchanan 1942; Buchanan 1793; Burnett 1986; Burt 1815; Buxton 1995; Campbell 1900, 1902; Carmichael 1900a; 1900b; 1940; 1941; 1954; 1971; 1994; Cartwright 1910; Celoria 1965; Garnet 1800; Geddes 1955; Goodrich-Freer 1899, 1902a, 1902b; Gordon 1984, 1992; Gordon Cumming 1886; Grant 1845; Grant 1988; Grant 1989 [1961]; Grant 1811; Henderson 1911; Highland Village Association 1911; Johnson and Boswell 1987; the Lewis Association 1943; Low 1996; MacArthur 1990; MacBain 1888; MacCurdy 1959; Macdonald 1972; MacDonald 1936; Macdonald 1984, 1990; Macdonald 1902; MacDonald 1961, 1966; MacGillivray 1996; MacGregor 1949; MacGregor 1937; Mackay 1924; Mackenzie 1952; Mackenzie 1892; MacKenzie 1919, 1932, 1974; Maclean 1957, 1959a, 1990; MacLellan 1962; MacLeod 1994; MacLeod 1867; MacPhail 1896-1900; Martin 1981; Megaw 1956; Napier 1879; New Statistical Account, 1845; Nicolson 1994; Pennant 1771, 1776; Polson 1892, 1897; Rea 1964; Report of the Crofter’s Commission, 1902; Ross 1976; Shaw 1886, 1993; Smith 1886; Statistical Account of Scotland, 1983; Steel 1965; Stoddart 1801; Thompson 1966; Töcher; Vallee 1954, 1955; Watson 1909; Wentz 1911; Wilson 1842.

I must thank Morag MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies, a native of Scalpay, off Harris, for information on vocabulary used in connection with death in areas other than Lewis, in present usage and in the recent past; she confirmed or pointed out several of the items mentioned in this paragraph. MacLeod remembers her father using the phrase ‘S fhad’ o bha e breothadh a lion-aodaich’, ‘It’s long since he was decaying his linen cloth’, and believes that it would refer to someone he had known rather than one of another generation, although she could not be entirely certain. Although metaphorical, this image is certainly not euphemistic.

"Na toireadh an Cruithfhearr air fhalbh i’e", I have heard of someone who was suffering a lot - "If only God would take her/him away". (Morag MacLeod)

Stóra mentions an interesting belief relating to the soul travelling through or across water: amongst the Skolt Lapps, when the soul left the body the water left in a vessel beside the dying person would appear to be disturbed (1971: 216-7). It may be possible that the vessel of water which was sometimes left beside the corpse until burial, in Scotland, may have served a similar function at one time, although this had long been replaced by an explanation of providing the soul with a drink so it would return.

See Carmichael (1941: 133) for a curious example of the alleged treatment once given to witches in North Uist.

Suicides were buried, with no marker, in unconsecrated ground (e.g. SA 1970/38/B1 (re Achnaba, Argyllshire)), in old disused graveyards, on remote headlands, at crossroads or at some boundary such as between two townships symbolizing their marginality, on hills; their burials were often at night with no ceremony whatsoever, and their bodies laid facing west. Gruesome accounts tell of how fear of suicide revenants led people to drive a wooden stake through the heart before interment. In Skye they had at one time been cremated, reflecting the depth of fear felt by survivors and it was believed that the corpse, like those of others dying before their time, would not decompose until the ‘proper’ preordained date of their death arrived. They were regarded as murderers and treated as such, with their family suffering stigma in the past, but now receive a special unusual pity and sympathy. See e.g. Gordon 1984: 146-9; Frazer 1936: Chapter 3 ‘Dangerous Ghosts’, 103-311 (including suicides 142-61); Macdonald 1902: 29-30. Some very staunch and dogmatic Christians do not allow that suicides can go to
heaven or receive God's forgiveness, and even into the 1960s they were not given proper wakes in the islands.

24 Stillbirths and unbaptized children similarly were buried by dark, often in an unused graveyard; they might be buried with their mother or where rain water would drip on them from a church wall or eaves in a natural baptism (Gordon Cumming 1886: 418-9; Gordon 1984: 143-5; also, e.g., SA 1963/52/B6 (Benbecula); c.f. Pentikäinen 1978: 153-166 and 204-8 (on Finns and Karelians) and Stora 1971: 171-2, and 242-3 (on Lapps)).

25 That a death was soon inevitable might be made clear by the results of divination or the interpretation of omens, in dreams, or second sight and other waking experiences, that had occurred at an earlier time or around that of the illness, as well, obviously, as the actual condition of the patient; other predictions were made from signs around the dead person and from events at the funeral. Most folklore publications made much in the past of the deliberate or incidental methods and signs used by the Gael to foretell future events. For examples and Gaelic terms used for such phenomena, see: Campbell 1900: chapters VII-X; 1902: chapters III and IV; Dorian 1985: 97; Duncan 1995: 116-17; Hamilton 1981: 84-6; Henderson 1911: 224-230; Macdonald 1984: 67; MacGregor 1937: 46-53, 57-8, 63, 69-73; Maclean 1959a; Pennant 1776 vol. 1: 322-25; Ross 1976: 25, 40-41, 96; Shaw 1986: 9-10, 13, 23.

26 In Argyll letting tears fall onto a corpse was said to bring bad luck (Cartwright 1910: 90). C.f. Pentikäinen 1978: 160: a Finnish belief warned that tears that fell on the dead would later burn the deceased like sparks, and excessive grieving prevented them from resting in peace.

27 For example, in a 1991 recording referring to Port Glasgow the informant confirmed that it was still common to cover mirrors to avoid distracting the departing soul or making it visible to the living to whom it was otherwise unseen (SA 1991/15 - part of this interview is transcribed in Bennett 1992: 243-4).

28 In a short article, Richardson (1993) discusses several kinds of boundaries and thresholds in mortuary practices throughout Britain.

29 People of childbearing age, but especially expectant or new mothers, were forbidden to sweep out the room where a corpse lay; and it was a widespread practice before (and in some areas into) this century that suicides were buried out of sight of the sea and crops in the belief that the produce of these would be harmed otherwise.

30 Sluagh, (gen.) sluainn, (pl.) slóigh, (gen. pl.) slògh (masc. n.). Survivors exercised careful custody over the dying and their remains. For example, as the sluagh were thought to come from the west (the direction often associated in Celtic mythology with women and negative values (e.g. Rees and Rees 1990) and all doors and windows on that side would be secured (Watson 1909: 60; Gordon Cumming 1886: 267). Carmichael obtained a lengthy description of the sluagh, their airborne nocturnal battles, their blood staining the rocks as crotal, and the population's fear of being abducted by them for a short while on night-time excursions (e.g. Campbell 1900: 7-25; Carmichael 1900b: 357-8; Wentz 1911: 104). Maclean (1959b: 195) included an account of oral traditions about such incidences of live abductions, including a supposed case in the winter 1951-52 when an old Highland woman inexplicably found herself transported miles away from home one night. Lady Gregory was told in the west of Ireland that only old people were regarded as having died of natural causes, all others having fallen prematurely into the power of the fairy host (Arensberg 1950: 194). The belief in fairies appears to have endured longer in the west of Ireland than in Scotland. Ó Madagain (1989: 29) quotes, second-hand, a woman in a remote part of Ireland in 1985 speaking of her husband as having been 'swept' after his sudden death in early middle age, 'swept being the technical term for "abducted by the Si"'. This word may have been used, of course, in a euphemistic way for unexpected deaths long after a belief in fairies had dwindled away and Ó Madagain does not mention whether there was other corroborating details for this woman actually believing in fairies. In the summer of 1987, Ó Madagain had been able to talk to old people in the Western Isles who could remember a time when there had been a general belief in the ability of the fairies to steal babies (1989: 34).

31 Oral examples of this belief and its enshrinement in folk theology appear in Carmichael 1928: 352-3 (also quoted in Wentz 1911: 85-6); Wentz 1911: 105, 106, and 109 (three accounts from Barra); also see Low 1996: 108, n. 14, 114-115.

32 In late mythology and vestigially in legends and folklore, the fairy population are depicted as the attenuated personifications of the ancient Goidelic deities, the Tuatha Dé Danann. 'Were
the side ("fairies") once in fact ancestors, as some scholars have suggested? Irish medieval authors give no consistent explanation of the side. Some distinguish between them and the Tuatha Dé Danaan, others do not. The distinction between ancestors and deities is often blurred in primal religions' (Low 1996: 45; c.f. Wentz 1911: 23-84 for closely comparable material from Ireland). In the surviving oral testimony, people within the same communities seem not to have been in full consensus about whether the 'fairies' could be identified as dead souls, and individuals often could hold ambiguous views. Legends about humans being abducted by the fairies are generally understood as having largely functioned to help people cope with losses of life and with serious chronic illness or disability in the cases of alleged changelings. Groups with high mortality rates not caused by accidents or old age - babies and young children and parturient or post-partum women - were, therefore, the most likely to have their deaths or long-term illnesses explained by abduction accounts.


34 The skulls of suicides were a well-known component of remedies to ease epilepsy, and sometimes cases of recurring bouts of insanity, throughout the Gaidhealtacht, usually involving the patient drinking water that had been silvered or taken from a holy well, from out of the skull, or unknowingly being given a drink in which a powdered piece of the bone had been mixed. Henderson (1911: 22) knew of such a cure being tried in 1909; according to Ross (1976: 79-83) in Lewis the skull of an ancestor was used; Beith (1995: 183) and Gordon (1984: 151-2) also refer to the practice. In 1992, I was told by someone in their late seventies, from Lewis and whose testimony I trust, of this being done for an epileptic within his memory, in the 1930s, by people he knew and named. The skull had been taken, by night, from a burial area in a neighbouring village, and it seems that the custom was resurrected on this one exceptional occasion by those involved.

35 Although there is hardly any evidence, the custom of a close relative catching the last breath of the dying so that the spirit could live on, which was practised by the classical Romans and by other non-western peoples, may have been once common in Scotland, as suggested in the Gaelic phrase 'Glaicabh mo dheò', 'lay hold of my breath, my vital spark' (Gordon 1984: 10).

36 Deò (fem. n.) (indeclinable). Dia, (gen.) dhé / dhia, (pl.) diathan, (gen. pl.) dhia (masc. n.).

37 Anam, (gen.) amna, (pl.) anman, (en pl.) ammanna (masc. n.).

38 Anail, (gen.) anailach / anaille, (pl.) anailcean (fem. n.).

39 In a tradition more redolent of a 'pagan' sensibility, and suggestive of a different set of values and ideals (but also reminiscent of the Eucharist), the blood is the vehicle of the soul, until it is gradually freed. The spilling of an enemy's blood after their death was sacrilege against their soul and their essence as a former living human; alternatively spilling blood on the ground brought one ill luck (Henderson 1911: 29, 33-4, 44). I will discuss the topic of drinking their blood as an honour to the dead when dealing with laments.

40 See Henderson 1911: chapter II, 'The Wanderings of Psyche (or the External Soul)'. Pentikäinen (1978: 157) provides a Finnish example of the belief found across many cultures in the soul taking the form of a bird when he mentions visions of birds that sometimes occurred at the time of a death.

41 Consider also the customs of telling bees of their owner's death or of hanging mourning cloths over hives throughout Britain (Henderson 1911: 82).

42 This belief firmly belonged in the Christian faith of the people: according to Carmichael's Benbecula informant, the seanchas (traditional knowledge and lore) said that the first dealan-Dè in this world had emerged from Christ's tomb (Carmichael 1941: 4). The butterfly is associated with the divine in all the following Gaelic names for the insect: amadan-Dè (God's fool); anaman-Dè (soul of God); dealbhán-Dè (God's little image); and dearbadan-Dè (God's butterfly). In Celtic mythology birds are often the embodiment of spirits and some of the most important deities, including war goddesses (e.g. see Wentz 1911: 302-305).

43 Amongst poems that seem more consistent with Catholic doctrine Carmichael obtained, for instance, 'four or five versions... in Lewis' of a poem that had been used with a particular tune at funerals in Lewis, Skye and Harris, 'down to Disruption times' (1940: 378-81).

44 Landowners escape, extraordinarily but not surprisingly, with their reputations relatively intact in narrative traditions about clearances and forced emigration.
Nasstrom even sees such ambiguity in ancient Norse religion, in concepts of the afterlife (1995: 40-42).

‘On the whole it is worth noting that the concept of hell was not very actual for Mrs. Takalo. She supposed that no-one really knew what hell is like. . . . On the other hand, she was of the opinion that there the dead are “in fire all their lives.” In claiming this she leaned upon Christian tradition. Certain of the dead beings appeared to remain restless transients in a marge phase akin to the Catholic purgatory.’ (Pentikäinen 1978: 208).

Halloween folklore is included in many general folklore publications and a few focus on it specifically (e.g. MacNeill 1970, 1990).

Vestimentary communication consists of more enduring signals which are less transitory and momentarily changeable than speech and gesture, while it does not require the same degree or kind of interpersonal exchange or contact as verbal intercourse. Personal adornment is one of the most potent markers of gender status in most, if not all, societies, and physical appearance is often our main basis for assigning gender to observed strangers in everyday life. Very often garments and style are assumed to relate to physiological characteristics and may emphasize differences between the sexes, but their links with other factors such as limitations on the physical freedom of women and with gender-associated activities lead us also into the part they play in the processes of construction of gender ideals in a given culture.

Taking inspiration from Roland Barthes and Russian semioticians such as B.A. Uspensky, the Balkanologist Gabriela Schubert (1995a, 1995b) has applied an ‘ethnosemiotic’ analysis to what she calls ‘vestimentary signs’. Schubert emphasizes that just as important to cultural semiotics as the codes themselves are the processes of encoding and decoding. She uses ‘coding’ as it occurs in speech act theory and, with such referencing to particular systems of signification, less broadly employed than the ‘coding’ in women’s folklore as defined by Radner and Lanser (1993) and others (see Chapter 2).

One has to be cautious in the treatment of dress traditions of the past and of rural communities, especially if the epithet ‘folk’ rears its head with the accompanying threat of generalization and the highlighting of unusual contrasts rather than focusing on the everyday, although there is less danger of this with Scottish material because of the relative lack of ‘folk art’ traditions and festive decoration in material culture (compared to many European peasant communities for instance). One has also to remember the sheer dearth of resources in areas like the islands and the levels of poverty that would have allowed little leeway for the creation of such things as special costumes for high points in the calendar or in the life course. And once it was worn out, a garment was adapted if possible to other purposes. Travel writer Norman Lewis satirizes the ‘folklorism’ of Don Alberto, a local landowner and self-appointed keeper of local customs in the Spanish fishing community in which Lewis spent the greater parts of three years just after the Second World War and which is the subject of Voices of the Old Sea (1996). Against a gradual tide of unenthusiasm for such traditions amongst the locals, who lived a hand-to-mouth existence for much of the year, the romantic and conservative Don Alberto revives a costumed ritual for a wine-pressing ‘which the villagers found absurd’ (58-9). When he attempts to introduce a costumed procession into the annual fiesta which had become a pedestrian, dull affair, the pragmatic locals confide in Lewis: ‘The idea of a fancy-dress procession was dismissed with incredulous laughter, and fishermen who mentioned this suggestion to me said, “You listen, and pretend to go along with him. It’s all you can do. In the first place, where’s the fancy dress coming from? I’ve worn the same things you see me in for the past three years.”’ (63)

Herzfeld interprets clothing ‘as a convenient path of entry into other congruent rhetorics’ and points to our latent or implicit acknowledgement of the metaphorical operations of vestimentary systems in our use of terms like, ‘garb, guise, clothed, clad, dressed’ in reference to figurative, and other features of, language (1987: 100).

Employment exiles and other out-migrants sent home money and clothing while the mass media began to seep into island culture bringing new images of what one could look like, pulling the area further into a mainstream of life in Scotland and beyond. Rural areas had been served by individual, and groups of, travelling tinworkers, tinkers or ceardan, who sold sundries including clothing. Lewis has been largely dependent on catalogue shopping and on the Stornoway outlets of the Pakistani immigrants (who in the late 1930s first appeared as peripatetic merchants) and their Scottish children and grandchildren and a couple of shops run
by other locals, for affordable clothing on the island. Any other clothing stores that have been set up in the town are generally more expensive and carry garments for special occasions, or cater for specific needs, like sportswear. A number of outlets serve the demand for workwear. Many people treat holidays as shopping trips or take short breaks in Scottish towns for primarily that purpose.  

Vallee's (1954) account of social organization in Barra and Vatersay, based on anthropological fieldwork conducted between 1951 and 1953, situates the islands within wider 'communities', as integrated into the mainstreams of life in the British Isles, but with distinctive local social and cultural features, more successfully than many commentators on the Gaidhealtachd at that time and since then. He provides a detailed account of quotidian domestic life during a phase of considerable change in living standards and accelerated post-War interaction with the outside world. While there were then older women who still wore tartan shoulder plaids and large head shawls, the modern modification, in the form of the headscarf worn by most island women at that time, was the same garment found throughout the country. Barra women dressed more like their mainland counterparts than local men did (1954: 19).

I asked some of the women who have been part of this research in personal correspondence for ideas that certain words prompt for them. My questions and their answers are given in Appendix 4. Responses to 'feminine' and 'masculine' lay emphasis on visual images and feature cultural stereotypes about the physical constitutional 'nature' of the genders; answers prioritize appearance, especially in mentioning clichéd ideas about 'feminine' clothing. Most of these women grew up at a time when the standards they described were unthinkable for the average island woman and quite alien to the communities because of local lifestyle, material prosperity and access to resources; 'feminine' denotes something ideal and exceptional, incompatible with the women's lifestyle. Several of the women are or were nurses and the neat uniform of the district nurse or a relative in the profession sometimes influenced their choice of career. This image and life contrasted sharply with life choices which had been available to their mothers, for whose generation there had often been very few routes to experiencing work life outside of their villages, except for entering domestic service or participating in the herring industry as a gutter or packer in a seasonal team. The role models women mention, other than celebrities they admired, were mostly young adult female relatives whose appearance was important to this and who embodied non-island ideas and aesthetics. There are no ideas in these responses relating to memories of earlier years of their life which could be construed as reflective of specific island values or cultural preferences.

The women also defined, amongst other terms, cailleach and bodach, which literally mean 'old woman' and 'old man' respectively, but carry a range of associational connotations, some ideas that are very much undesirable and not approved for non-geriatrics, and others that are more positive images of past individuals and community life, where clothing traditions were quite different - 'It's seldom one sees a real "cailleach" these days' (Nan) - images either redolent of oppressive poverty and social structures, or part of a nostalgic remembrance of the old days. Cailleach for most stimulates memories that alternate between warmth and austerity, of elderly womanhood and often widows in the past, clad in long, loose, black garments: 'Cailleach brings to mind an image of the old ladies I knew clothed in black with the skirts pleated and down to their ankles, maybe with a shawl over their shoulders and their heads covered either with a beannag [headscarf or shawl] or a knitted curac [cap], sitting at the side of the fireplace, and always with a welcoming smile on their face' (Ishbel); 'black clothes, shawl, hair in a bun' (Nan); 'An old lady, ankle length skirt, fitted bodice with an old-fashioned brooch, laced-up boots, black stockings, hair dressed-up and held with combs and pins' (Murdina). The bodach appears as 'an old man with a long beard smoking a pipe (your great-grandfather [i.e. a specific person the informant remembered])' (Dolina); 'cap, pipe, and braces showing. The beards had disappeared by my time' (Ishbel); 'wearing serge trousers, button-up waistcoat and jacket, shirt and tie or collarless, cap and boots' (Murdina); 'dressed in black with a black or dark blue knitted jersey' (Lena). Catherine offered another idea of these terms that evokes the often cited descriptions of crofter men of the recent past sauntering along, stopping for frequent 'cigarette breaks', while the women are incessantly busy and take the weightier onus for life in general: the bodach means to her 'One who rests on his oars', while the cailleach is 'One who has battled through.' Beyond the everyday usage of all these words is a shared image of a type which increasingly belongs to history in real terms.
Appendix 5 includes the views of some of my informants about mourning wear.

56 Even if the non-communicant disagrees with the certain ideas and with the way of life expected of the born-again, there is very often perceptible an opinion that publicly testifying to having the curam and taking communion entails aspiration to the fulfilment of various responsibilities, such as an image to uphold, if one is also to accrue the perceived benefits of religious status in the community.

56 According to St. Paul, God ordained that men should bare their heads during acts of prayer or prophecy (1 Corinthians 11 vv. 4 and 7), ‘forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God’ (v.7). However, Paul, who says in this same epistle that ‘the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man’ (v.3), advises that ‘every woman who prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is all as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered’ (vv. 5-6); woman is ‘the glory of man’ (v.7), created for him as he is created for God, and her glory is to have long hair, ‘for her hair is given to her for a covering’ (v.15), although not one that suffices for worship apparently. For men to have long hair, Paul says, is for them a shame, for they are the glory of God (v.14), but neither are they told to shave their heads, so hair is not a requisite mantle and, therefore, women require two coverings. I can remember having explained to me as a child that covering the head during worship was rather like bowing one’s head and closing one’s eyes during prayer, partly because one cannot and should not try to look upon God, and that one is not fit to have the topmost part of the body bared in his house or at other times when one attempts to communicate with him. When I ask Christians about covering one’s head for worship it is usual to have 1 Corinthians 11 cited and to be more or less told that this is all one needs, ‘it’s all there’.

57 People will refer to texts such as the above quoted letter of St Paul’s and the story of a woman who washed and dried Christ’s feet with her hair; the motif of ‘crowning glory’ still arises and some believers say, for instance, that they would have longer hair if their hair was not so weak or thin or if they suited it, so the issue is one affected by personal desires. There is nothing to suggest that the conventions of the church in anyway reflect a high valuation of hair. There is no celebration of this idea, indeed, there seems to be more of a reaction against it and what it could lead to that makes one think vaguely of, for instance, Muslim ideas whereby the sight of a woman’s hair is potentially loaded with sexual temptations for a man, and exposure of hair is immodest and provocative.

58 Although a feature of menswear in other parts of the world, drapings and wrappings around the head have been, into this century, associated throughout most of Europe with the female. Until recently the headscarf or similar head covering was a symbol of the mature woman in most countries, in urban and rural areas, but it has gradually become a more rustic or parochial image, relatively seldom seen now on younger women even although it may be a prominent part of traditional dress for festive occasions and folklorism events, a symbol in much of Europe of the peasantry, and of folk identities often manipulated for political effects and purposes (see Schubert 1995b).

59 Among Free Presbyterians, growing one’s hair, along with other alterations in personal presentation, if these occur concurrently with attendance at weekday services and prayer meetings, in addition to normal Sunday services, will often elicit speculation that a woman is leantulinn or has been through spiritual conversion, whether or not she has made this known in other ways.

60 Even those who observe the doctrine closely in their own conduct realize they cannot impose such ideas on the world, even their own children, and are keen to stress that appearance should, after all, reflect one’s true inward state and should not be used to make claims that are not consistent with one’s internal spiritual condition.

61 Rhoda is the daughter of one of my informants, Seonag, and Murdina’s niece. She is in her forties, was brought up on the mainland, but has been a yearly visitor to the island all her life, and attends a Free Church in a Lowland city. She regarded my questioning of her mother about female head-covering, hair length and trouser-wearing as irrelevant to that denomination in the 1990s and thought that my implied view of the Church was ‘antiquated’, only applicable to Free Presbyterians (see Appendix 5E). She was keen to stress that the Free Church is a much more liberal institution than my questions suggested: ‘dress code is no longer an issue, both here and on the mainland.’ This testimony has to be treated with caution, for others, and, from my own
observation, I, would not entirely concur with her perspective on rural Lewis Free Church congregations, although the Church has had to modify doctrines and practices that were increasingly irrelevant to the lives of its adherents, especially the young, and is a more liberal establishment than it was twenty years ago. I suspect that she offers an image of the Free Church which many of its constituents are working towards and would hope to be true in the future of the islands, and which has been achieved in most mainland congregations. Even then, there are often many people in such modernized parishes who disapprove of innovation. The theoretically permissible is of less interest or significance here than how the ‘average’ Lewis congregant perceives the Free Church and how they act in ways they believe to be in line with its teachings. It is clear that people of both denominations rarely will concede that the doctrines shared by or individual to their Churches are the result of hermeneutics (which would imply the possibility of alternative interpretations); they assert instead that the readings offered are literal ones of transparent Scripture – ‘Anyone who studies the Bible should have no difficulty in understanding the tenets of the Church. The Lord did not shroud doctrine in mystery’ (Nan; Appendix 5C.9).

Dollag, a born-again Christian, in her early sixties, who was brought up in a strict Free Church household in Lewis, says of her Free Church congregation in East Kilbride, Lanarkshire, a town with a fair number of islander residents: ‘Most of the women don’t wear hats, it’s only the older women who wear them. I wear one but I think it’s because of tradition and being brought up in the Free Church. Trousers, no, I’ve never seen any of the women wearing trousers but I’ve seen an odd teenager wearing them, but I suppose it’s only a matter of time before that’ll change as well, once our generation has gone, tradition will go as well. We are seeing it already in lots of things today. We do things today and allow things that my father’s generation would have been horrified at. I even see women with make-up and lipstick going to the communion tables while in my young days the ministers would have labelled them as Jezebels and banished them from the church.’ (Appendix 5F) The testimony of Murdina, Dollag, Kenneth and many other Free Church members I know shows that there is still some continuity with the past, most evidently in the attitudes and self-conduct of older Christians, a substantial sector of the Church (see Appendix 5).

6 One’s insider or outsider status is important here: a complete stranger would be excused transgression of local norms, but the same leniency might not be extended to a visitor with close local connections and others would wonder why she had not been advised properly, or whether her contravention of custom was a deliberate act of objection.

6 Free Churshism can be seen to have less importance here in terms of religious, spiritual meaning than as a cultural tradition which can be traced geographically and temporally; where a ‘folklore’ of church custom and ethno-theology are more relevant than the strictly doctrinal or exegetical role of the Church.

6 In the past, the transition between marital states was made all the more overt by conventions of appearance, particularly, as much of rural Scotland, in regard to hair and headgear and in mourning apparel. Until the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, unmarried women and matrons were distinguished by a change of head-dress, with the presumed loss of virginity, and ascension to full adult status. There were localized and historical variations. For information about Highland head-wear in the past see, for example: Buxton 1995: 93; Carmichael 1900a: xxv; Geddes 1955: 184; Gordon Cuming 1886:126; Grant 1989: 327-330.

6 There may be underlying, older factors to the documented past folk practices which may have some very sparse vestiges in current ideology about the feminine. In many belief systems hair is believed to be the medium by which the body’s energies and potentials are emanated into the surroundings and by which on the other hand emanations from outside enter the person’s body. Consequently, women’s heads had to be covered from the time of their fertility [or marriage] (Schubert 1995a: 94-5); women were, simultaneously more vulnerable than men to harm from the outside world and had more potential to pollute. In traditional Gaelic folklore one could magically cause harm to another with hair from that person, so it was taboo to cut a baby’s hair or nails until it was a certain age in some parts of Scotland and people were often vigilant to collect and dispose of their own hair. A Gaelic supernatural legend, as another example, tells of how a woman endangers the life of relatives aboard a fishing boat and provided the etiology for an old prohibition against brushing one’s hair whilst one’s menfolk were at sea. There is also an international folk tale motif of the extraordinary, often pubic, hair a hag uses to bind her enemy
supernaturally, and the belief in one’s power or essence inhering in hair is illustrated in the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah.

66 We were constantly reminded of our femininity as we grew up. It would have been anathema to wear trousers, or have a boy’s hairstyle, or to wear any clothing that appeared masculine. I remember my younger sister once played football in a nearby park with a group of young boys and several neighbours came to complain to my parents of the “disgrace” (Nan; Appendix 4J.13). ‘The one thing I remember [about prescriptions about femininity when growing up] was that I was not able to wear trousers, “As they were not for girls, they were for boys”’ (Lena; Appendix 4G.14). ‘I never wore trousers until I earned enough money to buy a pair - my parents felt they were manly and went against Free Church ideology’ (Katy-Ann; Appendix 4F.3). One Free Presbyterian communicant who disapproves of women in trousers comments: ‘To be feminine was, as I mentioned earlier, very much to do with attire. Wearing of trousers was most certainly frowned upon as being first and foremost unscriptural, and then uncomely for a woman to wear man’s attire. Then the teaching of the Bible was preached to us. I can remember the first girl I saw in slacks and she was thought of as an undesirable character, brazen.’ (Ishbel; Appendix 4E.11)

67 Murdina, who had worn this garment during the War but not since, says she has no real opinion on the matter generally, but ‘I would definitely say “no” to any woman coming to church in trousers, far less wanting to become a member.... I think it’s important that all members should maintain and set a good example to others in the way of dress.’ (Appendix 5D) Although more ‘liberal’ Free Church congregations (including apparently the Free Church in Stornoway, according to one correspondent) do not frown upon trousers in church, most women would never do this in village parishes, except to a wedding. Again, the motivation is often to avoid offending the older and more conservative Christians rather than any personal belief in the wrong of this behaviour, less a religious matter and more one of conforming to custom.

68 Kenneth wrote (Appendix 5G) regarding failures in separation of the genders with reference to this subject: ‘Again it is surely to do with maintaining the difference between the sexes and anyone looking at the state of our nation today... can see how things small in themselves can influence the whole of society to the extent that it can eventually lead to God’s judgement of us in wrath.’ Knowing Kenneth personally, I would say that he represents a conservative core and his views, although not his everyday bearing and interaction, are quite dogmatic and uncompromising.

69 The quotations from Kenneth exemplify a striking element in Lewis religious expression, a linguistic register employed by believers in English and Gaelic, even in informal conversational contexts when concerned with their faith. The rather formal, somewhat old fashioned language echoes that used for worship by ministers and lay people, an idiom in which many converted men become skilled, especially if they aspire to be an elder or deacon. Women too learn to use this register through professing their faith, sharing their experiences with others and in prayer, and it can be both impressive and disquieting for someone for whom religion plays no part in her everyday life to be speaking with a believer about mundane topics when they switch into this mode of articulation. This language reflects a more structured traditional idiom used for public prayer and exegesis, an inheritance from the nineteenth century evangelicals. But the island churches are changing and the ability to engage in complex theological discussion is of less interest to many younger Christians whose lives are filled with other pursuits. A relative who is an elder in the Free Church spoke to me of his regret at the loss of a Highland tradition he had orally inherited and at the younger generation’s relative disinterest in hermeneutic exploration and debate. Just as the emotional and visual impact of a Lewis funeral procession can make a viewer forget about the exclusion of women and admire the event, professions of devotion to island Presbyterianism and to one’s God can often be impressive in the sincerity, dignity and seriousness of their expression.

70 She continues, ‘That does not mean women have no role to play in Christianity, e.g. visiting the sick and housebound, praying at home and in silence in church, serving Sabbath school, Campaigners [a Free Church youth activity group organized by adults and teenagers and very like organizations like the Brownies, Guides, or Scouts], all temporal church functions, cleaning the church, etc.’
71 The creation and promulgation of specific but temporal versions of gender ideals within island religious discourse, and the whole question of the position of women in the Churches are topics which require research.
CHAPTER 4
CARING FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

Introduction
Having set a general scene in Chapter 3, by reviewing some of the cultural practices and religious beliefs connected with death in the Gaidhealtachd, I turn here to certain aspects of performances by women which require an element of caring, and to consider how these may be interpreted ethnologically and as exemplary of traditional and, to an extent, still prevalent gender-based assignments of activities in Lewis communities. This discussion focuses on private routines and activities which have been or are regarded as simply part of 'women's work' in the sequence of events around a death, before a consideration of wakes and funerals as more formal occasions in another chapter. In relation to the roughly chronological sequence of death, the experience of caring can begin some time prior to the death, changing with the event itself and in the subsequent phase, the focus gradually shifting onto the needs of the living rather than those of the dying or the dead person. My frame of reference encompasses recent decades and the contemporary situation, particularly drawing on notes made of field observations, personal correspondence, and interviews about death customs and beliefs in the School of Scottish Studies, as well as some pre-twentieth century material.

I use the idea of 'caring' and of domestic responsibilities to encompass an extensive field of activities, conduct and ideas: tending to the dying and to the needs of the bereaved; the important laying-out of the corpse for burial; creating a site for, and carrying out, many of the religious, vernacular or institutionally enshrined, rites within the home and other customary practices; and providing hospitality to visitors to the home. Caring for others, including the dead, has been a responsibility generally delegated to women. Diachronic changes in the nature of such caring and related duties, which reflect developments in the management of death and its aftermath and in the categories of people involved, have expressed and been the outcome of altered understandings of what each gender means, their relations, and the aspects of identity open to someone in a particular context. Cultural constructions of gender ideals and of appropriate roles for men and women, conventionally justify and motivate, and are justified, perpetuated and manifested by, the demarcation of 'gender-appropriate' spheres of activity and behaviours which permeates the quotidian.

The activities referred to are set in contexts of studying domestic culture and domestic ideology which identify women with caring and with the home, and in contexts of
women's folk or informal culture. Some of the symbolic and practical changes and actions which in the past had to be undertaken in a home at the time of a death are enumerated in Chapter 3 and I discuss the subject in generalized terms. The female task of lamenting and public crying in the past (considered in Chapters 7 and 8) might also be considered as a kind of care undertaken later in the death sequence. Protecting and attending to the welfare of others, assuaging the departed spirit and assisting its transition, and helping the bereaved by channelling grief and fulfilling the ritual requirements of a lament, are as important in such a performance as the personal expression of the singer's loss.

**Studying domestic culture**

The labour of caring for others at and after a death, and the observation of mortuary requirements in the private sphere of the household, have to be situated in the context of primary and extended caring at all times, critical and mundane. The roles involved generate experiences, knowledge and skills that are less usually a part (if at all one) of male experience. The ethnologist's or 'folklorist's eye for the meaningful patterns of everyday life' (Levin 1993: 285) means that her/his investigations are often into aspects of life (like the domestic and crafts) deemed to be relatively irrelevant or trivial in other approaches to the study of (and definitions of) culture which often grant even less attention to the unacknowledged, unpaid labour and expertise and everyday experiences of women in the home, within the family and neighbourhood. Feminist scholars (from the 1970s especially, and often within the context of Marxist critique) who devote critical study to housework and the labour divisions within the home also demand re-evaluation of women's unpaid labour as productive in ways unacknowledged by prevailing employment norms and the market economy; and, thereby, further politicize and question women's 'unseen', informal, unpaid care and running of households.¹

For several reasons, however, folklorists and ethnologists, often with feminists among them, generally neglect much of the domestic and caring work carried out in the private sphere, even while they follow a frequent interest in crafts and recognized public skills and are well placed to investigate this subject.² Domestic labour and informal caring are regarded as relatively inconsequential by researchers in the mainstream of folklore research, while they are often defined by feminists as a sphere to be studied and quantified primarily or exclusively in order to be able to describe its centrality in the oppression of women. Spectators, then, at possibly opposing poles of opinion regarding
gender inequality sometimes share a basically negative evaluation of such work and responsibilities, and of women’s experiences of these as uninteresting; they receive and, therefore, appear to merit, only scant attention or respect, are repetitive and routine, sometimes seem undemanding, and are frequently undertaken in isolation. For such reasons women’s everyday domestic labour has been largely excluded from the remit of ‘occupational folklore’.3 Central aspects of women’s lives are often judged as unimportant because habitual and conventional; ‘for many folklorists, it is the “adornment” that makes the work worthy of study’ (Levin 1993: 289), it is the ritualization and aesthetics of an activity for more than one person that gives it significance far beyond its productive or utilitarian values for some scholars, rather than any importance it derives intrinsically from being something central and repeated in ordinary life. Furthermore, in the past, and too often in the present, near-obsolescence or redundancy have been prioritized criteria for defining a subject as deserving of folkloristic study, as have been its strangeness and novelty for the researcher.4

Fortunately there are many studies that do investigate women’s domestic strategies as complex, little understood and deserving analytical attention, and which explore the ambivalent relationships women have with domestic roles. Examples of the issues tackled by these sorts of studies are: the informal, everyday support systems women structure within a community (Aamodt 1981); the practical resourcefulness women require just to ‘get by’, which is generally omitted from the economic equation yet crucial to it (Oberhauser 1995); how other kinds of ideology (for example, rural identity) can be intimately intertwined and mutually defining with the domestic (Stebbing 1984); and how to use women’s experiences to redefine concepts of ‘work’ (Wright 1995). Paying attention to the everyday reveals, for example, alternative chronological, life course patterns and structures of which those who research women’s lives need to be aware (Davies 1996). Finding ways to research, document, and revalue the knowledge and skills involved in women’s quotidian experiences in the home and in the community represents changes in, and a challenge to, what is given epistemological privilege.

It can be problematic for a feminist researcher to devote considerable research energy to detailed study of domestic routine because so much of the work dedicated to ameliorating the position of women necessarily, of course, has been and is concerned with liberating women from domestic ideology and the traditions of the home. To study the household and family-centred labour and responsibilities of women requires taking care that one never valorizes the domestic in ways that could support sexist ideology:
Feminist folklorists couldn’t very well argue that housework was creative and traditional [i.e. ‘folklore’ at all], because that argument was the very one used to argue that women’s place was in the home. [And the] mop bucket... was something to be gotten away from (Levin 1993: 288).

Some researchers have reflexively engaged themselves with these dilemmas. Yocom has addressed on a personal experiential level the difficult process entailed in taking on for documentation and study mundane women’s work (Yocom: 1990, 1993a). She describes how, as part of the retrospective self-scrutiny she was compelled to undertake, it was necessary to reflect upon her subject-choices and motivations for research, and upon her initial resistance to investigating, and identifying with, those aspects of housewives’ lives with which she believed she shared little common ground or which she believed she ought not to find interesting. This is an experience of, not least of all, changes in self-understanding that many feminist researchers regard as necessary and valuable to discuss.

Assessing oneself as a feminist and having a much wider range of life choices to women who follow a home-centred, traditional role, the researcher reflexively discovering that she actually may have more in common with guardians of domesticity than she has believed has to alter her own sense of who she is. She often has to confront, in ways perhaps previously resisted, that she has also been inculcated by and subjected to the domestic ideal; that she relies on the fact that other women will sustain and adhere to an ideal which she might believe she opposes and treats as a virtual anathema; or the realization that that she might actually sometimes find the intimate operations of running a household and the subject of caring for others of interest, even if this is solely within the confines of research, and does not imply she would choose such a life for herself. Some primary dilemmas are how to investigate and represent roles and activities in sensitive ways which also accommodate issues such as: some women’s very real pleasurable satisfaction from and preference for a traditional role even when offered alternatives; the complexity and inventiveness of routine which are not ordinarily apparent, the sheer resourcefulness and creativity of the carer or homemaker to achieve her aims and make her work not just tolerable, perhaps enjoyable; the rules and custom underlying what seems to be informal, spontaneous or individual, and the fact that domestic actions can be signifying ones, symbolic, communicative and artistic performances which can even use coding strategies; and the importance of foregrounding the high value of such labour and the dependence of others upon it. Balancing all of this there has to be a steady avoidance of any tendency to romanticize this sphere, acknowledging all the negatives - boredom, isolation, service without reward.
or gratitude, repetitiveness, its possible enforcement - and maintaining, perhaps, an engagement with one’s intentions as a feminist to expose and challenge mechanisms of female subordination.

When one looks at women’s past and present domestic roles and responsibilities on Lewis, it is very easy, especially for the historical situation, to focus on negative aspects, and certainly there was and is plenty to criticize and condemn. Women’s lot was undoubtedly, much of the time, from a modern perspective, rather abject (although life for neither gender was easy) and this was compounded by religious dogma which often justified female oppression. But it would be inappropriate and negligent to underestimate or discount the importance for many women of fulfilling domestic roles and to ignore that, while it may seem women had no alternatives to such a way of life, individual personal interpretations and conceptions of caring, household and maternal roles, made their experiences idiosyncratic and important. Variation is also apparent in the ways these ideas and the possibilities for their negotiation change historically. Where opportunities for other life-course avenues are limited or non-existent, the importance of domestic, mothering and other caring role ideals to an individual woman’s sense of self has to be appreciated, and attempts made to understand the available discourses within which she can construct a consistent gendered identity.

**Hebridean homemaking**

The history of very late extremely poor levels of housing in the Gaidhealtachd, the Outer Hebrides especially, the absence of amenities, a lack of natural resources for furnishings and building, endemic poverty and overcrowding in homes and on the land, the wet and windy climate, and the sheer amount of work required to simply feed, warm and clothe a subsistence household, have contributed to the moulding of one side of island women’s perceptions of themselves as historically wives, mothers, and other carers, with culturally specific versions of these roles and ideals. The domestic ideal is a construct variable with such factors as class, local economy, material resources, and religious denomination, and as has been observed all over the country, when members of the middle class (from the Victorian period especially) have decided to improve the conditions of the lower classes, they impose their values and priorities upon them, including in the separate spheres model, for example, an idea of femininity dependent on more prosperous women’s relative seclusion in the domestic environment with children and other dependants. In Glasgow tenements or crofter-fishing townships, criticism
directed at the domestic surroundings of the poor being implied criticism especially of the females of the household as ignorant, incapable, lazy, or negligent, of not being properly ‘feminine’. Island generations who had a chance to see the outside world realized that past poverty was more to blame for low standards of living in which they had been brought up, but at the same time their earnings and new access to commodities granted no excuses for not attempting to take on the standards of domesticity concomitant with new levels of comfort and affluence.8

Within crofting, the home had a productive role, and when fishing had a domestic base this was even more the case. Family households, into the 1940s and 1950s, were also, to an extent, productive labour units: as well as working at agriculture and fishing men laboured at times for a wage; women worked the croft, the moor for fuel, and manufactured a certain amount of the family’s clothing, as well as doing other indoor work; grandparents and other dependants contributed labour and childcare; children helped with agricultural work, herding and peat-processing, and girls with housework and childcare, boys with fishing and outdoor labour. Beyond the immediate family, systems of mutual aid and communal labour strengthened wider kin connections, as, of course, did limited geographic mobility and relative isolation. Sharing productive labour amongst households continues although people now engage in far fewer communal activities or they can afford to pay for outsiders to do such work (e.g. peat-processing).

There was little substantial amelioration in island living standards before the twentieth century, but with changing employment patterns, increased contact with the outside world, the start of the Welfare State, and more understanding and awareness of each other between outsiders and islanders, changes in the early decades of the twentieth century led women to look more objectively at the struggles of their mothers to raise large families in often extended households, while croft, peat and shore labour left very little time for ‘mothering’ and for what housework in modern homes means. Domestic skills became a valuable, marketable ‘commodity’: for my grandmothers' generation, born at the end of the nineteenth and in the first third of the twentieth century, apart from seasonal labour in the fishing (primarily the herring) industry, domestic service was the only other ticket available to many young women to a degree of adult independence and to leave the islands for at least a while. The majority of the next generation continued to leave the islands, temporarily or permanently, in the 1950s, 1960s and to a lesser extent the 1970s, at the ages of fourteen or fifteen, to go into hotel work, nursing or service
employment of other kinds, unless they were fortunate enough to have families who could afford, and had the will, to support them in education beyond that age.

Although radical changes in the numbers of wives and mothers in paid employment, age shifts at marriage and first pregnancy, and debates (at least) about the gendered divisions of labour inside and outwith the home, have all influenced island attitudes and lifestyles in recent decades, a significant proportion of middle-aged women particularly define themselves primarily through aspiring to the ideals of the mother and/or homemaker, with adaptations and constraints imposed by specific features of local society and its values. Many say they are sorry or resentful that they lacked opportunities for other achievements in their lives; that they unquestioningly accepted as young women the prevailing familial model; and that they want younger women’s lives to be different. This factor in their socialization profoundly structured their life courses and the ongoing formation of selfhood. A woman can be living through these ideas while at the same she is critical of the status quo. Tidiness and cleanliness of the house are taken as almost metonymic for the internal well-being of the household and the integrity of its inhabitants, for their respectability, of which, on Lewis, women are the custodians. ‘[A] dirty house is a disintegrating person. The compulsion to housework, then, is not economic or legal, it is moral and personal. And the housewife sees it in moral and personal terms’ (Williams, Twort and Bachelli 1982:115). The personal investment made by the housewife and mother into her perceived role is considerable and profound.

Caring in a crisis
I turn here to the female-designated responsibilities and activities which have been practically or symbolically requisite in response to a death: women’s treatment of the body, which has in the past included the treatment of the noncorporeal, especially because of beliefs that the spirit might need protection and possibly encouragement to settle in the afterlife; and the management of the home and attention paid to survivors. Identification of the female in various cultures with the physical and with nature (and frequently, therefore, with the chaotic, unmanageable, ‘unknowable’), birth and death, plays a part in women’s high degree of involvement with the body, dead or alive. Menstruation, for instance, as the loss of blood without injury or illness, can be suggestive of death (a temporary one from which women recover) in many cultures (e.g. see Shuttle and Redgrove 1986), with symbolism in rites and oral traditions developing from this comparison. Its repetitiveness can be taken as homologous to the repetition of
death and of reincarnation or transmigration in cosmologies with cyclic views of life. Similarly, of course, death in this world can be understood as a birth into the other, the tomb a uterus for the gestative soul. Such suggestions of, and explicit parallels drawn with, female procreative functions, provide some reasoning for why in so many belief systems women can deal with the physical remains but not with the official religious duties, and this division is reflected in the gendered roles at Lewis wakes and funerals (Chapter 5).

A high proportion of islanders have until recently died and, to a decreasing degree, still do die at home, or while being looked after in the household of a relative. In times when few people left their native area, and unless the death was sudden, almost all died in or near their resident township, and no alternatives existed for the care of those unable to look after themselves. Supporting and nursing someone who was chronically infirm or ill in crowded pre-improvement housing, which in itself contributed to premature deaths, would always be difficult. One-chamber thatched dwellings (including the blackhouse type), with a central hearth, box-beds and little or no glazing, were general in the Hebrides into the twentieth century. Improvement only began long after standards had started to rise in the Lowlands and much of the mainland Highlands. For example, one contributor to the New Statistical Account reported, circa 1836 that, ‘the Island of Lewis is a full century behind other parts of Scotland, in agricultural and domestic improvements’ (NSA vol. XIV, Ross and Cromarty section: 121). As registers of deaths were generally not kept in most island parishes until well into the nineteenth century, and when they were they were patchy, often inconsistent, and unreliable, it is difficult to construct even an impressionistic idea of mortality rates from island to island. Even as villages became less isolated and subsistence-based, poor nutrition, illnesses caused by exposure to the climate, periodic crop failures causing famine situations, accidents at sea and on cliffs, neonatal tetanus, and epidemics of cholera, smallpox or tuberculosis (a significant killer into the 1950s) all contributed to early deaths, adding to the high maternal and infant mortality rates. Legislation in 1854 made the registration of deaths statutory from the following year, but, according to the findings of the 1912 Dewar Report, which provided the impetus for the establishment of the Highlands and Islands Medical Scheme in 1915, in remote parishes almost half (and in extremely isolated areas, like parts of Ardmamurchan, up to 90%) of all deaths were not actually certified. This indicated the sparseness of medical services in the Highlands and Islands, in that non-certification was the result of no doctor having attended the patient during the last
illness so that no cause of death could be recorded. In Lewis cottages, life had often to go on, quite literally, around death.

Before the state made professional health care available in the Gaidhealtachd, in communities coping with whatever folk medical knowledge and resources they possessed, certain women and men were often particularly noted for their expertise and lore, and sometimes an innate or acquired gift for healing specific conditions. Mature women had the largest primary care-giving burden, secondary care was shared throughout the female community, and the socialization of a girl prepared her to be a carer. As in most of Scotland, many villages, or separate neighbourhoods within a village, would have had a local recognized ‘laying-out woman’, who would direct the procedure while being helped by family members, even into the mid-twentieth century for some time after professional nursing services became available. When someone died, particular women, members of the household, the laying-out woman, or others close to the dead, were responsible for the work of transforming the domestic surroundings so there was a site for rituals that were enacted to facilitate the passage of the soul and the movement of the living from previous relations and status, into an uncertain marginal space of transition and adaptation, to prepare for eventual incorporation into new conditions.

I consider here just some aspects which lie behind why responsibility for the dying and the dead body has, according to most evidence, traditionally lain with women, with my emphasis being on the needs of, and the importance of this to, the living community (rather than the soul requiring ritual support). It is essential to remember that during many periods children have made up the majority of mortalities and that many young women died or had their health seriously and often chronically damaged in connection with childbearing. Female responsibility for the dead would seem like a logical extension of mothering, midwifery and ‘obstetrical’ duties. Lewis women ensured the performance of appropriate and necessary apotropaic and protective rites, fulfilled the perceived practical requirements in the preparation of the corpse, and offered comfort and some continuity and normality. As with most customary practices, mortuary observances exemplify the ways that the purely practical and the symbolic and ritualistic can be densely, complexly intermingled. Each life crisis highlights the dependence of the community upon those who fulfilled these roles, and, by accepting the part of carers for the living and the dead, women reaffirm what they understand about themselves and their relations with others within the township, while activating and adding to stores of
relevant knowledge acquired informally and practically as part of socialization and their ‘folk education’.

Mundane, routine actions can be actually rich and polysemously symbolic, meaningful in unexpected, culturally variable ways that can be defined as performance. An isolable role, such as that of the specialist laying-out woman, and the roles assumed by others in ensuring the proper treatment of the corpse according to discourses which characterize such as women’s work, can be subjected to performance-grounded analysis - from an ethnomological, folkloristic perspective applied to everyday life, and from the sort of hermeneutic and theoretical orientation delineated in ideas of gender as performance (without going into Butler’s more sophisticated analysis of performativity). It is the cumulative and repetitive assumption of such roles which contributes to the maintenance and the ongoing processual construction of a gender identity with any continuity and appearance of consistency. In quotidian routines the repetition of acts and the expression of thoughts, ideas and attitudes are part of the continual and continuous process by which the individual is situated in the community; precedents are imitated and examples set for the future in the same actions which are popularly regarded as showing that gender-based social differences are inevitable and right.

Most of the time preparing the corpse has historically been a female task, even in cases of recovered drownings and other ‘remains’ that were particularly unpleasant, awkward, or heavy. Even before the person had expired, the nearby laying-out woman (frequently also the local midwife,20 the bean ghlèine21) would often be summoned, and she tended to be someone thought of as skilled at dealing with the needs of the dying as well as the deceased. If she was also the local ‘howdie’,22 her attendance at confinements acquainted her with near- and actual mortalities and it gave her familiarity with the body in a ‘medicalized’ or ‘pathologized’ state.23 She would direct and help others who took part in the laying-out, and the ‘kisting’,24 an important stage in the liminal phase, when the body was laid in the coffin, or ciste-laighe;25 and another barrier erected between the dead and the living. Those in the undertaking role washed the corpse26 carefully, a symbolic purification of its boundaries from mortal, profane life27 as well as a matter of hygiene, expelled fluids and gases, saw to orificial sealing, dressed the body, and arranged it (perhaps even propped-up in bed) or ‘streeked’28 it on a suitable surface, depending on the condition of the corpse and resources. The laying-out woman had to know about factors which could influence the decomposition of the corpse before burial; what should be done before and after rigor mortis had set in, or if this had already
occurred (approximately three hours after expiration); what materials were needed; and how best to achieve an impression of repose. She ensured that expedient practical and symbolic actions were carried out appropriately for the sake of the deceased and for the satisfaction and consolation of the bereaved who also had to be protected from the dangers opened up by the event.

The corpus of skills and knowledge which women passed on orally and by example to one another was crucial (see Rundblad 1995). Despite some very specific exceptions (for example, in a few small-scale tribal societies), females, across most cultures, are socialized into the performance of nurturing, caring roles, 'based', by a cultural logic, on their reproductive capacities; necessarily, then, they acquire and form knowledges generally not expected to be accessible to men. This is especially the case with female healers, midwives and those who fulfilled duties to the dead. Making this sometimes gruesome, unhygienic activity 'women's work', could be regarded as possibly another instance of the most unpleasant jobs being allocated in the past to those of the 'lower castes'. However, there is evidence that the local, 'semi-professional' laying-out woman received a degree of special respect and grateful trust from others. She had exceptional experience and knowledge of the male and the female body which the community relied upon, and her status was accentuated by the mysterious, sad, brutally real character of her duties. This 'privilege' could possibly have contributed to elements of curiosity and fear in the ways others might have regarded her work and that of others who had connections with a general 'wise woman' category.

Custom-practitioners and folklorists variously interpret the symbolic potency of customs performed on, or in contact with, the body. Knowledge of the proper routines would be passed on verbally, and by example and observation, but most of the rites that survived well into this century had lost much of their power and relevance as affective and meaningful rituals long before reaching a moribund state. For example, when questioned as to why a saucer of salt was placed on the corpse, something once done throughout the whole of Scotland and in some islands into the 1960s, people who had seen this or have done it themselves give no explanation most of the time, except for resorting to justification on the grounds of it being tradition, without need of or capable of being explained, or by saying that it was simply to prevent swelling. The purifying, preservative and ritually apotropaic qualities of salt and its symbolizing of the incorruptible, unchangeable soul are not usually mentioned, although the practice seems to refer to these. Customs and folklore like this have been documented by countless
writers over the years, but most do not comment on exactly who would have undertaken such tasks. It would seem logical that the carers for the body would include these amongst their other responsibilities rather than delegating them to others, especially as the material and symbolic importance of a custom are often not separable.

As with a great deal of folklore and custom, especially where these are situated in domestic or female-dominated contexts, it is women who have kept and keep alive the practice and knowledge of these routines, often after, and in resistance to, processes of them becoming considered outdated and unacceptable within the male-dominated ideology of ‘official’, formal culture. When men and younger people cease to maintain traditions they have come to regard as anachronistic or unnecessary, older women often insist upon, or are left with the task of, ensuring that things are still ‘done properly’; frequently, those who will not actually participate in the active execution of the customs, nevertheless, object if no-one else is willing to actively ensure that tradition is observed. As with many other sets of customary behaviours and the upholding of standards and beliefs, one of the most resonant effects of the right performance of mortuary rituals is to create a public display to others of the family’s solidarity and integrity according to the ethics of kinship. It examplifies the community’s sharing of responsibilities, its cohesion and dynamics, while the fulfilment of expectations displays the cultural competence and awareness of the individual community member and their social integration with others.

The image of the bereaved female, often with a dead ‘hero’, is one with resonance in, for example, international ballads and folktales (where she sometimes dies of grief), in Gaelic tales and songs, in Christian iconography (for example, the Pietà), and in the contemporary mass media (Hockey 1997). In Gaelic laments and elegies the composer frequently describes the corpse vividly and refers to her personal duty to the deceased (Chapter 8). Spinning and sewing a linen shroud (marbhfhaisg) for herself and for her spouse was often one of the first tasks expected of a new bride, a statement of the lifelong alliance made at marriage and an apprentice-piece in uxorial responsibility and in the skills for clothing her household. The shrouding of a corpse, undertaken with care, has its own ritual significance as an element in staged separation and the creation of new boundaries, and for transition from one existential state to another. Winding sheets and shrouds had particular practical importance in the days when most burials did not utilize a coffin, the dead being carried to the graveyard on a simple bier, or improvised carriers, like oars, ropes and tarpaulin. Such expedients were common in the nineteenth, and no doubt the early twentieth, century in areas like the Hebrides where
there was a scarcity of wood and other resources. Archival interview recordings in the School indicate that making a shroud and other special grave garments were tasks with which many women were familiar. Older women passed on to younger ones the specific skills of embroidering, scalloping, generally decorating and forming a shroud, and two or three might share the labour. By the 1930s commercially produced grave clothes were available, and now they are ordered with the coffin, although islanders who are in their seventies and older sometimes have a shroud (a large, white night-dress) or equivalent garments stored with household linen, which in the past would be aired annually, and people are now buried in various garments such as a best suit or favourite outfit.

For as long as a corpse lay in the township, outdoor labour ceased as a mark of respect and, until recently, because almost all village men would attend the funeral, they would take a half day or more off work, and bring fishing boats into port. Writers and insiders, in conversation, often equally assert that all work stopped in the past, which is, of course, not true, and exemplifies the assumption that what women do is not proper work but part of their 'being female', and that that which is relevant to males can be used to generalize for all. There were, however, a few explicit restrictions on domestic activities enshrined in legend and folk belief. Women's responsibilities in the home could even increase at a death and certainly many of them could not be suspended; the break from croft, moor and shore work did not mean a funeral holiday, even although 'housework' was not so varied or important in small houses with the most simple furnishings.

*The body in death*

Codes of restraint and control that have in the past defined bodies in relation to and interaction with others and for oneself, and older ideas of modesty, contrast with the way in which the corpse at home has traditionally been placed 'on show' to be visited once laid-out (Thorsen 1987: 104). The remains are complicated in meaning, even just in physical terms, without being regarded as representative of the whole person. A concern with the treatment of the corpse, with describing it, seeing and touching it, with performing the last offices for the dead, is a pervasive and distinctive thread in Gaelic laments (Chapter 8). Taboos on the display of the living body and a preference for greater restraint than today in physical contact with others, even in shows of affection between children and parents, prevailed into the middle of the twentieth century according to many islanders. Such attitudes are relevant to the ways that caring roles
and the maternal were construed and recommended, and may even have influenced the way that the dead body was regarded. Washed, dressed, manipulated and shrouded by people, who might never have seen the deceased person naked in life, the remains can then be gazed at by others without some of the inhibitions that shape social interactions; and they can touch it without a response. Most visitors are expected to touch the body, on the face or the hands, although there is less sense of customary compulsion to do this now, and in the past would also kiss it. People will even comment admiringly on the appearance - perhaps that the deceased looks peaceful, happy, rested or younger than in life - and there is a feeling of being cheated, denied the right to perform final acts of affection, if the bereaved are not allowed to see the remains. I know many who express this sadness in conversation.

Cultural codes of modesty and personal dignity influence how the body is treated and it must be managed appropriately, but as Thorsen points out, new rules and practices have reversed a previous situation:

The feeling of shame attached to the naked body... that has dominated the Europeans for nearly four hundred years, has been decreasing in this century. On the other hand, the open attitudes towards death are disappearing. The dead body is hidden for the living. (1987: 104)

It is relevant to the past and present that the dead body can be regarded as 'out of control': the laws of life are discarded, the soul leaves in possible turmoil, chaos. The corpse is a ritual object in many ways and has to be treated as such; it is a frontier location at which death and life, the eternal and mortal, meet and separate. General cultural definitions given to the body shape how it is treated in death and it becomes a locus of absence and anomaly, an ambivalent object which should contain life. The corpse of someone who is missed is regarded kindly, but could be simultaneously an object of fear and dread, possibly even revulsion as a decaying cadaver, a de-animated mannequin, even a source of morbid fascination, often depending on the specific condition of the corpse. Christian eschatology demands certain treatments for the body, and cremation, the principal method of disposal in Scotland today, which is possible only on the mainland, would still be acceptable to only a minority on Lewis, anyway, as has been the case in most Christian societies until relatively recently. As a sexed entity, the dead body becomes ambiguous: at death there are materially few differences (for example, grave clothes can vary) in how a corpse of either sex is treated and on Lewis the gender of the departed is in spiritual terms irrelevant, although as an entity persisting after the demise of the physical body, the departed retains her or his gendered identity for the way survivors continue to be, and have been, related to them, how they
respond to loss and remember them. Nature takes over sides of existence that humans have managed to organize through culture, order, the social, but with the science and ‘cosmetology’ of the funeral industry, specialists and support groups to help the grieving, and by modern means of commemoration, humans increasingly try to control death, at the same time as the ways in which people can die seem to become more varied in their causes and violence.

Caring on Lewis in the present day
In the confusion of grief, survivors have still to follow cultural behavioural standards determined by gender ideology. Transformations in all the life-crisis entail changed relationships with other beings, mortal and supernatural, in the natural and human-created environment, and with oneself. With a death the private (and this has been a more relevant concept in recent decades) is exposed when the body is left to the care of others; areas of a house, like bedrooms, that are usually closed to people from outside of the household may be opened up for the wakes and funeral; secular, mundane spaces are imbued with a spiritual atmosphere; boundaries become permeable; peculiar displays of emotions are permitted, even expected, and other behavioural expectations disrupted; special crisis-connected routines temporarily replace suspended ordinary ones. This demands a great deal of action and effort, honouring tradition and acting according to cultural ideas alongside the provision of hospitality to visitors and the care of the bereaved. It is still very much the case that mutual support networks, based largely on consanguineous, affinal and neighbourhood relationships, mobilize themselves around the main bereaved household to provide practical as well as emotional and perhaps spiritual support, the continuance of these systems aided by a relative homogeneity in even modern island society.

Today, in the late 1990s, in the event of a natural death occurring in a family home, relatives can usually choose whether they want to prepare the body themselves. If the death is very late at night or on a Sunday, they will in country areas almost inevitably do so, calling perhaps on other family members or even close neighbours to help, with men often preparing male bodies and females doing the same for their own sex. This is frequently with the aid of the district nurse, and there are in many families middle-aged women with professional nursing experience who can take over. The preparation and dressing of the remains within the home is, apparently, however, coming to be less regarded as one of the responsibilities of a district nurse and she may decline to do it.
This change will encourage people to use the services of the local undertaking company for the whole process, and with fewer people dying at home the responsibility or the option to perform the last offices is becoming less relevant to families.

It may have been relatively recently that men became responsible in some districts for laying-out male relatives. Although this obviously would have had to happen in specific circumstances, it goes against most older accounts, certainly as far as who is identified in the activity. Caring responsibilities for the living would have surely made women less uncomfortable in handling bodies of the opposite sex. The practice of men preparing male corpses may have become the norm in some villages with increasingly ‘puritanical’ ideas about the human body and privacy in the nineteenth century, especially with the impact of the religious revivals of that time. However, it may to an extent have derived from a response to, and from the influence of, professional undertaking which was gradually becoming more significant in the lives of ordinary islanders from around the 1920s and 1930s, by which time many had started to purchase coffins and other mortuary paraphernalia. Although there has been a family firm of undertakers based in Stornoway, dealing with Lewis and Harris, for over one hundred years, the overwhelming majority largely continued to care for their own dead as far as they could into the middle of the twentieth century, with the local carpenter constructing the coffin. The male undertaker set an example of what was appropriate, worth paying for, but the island situation contrasts with developments in areas where professionals thoroughly took over the process, the custom of men laying-out the bodies of other males perhaps being a local response to more wide-scale trends and changes in ideas.

With so many natives residing away from the islands and the large average size of families into the 1960s, there is often a substantial number of returnees to be accommodated when a relative dies, creating extra housework even without the labour created by wakes and visiting. Materially, with food, household items, furniture and living space, as well as with their labour, women aid one another at such critical times, crossing the bounds of the limited family unit which prevails more and more. Apart from their roles in wakes and funerals, males face fewer demands except for those who are, occasionally, involved in laying-out a male relative, and those responsible for publicizing the death, making the formal and public arrangements, ordering the coffin, hearse and other transport, and other duties, for example contacting the deceased’s solicitor. Death in the islands has been through history, and, to an extent, into the present, a relatively ‘domestic’ event, even in the ways in which institutionalized
religion is involved. The home is a female place, the bereaved, the sick and the dead body female responsibilities.

The woman who manages the main household connected with a death is treated sympathetically, but this cannot completely stop others from secretly judging the condition of her home at that time, and once the crisis has passed observations may be circumspectly voiced; those who help with domestic responsibilities at the crisis may evaluate her homemaking if, taking over her space in order to provide practical assistance, they find that her standards of housewifery do not match their own. Women co-operate to fulfil the domestic as well as the folkloric and ritual requirements of each other. The relatively few social barriers that exist within an island township are crossed, snobberies temporarily suspended, grudges forgiven, although the division between the vehemently pious and the openly non-religious can colour their interactions. Hospitality is still an essential aspect of island social relations and has to be extensively exercised around the time of a death because of the numbers of people calling at the home for the wakes and funeral, or simply to pay their respects.

Why so many elderly and chronically ill people have recently spent and still do spend the end of their lives at home in the care of family members, does not seem to be explicable by factors such as the distances between villages and centres of care or the level of residential and hospital facilities offered by the state or the private sector. A significant proportion of families seem to choose not to use services that are available, and there are others who do not, or are very reluctant to, claim such benefits as allowances for carers and attendance, ‘on principle’, unless absolutely necessary. Some reasons for this lie partly in several historical features of island (and more broadly traditional Highland) society as they influence current thinking, and the ‘operation’ of gender is an important element in these: a familial ideology, that has, nevertheless, altered radically since the last century; the positioning of women in kin groups and the socio-economic community; the notions of privacy and familiarity as opposed to outsiders and what is strange; patterns of residence and inheritance.49 Combining and overlapping, these factors continue to influence a changing ethic of care in the islands.

The generation born in the decades around the Second World War inherited many attenuated and vestigial aspects of a ‘traditional’ Gaidhealtachd culture which had been ailing for a long time, a certain set of ideas about the duties and relationships between kin being among them. Its reformulation in line with the norm of the two-generation
nuclear household is yet incomplete and its influence is basic to why so many middle-aged women still expect to spend some part of their lives nursing and accommodating relatives who cannot look after themselves, especially in the role of a daughter or daughter-in-law. Without invoking trite generalizations about the Gael’s ‘sense of place’ and clan mentalities, the strength of kin ties, especially consanguineal ones, and the concept of ‘home’ are very important, even for those who settle permanently away from the islands (a considerable number of whom retire there in later life). In the past, when a livelihood depended on having a croft to work and when housing was short, many couples relied on inheriting land and a home. Theoretically, sons were favoured, and, at least temporary, post-marital virilocal residence was the norm, but even daughters with brothers could inherit; if the eldest son did not get the family home, it generally went to the child remaining there last. Implicit was the assumption that whoever was to inherit was responsible for any elderly or other dependent residents (not just parents). If a married son inherited the burden probably fell on his wife; women cared for their spouses, and for parents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins of their own or their husband. Nowadays, inheritance is varied.50 Reward for duties has not been the motivation, however: caring was and is expected from the women of the family. I know many examples of unacknowledged self-sacrifice by women who nursed and ministered to consanguineal and affinal elders for years, often while raising a family; of single or widowed women denied any acknowledgement in life and in inheritances after years of service to others, fulfilling a sense of obligation founded on family and gender-based cultural expectations, often unquestioningly without any anticipation of gratitude.

Sina, a Lewis woman in her sixties, said to me, of her mother’s generation and of women before that, ‘I think our [of the community while she was growing up and before that] religion and poverty went hand in hand with their oppression’ (recorded interview, 29 June 1995; see Appendix 6B for full transcript). The patriarchal (and almost gerontocratic) local government of the Presbyterian churches has ideologically supported such notions of duty fundamental to cultural attitudes inherited by the oldest generation alive today. In the past, community members had, of course, to shoulder such responsibilities, but what I want to highlight is how so many middle-aged and older women in recent times have, for years, maybe even decades, resisted help from outside the family circle, except for medical care, and even still will do so. From my own impressions of life on Lewis, many only reluctantly accept even short-term respite care and long-term residential care often seems to be refused until essential for the welfare of the dependant. The idea of the discrete family unit is salient when carers assert that no

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stranger will look after their parent or in-law; they might speak of guilt at resenting their situation or wanting others' help, or of not doing enough themselves if they accept support. Although attitudes are altering, many see the placement of relatives in old people's homes as selfish and callous, and reject the idea that someone should receive payment for what families should do, 'naturally'; they, often nostalgically, lament a past when immediate families, extended kin and neighbours cared for each other in sickness and health (c.f. Aamodt 1981: 141). The pervasiveness and importance of blood ties persisting in island social structure relates, causally and consequently, to the relative insignificance of friendship relationships which lack a kinship, religious, or labour basis for most (especially married) people of middle age or older (c.f. Ludwig 1988). Practical and social over-reliance on close family to the exclusion of others can generate problems, as noted by a woman interviewed in a study of the daily lives of female pensioners in Oslo, whose comments, described as typical of her age and social group, relate to particular difficulties in grieving experiences, and could easily speak for many Lewis women of a similar elderly age:

We had a lot of contact with my sister and brother, and the family, as long as my parents were alive. . . But now it's twenty years since they died. It was nearly too much, as I have thought since then, for it meant that we had no great contact with other friends. It was all about the family. So when they died, we were suddenly left there on our own. (Quoted in Myrvang 1992: 91)

Middle-aged Lewis women and men, who are being succeeded by generations of smaller sized families and of individuals who belong to more varied social networks, often express wholehearted gladness that the pattern, in which they are still entangled, is disappearing, are able to plan ahead for their own old age, and instruct their offspring not to do as they have done, but to accept aid and 'carry on with your own life'. Their fulfilment of a disappearing role is a last duty to their parents' generation, a last courtesy to tradition and an older way of life. This all sounds very cynical and, women do look after long-term dependants, who will eventually die in their care, out of love, respect, friendship, enjoyment and for a sense of satisfaction in addition to obligation or need. They want to ensure that the person in their care at least has the chance to die in familiar surroundings and company. Growing numbers of women working outside the home and staying longer in education, smaller family sizes and residential patterns obviously necessitate the radical redelegation and reorganization of all domestic care-giving responsibilities. Furthermore, modern care - for the medicalized body or mind and for one's social being - is specialized, scientific, the qualified professional taking over.
Another underlying factor in attitudinal adaptation lies in a societal and cultural reorientation of focus from duty to the previous generation and repaying them as society expects, onto the nurturance of, and investment in, younger generations. Women may speak of how caring for elderly kin can place an unacceptable strain on a marriage and relationships with one’s own children, especially if the older relative arrives from their own or another home. Sina, for example, who like her mother raised a large family, remembers nursing her elderly mother, from her own mid-fifties:

Well, the rest of the family [Sina’s children] was away by then, of course. But the two [youngest] girls were still at home and it was quite a struggle because she had to have a room of her own. And although they loved her dearly - she wasn’t too much trouble - but still at times they resented her. They felt they were restricted in some of the things they could do, like watching the telly. And she didn’t care for some of the things they watched on the telly - ‘Put that thing off! ’ That sort of thing. (Appendix 6B)

She continues later:

She wasn’t a great deal of trouble, I have to admit. . . . What am I searching for? She did cause some resentment in the house. And I felt that the resentment was of me for having her, you see, that I was put in a very difficult position, sort of trying to please the family and at the same time as a duty to my mother. And, well, I mean where else could she go? I mean I couldn’t let her go into a home after bringing up a large family, that she would have to go into a hospital or a home. No, I couldn’t have, I couldn’t have done that, no.

Her experience shows the network of obligations women carers are caught up in and the complicated processes involved in satisfying gendered roles. In this case, Sina recognized her ‘duty’ as the eldest daughter to protect her mother’s welfare; she suffered the brunt of a sense of obligation on behalf of her other siblings to provide their mother with care in a family home, especially as there had been so many children in their family; and there was her own maternal role. Conflicts, however minor, were inevitable and there is little sense in the rest of her narrative of having received much support from siblings who were accessible or from others even although she is speaking of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Many women who refuse modern forms of help, and even give up work and other activities to care for older relatives, conform to values that they themselves believe to be anachronistic and untenable today. Understandably, they are pursuing an adult filial ideal they were taught as they were growing up, not least of all by the example of their own mothers, a role not unlike an extended maternal one and part of the culturally constructed model of the ‘female’ as a nurturer. An ethic of self-sacrifice, which is
starkly illuminated at the death of a care-dependant, or when a woman dies herself and others ‘take stock’ of her history, moulded the most active years of many island women’s adult lives in the distant and recent past. Middle-aged women, of a generation whose experiences have been very different to those of their parents and grandparents, retain, nevertheless, internalized notions that were part of their early socialization and the cultural mentality of the time; they adapt to those standards, which inform their construction of personal identity, even if their own behaviours are inconsistent with what they believe is best for younger women and men.

Contrasting with the more female-identified duties to and around the body, men perform the formal religious offices, whether as a Presbyterian elder or minister who comes to offer prayers of comfort for the bereaved (or as a Catholic priest administering the last rites or extreme unction). Fetching the doctor, likewise, would usually have been a male responsibility, as are other formal tasks today like liaising with the undertaker to arrange the funeral. Obviously, the religious and formal role of men here is in line with gender divisions which generally influence the assignment of activities, and have led to male-dominated commercial undertaking, professional medicine, established and official religious positions, and, therefore, the management of the public events and administration around a death. The ‘traditional’ knowledge, skills, and roles of women have been unpaid, largely unrecognized in formal terms by external authorities, and may be regarded as appropriate to the realm of the private and personal, even cast as ‘folklore’ in pejorative use of the noun, in contrast to the official, modern, often scientific and financially rewarded male involvement. The separate, traditional roles of the genders are clearly apparent in the ways in which responsibilities around a death are delegated.

In many cultures, it seems that so long as managing the fluids, excrement and functions of bodies that are out of control is work without formal recognition, it belongs firmly to women and lower status groups - an allegedly ‘natural’ assignment. Once it becomes possible to make a career and profit from it, women are replaced, at least in the control of the new market or occupation. In a study of how the official history authored for itself by the modern North American undertaking industry denied women’s past involvement, Rundblad discusses how the ‘popular knowledge’ (employing the term after Foucault) of shrouding women was displaced and dismissed by the scientific knowledge of the profession:

with the advent of occupational undertaking, the knowledges that shrouding women possessed would become “subjugated knowledges.”
These, as noted by Foucault, are knowledges that have been buried by emerging knowledges (1995: 188), and these eventually ‘served to legitimate a new “politics of truth”’ (189), that excluded women from the field, in the past and present (c.f. Field, Hockey, Small 1997b: 8).

‘Women were not expected to be bewildered and immobile in the face of death until a later age when the funeral parlor had taken over [their] functions’ (Geddes 1981: 117), but in the west with the increased formal management of the corpse principally by men, women’s expected behaviour and roles in the presence of death altered. These changes occurred with (and through) a reconceptualization of gendered personality traits, and this largely advantaged males: female nature justified their pre-market responsibility to the dead; female nature justified their exclusion from the urban nineteenth century-established occupation. The discourses within which normative femininity and femaleness were constructed had changed. Women on Lewis, throughout the islands, were certainly not of fragile sensibilities or weak-stomached, living in communities with much poverty, high mortality rates, and where deaths and births were familiar events. Life and death have been hygienicized in this century and, if nothing else, my generation are markedly more squeamish in everyday life than the previous two born in the twentieth century. As growing numbers die in residential care and hospitals, the ability and willingness of lay people to deal with the ‘unpleasant’ aspects of managing death diminish and professionals are increasingly relied upon.

Conclusion
Engagement with caring roles around a death was and is a variable experience: some of the roles are extensions of generalized, daily domestic and nurturing ones, others are more challenging and traumatic, but all reinforce associations of women with the home, the caretaking of others, the frequently menial, and assumptions about women’s greater ‘natural’ solicitude, responsiveness and empathy towards others. Performances of traditional roles, in the appropriate exercise of practical domestic skills and acting in supportive, empathic ways, individually or in groups, consist in this phase of interactions located within culturally, temporally specific parameters of feminine/female behaviour and repetitions of gender signifiers. Rundblad describes the funeral industry’s history of the care of the dead as ‘a narrative construction of reality’ (1995: 189), an instance of the historical, cultural, philosophical, religious and political discourses operating to promote and validate gender variants. This is a well evidenced substantive example where the
ficticity of the gender discourse underlying the history is easily exposed. In less formal, institutional ways, the simultaneous existence for certain social groups of the notion of caring for the dead as part of female responsibilities illustrates an alternative set of ideas about gender. Synchronic and diachronic variations expose the falsity of claims by gender discourse to be grounded in essential nature: nature is disrobed as a construction which can be redefined to suit the ideology of those in control of power and crucial resources. With regard to currently changing ideas about caring and gender roles, fewer Lewis women can or will nurse dependants outside of institutions with little support from others till death, not least of all, because far more women than in the past are in the workplace outside the home. Given that the versions of gendered identity which people negotiate are multiple, vary in time and, therefore, are never closed or fully determined, minor signifying actions contribute centrally to the discursive process of identity ‘doing’, and they function performatively as their effects accumulate and rely on and reinforce past ones. Women’s changed and changing participation in Lewis wakes and funerals, the next stage in the sequence of death experiences, demonstrates in similar ways to their caring roles how versions of gender ideals, upon which formal convention are predicated, are negotiated by women as they engage constantly, in the perpetual process of identity creation and maintenance, and how available roles vary historically behind appearances of continuity and consistency.

1 The anthology edited by Malos (1982) samples studies of housework as a political issue from feminist perspectives.

2 ‘Feminist folklorists are most likely to have established it [housework] as an area of study because of their interest in discovering “women’s genres” and genres that exist in the private domain (Jordan and Kalcik, 1985: ix) and in calling attention to and revaluing women’s “mundane” activities (Weigle, 1982 [Soldiers and Spinsters: Women and Mythology. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press]); chap. 7); but the movement to study women’s folklore began in the context of the feminism of the 1970s and, as such, was characterized by the same condemnation of housework that characterized the feminist historical and sociological writings of that period.’ (Levin 1993: 288)

3 McCarl 1984 is an example of performance-grounded analysis of occupational folklore.

4 ‘Finally, if we look at how modern folklorists define their area of study and consider the common characterization of housework, we will realize that folklore and housework are defined almost as opposites. In the past and in Europe - in situations where folklore has been defined as the speech, beliefs, or activities of a particular group of people called “folk” - the folklore of housework was collected. Now folklore is defined as the study of expressive, creative, traditional, skilled cultural performances, usually ones that create a product (although the product might be as intangible as a story). Housework is characterized as trivial, mindlessly repetitive, invisible, productless, isolated (de Beauvoir, 1961 [The Second Sex]; Friedan, 1964 [The Feminine Mystique. New York: Dell], among others). Furthermore, many of the feminists writings on housework have emphasized the similarities in the way women do housework and in the problems they face, so cultural differences have been obscured for the purpose of making political statements. Considered in these terms, it is not surprising that quilting and cooking are studied, but that sweeping or dishwashing are not.’ (Levin 1993: 289)
Working by day in the masculine environment of a Maine logging camp in the winter of 1985, Yocom found that returning to the indoor world of women in the evenings made her feel as if ‘I was crossing into the Twilight Zone’ (1990: 33).

Without going as far as Rogers (1975), for example, we should avoid seeing the peasant women of the Hebrides of the past as utterly oppressed by men with no power or influence over their own lives. The evidence of their poetry alone testifies to their creativity and desire to express themselves.

Cameron (1986: 85-94) gives a brief overview of the range of women’s quotidian and seasonal work in crofting communities around the turn of the century and before.

One can generalize that most islanders (at least the older generations) are critical, even mocking, of those who have social pretensions and that they value homeliness, hospitality and comfort over appearance (and according to even seventeenth century writers, for example, this has long been the case). However, comments by, often middle-class, outsiders, in the past and in recent times (and even in the present) about their material lives must have created (and still can create) a certain sensitivity to such evaluations and opinions, and have contributed to a sense of inferiority some feel in respect of their people’s history, way of life, and Gaelic culture. Older people will also express the idea, regarding their material circumstances in the past, of only really becoming aware of their poverty through contact with outsiders, that, in common with other lower class communities, ‘We didn’t know we were poor until they told us’, and that before real improvement in their lifestyle and security, ‘everyone was the same and had the same’.

Among the Yolngu, of north-east Arnhem Land, ‘the red ochre painted on the body during mortuary ceremonies is said to be (or to signify) the menstrual blood of female clan ancestors’. As if to accentuate this symbolism, women during the period of mourning cut their heads so as to bleed. This and other evidence shows how mortuary ritualism among the Yolngu is assimilated to menstruation and a ‘return to the womb’. Similarly, if the grave is ‘blood-filled’ - if one is inside a womb rather than just dead and in the ground - birth or ‘rebirth’ is the inevitable next stage. (Knight 1991: 447) One Aboriginal legend-account of how birth and death entered the world blames two sisters who let their menses mix with a pool of water, in many versions of the narrative then tempting out some monstrous creature with the smell of the blood (Knight 1991: 463-4).

This has even been reflected, for example, according to some archaeological and anthropological interpreters, in the construction of ancient graves (e.g. Gimbutas 1989 and 1991; Sjøø and Mor 1987).

Delaney comments, ‘the dead body is the symbolic equivalent of the seed planted in the earth to be born in the other world. Men, invoking the assistance of God as they do during insemination, officiate at the ritual of burial; women are symbolically identified with the tomb, the earth’ (1991: 313). In the Anatolian village that she studied, female remains are taken straight to the cemetery, whereas male ones are taken by the men to the mosque for final prayers (312), the spiritual status of the genders sharply distinguished in Islam.

Secondary accounts of living conditions in the Gaidhealtachd occur in works by Fenton (1978), Fenton and Walker (1981), and Grant (1989: 141-197). The 1901 Report of the Crofters’ Commission (1902) is a good example of contemporary accounts, especially the section ‘Housing and Public Health’ (lxxxv-xciii).

From analysis of the sometimes very patchy available statistics, Clegg provides interesting information on mortality rates for the general population and specific groups and on common causes of death for St. Kilda and Harris (Clegg 1977, 1984 and 1987).

For example bad weather meant serious food shortages in 1773, 1783, 1816, 1836, and, of course, through the potato blight, in 1846.

‘It was seldom that a St. Kilda man died a natural death’ (Carmichael 1941: 106), while women risked life with pregnancy.

The first and second Statistical Accounts describe the various epidemical and environmentally induced or linked illnesses that were primarily responsible for, particularly, early death in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and include comments such as this one concerning the parish of Stornoway, circa 1830-40: ‘the lower classes, but more particularly the male portion
of them, may be said to die, in general, at an early age' (NSA vol. XIV, Ross and Cromarty section: 119).


18 'Certain women who are recognized for the "vocation" visit the house, lay out the body and robe it' (Buchanan 1943: 117, writing about Barra), 'women who were called upon to lay out, almost in an official capacity' (Morag MacLeod, about Scalpay). Surprisingly, in Ireland there is evidence that 'there was a strict taboo on any family member handling the corpse for the purpose of "laying it out"' (O Cruialaoich 1990: 152), so it had to be done by the local specialist, known as an bean bhan, 'the white woman'. I have not been able to find evidence of this having been the case in Scotland at any time.

MacLean calls attention to the contrast inherent in women having responsibility for the dead body, but not attending the graveside (1986: 69, specifically referring to Ardnamurchan).

19 A Gaelic word descriptive of preparing the body for burial is ollanachadh, -aidh (gen.) (masc. noun), which according to Dwelly has the secondary meaning of 'burial', and there is the verb ollanaich. MacLeod defines ollananch as a woollen cloth such as that wrapped around a corpse and as the act of dressing the dead (1867: 232-3).

20 The granny-midwife who administered to the dead throughout Scotland for most of the time that we have any evidence of who did this, was often ascribed supernatural talents, such as the gift of foreseeing a death and, therefore, making herself available even before the actual demise. Description of her role in the Orkneys appear in Firth (1974: 80-81) and the testimony of Margaret Ann Clouston, who had taken charge at births and deaths, SA 1985/146. Every township, or neighbourhood of a village, in the islands, had its woman who was noted for her talents (e.g. SA 1985/141/B8, re Skye).

In many cultures, the same 'folk' specialist manages deaths and births (e.g. Geddes 1981: seventeenth century Puritan New England; Rundblad 1995: on North America up to the twentieth century; Seremetakis 1991: on the rural Peloponnese up to the present). The laying-out woman's dealings with both sexes differentiates her from the midwife, but within cultural tradition these figures are very close, even if different individuals have fulfilled these roles in one community at the same time.

21 In some interviews in the Sound Archive of the School, the informant uses bean nighe, 'washer woman', for the one who prepares a corpse, but this title is generally reserved for the supernatural death harbinger discussed later, although confusion is understandable given that bean nighe does describe part of what the laying-out woman does.

22 The term 'houdie', etc., is a Scots term for a midwife, and previously for other untrained nurses. It, therefore, was very often used in contexts where it referred to the woman who looked after the preparation and dressing of corpses.

23 The comparable appropriation of these roles by male professionals is mentioned below in the text.

24 From the Scots word 'kist', a chest or box, but also amongst other things a coffin, giving the verb 'to kist' meaning to lay or enclose in a coffin, and the 'kistin', an event usually on the night before the funeral which was often marked specially with its own ceremonies. The 'kistin' took on another kind of formal importance when laws were established regulating the materials to be used for graveclothes. In 1686 an Act of Parliament stipulated that only linen should be used for burying clothes, and in 1707 another Act ordered that 'every corpse should be swathed in plain Scots woollen cloth... To secure faithful obedience... Parliament (in 1695) enjoined that the nearest elder or deacon, with a neighbour or two, "should be present at the putting in of the dead corps in the coffin that they might see the done". From this rule arose the lugubrious custom of "kisting" (SND vol. V (1960) s.v. 'kist', quoting from H. G. Graham's Social Life II (1899: 36)). 'Kisting' seems to have been partly responsible for the increased participation of the clergy in funerals in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 5). See Gordon 1984: 29-31; Martin 1996: 70.

25 From ciste (fem. n.), chest, box, coffin, come ciste-laighe, lit. 'chest for laying in', ciste-chaol, lit. 'narrow coffin/chest', and ciste-mhairbh, lit. 'chest of the dead'.

26 Gaelic words for the corpse are: corp, (gen.) curp (masc. n.), 'body, corpse; being, person'; creubh, (gen.) creibh, (pl.) creubhan (masc. n.) (crè is 'clay'); dastach, (gen.) dastaich (masc.
Amongst women midwives feature often. This ritual cleansing would be expected in cultures where there is a strong and pervasive belief in an afterlife and an eternal soul. Delaney notes the importance of this within Muslim notions of pollution also (1991: 312).

Also 'strek', 'straik', and other variants, a Scots word used principally for 'stretch, draw out, length' but also with the meaning of 'to lay out or compose a dead body', and giving the term 'streekin-board/baird', upon which a corpse was laid out and straightened. 'When the death took place a messenger was despatched for a wright, who hastened to the house of death with his strykii on the board brought by the wright, and covered with a home-made linen sheet.' (SND vol. IX (1974) s.v. 'streek', quoting from Walter Gregor's Olden Times (1874: 138). The streeking board was one of the items of mortuary paraphernalia often featured in memorates about death omens. It would rattle or move before a death occurred to warn of its impending usage, in the same way the carpenter's tools used for the coffin or furniture that would be moved around for the wake or funeral would be inexplicably disturbed.

In societies without an undertaking industry similar to the modern western one and where outsiders to the mourning group prepare the corpse, these people tend to belong to lower status groups and often have other menial duties, as with some Indian untouchable castes. Trawick (1990) provides an interesting study of emotional expression in song by Cevi who is doubly stigmatized by belonging to one of the largest of untouchable castes in Tamil Nadu, and by being female. Trawick partly seeks to understand Cevi's experience and sense of self through an application of Kristeva's theory of abjection.

Midwives feature in many legends involving interactions with the fairies - e.g. there is Hebridean tradition that a successful line of hereditary midwives had been given a special gift for this activity by the fairies, and another that St. Bride was the midwife with the Virgin Mary when she gave birth to Christ. In many areas, of course, laying-out women, wise women and midwives (and all three roles could be embodied in one person) were especially vulnerable to hostility and suspicion during period of localized and more widespread persecution of alleged witches.

Of course, people have many legitimate reasons for choosing or subconsciously ‘deciding’ not to mention perhaps motivations or such beliefs as might be expressed in such customs.

From interviews on customs: SA 1971/102/B2; SA 1975/24/A5; SA 1977/49/B3; Shaw 1986:13, referring to the 1930s.

Nails were often laid in this salt, sometimes in a cross in apparent reference to the Crucifixion, but this possibly conceals or absorbed an earlier traditional use of iron against Otherworld interference, especially by the sithichean. Into the 1960s, in, at least, the Southern Isles (North Uist included) and probably in Lewis and Harris also, laying a turf on the abdomen (a custom also practised in other areas such as Shetland) was said to prevent the corpse from swelling, but can also be interpreted as alluding to the earth and the inevitable decay in physical life. A Bible has sometimes been used for the same practical purpose or to keep the lower jaw of the dead body, but obviously it is religiously significant too, and is sometimes laid on or near the body during the period between death and the burial.

Bennett's collection (1992) is an accessible and valuable anthology of writings and transcribed archival sound material related to the main phases of transition in the life cycle.

This tendency could compare with the relative linguistic conservatism sometimes noted of women in mono- and bilingual situations, which is accounted for by a complex of different factors.

Marbhphaisg, (gen.) marbhphaisg, (pl.) marbhphaisgean (fem. n.), shroud, winding-sheet (an older spelling has marbhphaig); marbhphasgadh, (gen.) marbh-phasgaidh (masc. n.), shrouding, act of shrouding; marbhphasg (vb.), shroud. Marbhphaisg has also come to mean 'a curse', and appears in the imprecation 'Marbhphaisg ort!', 'A curse on you!'. Amongst the various omens and divinatory results that warn of a death, the image of a shroud, in dreams, in egg whites dropped into water and read like tea-leaves, or wrapped around wrathful, features often. It was also taboo to sew clothes while a person was wearing them: this was only done to the dead (Henderson 1911: 295).
37 Into the first half of the twentieth century, girls sometimes even made a shroud at school (e.g. as Margaret Ann Clouston had done in Kirkwall (SA 1985/146)). A Lowland custom of a bride gifting her husband with a special ‘marriage shift’ may even refer to the garment that would serve for his graveclothes (Henderson 1911: 249). In several cultures, young wives (examples of this in the Gaedhealtachd have been recorded), or young unmarried people generally have been buried in the outfits of, or with other items associated with, brides or grooms. Although the use of weddings clothes for the grave can have great symbolic significance, a straightforward reason for their use is that they may have been the best garments that a person had ever owned. (C.f. Alexiou 1974: 5; Moldován 1986.)

38 ‘Covering thus has many meanings, but can perhaps best be understood as a kind of protective social membrane that keeps a person’s own substance from leaking away. At the same time, it keeps harmful if invisible forces (for example, the evil eye or drafts) from penetrating its substance. . . [I]t implies that they [dead people] are neither self-contained nor invulnerable to outside influences.’ (Delaney 1991: 67)

39 Carbad, (gen.) carbad, (pl.) carbadan (masc. n.); eileatrom/eilltriom, (pl.) eileatroman/eilltrioman (masc. n.); giulán, (gen.) giulain, (pl.) giulan (masc. n.), all ‘bier; streaking board; hearse’. MacDonald also give the spellings eulaidream and the words eislig and eislinn for South Uist (1972: 113), and gives the synecdochic phrase, ‘Tha ’n giulan a’ tighinn’, ‘The funeral (lit. bier) is coming’ (ibid.: 140). At burials in the early eighteenth century around Inverewe the body was slipped into the ground in a wending sheet of blue homespun fabric (Mackenzie 1952: 44).

40 See Synge’s description of a coffin being carried in the Aran Islands which is quoted in Chapter 8.

41 There are descriptions of the making of shrouds by hand, in, e.g., SA 1971/102/B2 (South Uist); SA 1974/96/A1 and B5 (Barra); SA 1974/109/B16 (Barra); SA 1977/49/A13 (South Uist); SA 1977/56/B3 (South Uist); SA 1977/58/B4 (North Uist).

42 As on Sundays, spinning was prohibited; on Saturday evenings the belt of the spinning wheel would even be removed lest someone should absent-mindedly turn the wheel and, thus, break the taboo which stemmed from the story of how Jesus Christ had been bound by his captors with a spinning wheel-band. In areas where belief in the fairies was strong, spinning wheel bands were also one of the items found in a house that could help the fairies enter, on Fridays, which were hated by the fairies, the eve of quarter days and the last day of the year, especially, and, so they would removed on those nights also (Campbell 1900: 20). The taboo concerning the fairies seems to have been the more widespread one and was probably older, the prohibition accreting a Christian explanation later on. Like the distaff and spindle, the spinning wheel and associated craft are potent symbols of the feminine and frequently appear in Gaelic versions of international popular tales and local narratives. Another incident in the oral ‘folk bible’ implicating a woman culpably in the Crucifixion, which provides, after all, the foundation for Christian conceptions of human death and the eternal soul, gave rise to the taboo against fanning flames with one’s skirt as one would be imitating the woman who had done this to encourage the fire when the nails used at Christ’s death were being forged. A version of this legend is published in Carmichael (1940 vol. 3: 260-61). Females inherited Eve’s culpability for the Fall and came to be more involved in the folklore of the Crucifixion than was depicted in the Bible: although intent is not necessarily implied, something inherent to female nature underlies their lapsarian guilt and their betrayal of the Christian culture hero, suggesting an impiousness or a weakness to resist evil temptation. With the Fall, women had brought death into the world.

43 In her article on the lives of small-scale farming women in central Norway, Thorsen provides a parallel to rural Gaelic areas in her discussion of intimacy and rules governing the body in secular, quotidian life (Thorsen 1987).

44 Ennew, who conducted over three months of fieldwork on the west side of Lewis in the early 1970s, noted that, ‘open affection between courting, engaged or married couples is rare’, although the physical closeness exhibited by female family members and friends was noticeably less inhibited than would be usual in much of Britain. My own observations and experiences would support most of this, although middle-aged couples are becoming less restrained now and young couples find the standards of previous generations almost quaint or absurd; female kin, particularly, still display their closeness physically, and middle-aged people often say that they made a conscious effort to escape the inhibitions of their parents and to express affection for
their children with physical contact. On meeting someone for the first time, or someone whom one does not see regularly, males shake hands with other men and with women, and depending on the degree of the relationship will press or clap the arm of the other; this also happens at formal occasions and the church elders shake hands with the congregation as they enter before ordinary services and even with children entering Sunday School. Male and female adults often kiss relations of the opposite sex on the lips or the cheek and lightly hug, and women will kiss briefly on the lips, if meeting after a long absence, for example when an exile has returned on holiday to the island. Children are taught to kiss and hug older kinsfolk and female relations, even distant cousins, will kiss and embrace, if meeting after a period apart or for the first time, or some may even do this more regularly as part of greeting and bidding farewell. Of course, this depends on the closeness of the individual family, and many people of my grandparents’ generation, who did not give their own children much physical affection, have learnt to be demonstrative in older age, especially around grandchildren, young and mature. (Various fieldnotes from participant observation.)

45 No-one (not even children) was supposed to refuse touching a corpse in the past. It was said that this prevented one being visited by the ghost or having nightmares, forcing one to overcome any fear or awe, and it prepared the person for having to handle a dead body themselves. In Lewis, touching is now done generally, from personal choice, out of respect and affection, a last meeting of skins, affirming past connections and to show that all of this overrides any feelings of fear or distaste. Marina Takalo recounted how she had dealt with her own fright and upset, according to common practice in her area of Finland: ‘in order to rid herself of fear and sleeplessness she went in the morning to the corpse lying in the main room, touched it with her hands, stroked its face, hands and feet and asked at the same time, “Why do you frighten me?”’. This was the traditional procedure following the collective tradition. . . . The questioning and the stroking both had psychological significance: when a person mustered up enough courage to address and touch the dead, he [sic] also overcame his fear of it’ (Pentikäinen 1978: 155). One posited origin for the custom of laying a hand on the corpse relied on the long-extinct belief that it would bleed if touched by a person who was responsible for the death, and this took the form of a trial of guilt in cases of murder in Celtic and Nordic tradition (Henderson 1911: 41).

46 In a system where hell has traditionally been represented as a place of fire, repulsion may be an understandable reaction to incineration of the body. There are also believers who express a lack of acceptance of the concept of palingenesis.

47 The most important exception to this in the past has, of course, been that of the woman who dies in or shortly after childbirth. There are also documented odd exceptions such as that mentioned by Martin in the Isle of ‘Toronsay’ (i.e. Taransay off Harris), where there were separate cemeteries, dedicated to a different saint, for the sexes (St. Tarran’s for women and St. Keith’s for men); it had been believed that if the rule for burial in the appropriate cemetery was contravened, the corpse would be found exhumed the next day (1981: 49, writing about the late seventeenth century and how the belief was disproved). Separate cemeteries for the genders existed in other areas too.

48 SA 1977/58/B4 is the testimony of a North Uist man who describes the routine of laying-out as he had done it, and in another interview a Lewis man speaks of how the living always administered to the dead of their own sex in his village, in recent decades, and that particular men would be called upon (his own father had been one), just as certain women were (SC 1992/03). One of my own informants, also referring to Lewis, in 1965, wrote that she and her aunt were criticized after they laid out her father. However, her aunt was an older local who would have known if it was totally unacceptable for women to lay-out men (Appendix 3N).

49 Ennew (1980: 18) discusses briefly some aspects of patterns of succession.

50 Priority for the house in my own village seems to be with any close family member who does not have property of their own, or who wishes to return to the island from living elsewhere, often doing so before the parents die to look after them; or to a grandchild hoping to set up a home; or where there is a croft it is usually given to the eldest son, if he wishes to take it on, even if he will not inherit the actual house which might be left separately to another relative.

51 In part as a consequence of the introduction of more technical means of caring for the body (i.e. embalming), an understanding of women’s “nature” was used by the funeral industry [and culture generally, too] to restrict women from the market care of the dead. For instance, The
*Western Undertaker* [a trade journal] notes that “we are not accustomed to think of women as physically courageous. A woman... should shriek at the sight of a mouse or faint when she sees blood” (1909). . . Beliefs such as these, of course, were supported by the increasing emphasis of women’s and men’s separate spheres. . . The expanding use of embalming involved increasingly more “scientific” means of caring for the dead, a realm of study that was unimaginable for women.’ (Rundblad 1995: 181)
CHAPTER 5
WAKES AND FUNERALS

Introduction
As with the customs of Ireland,\(^1\) the wakes and funerals of the Scottish Gaidhealtachd aroused intense curiosity in outsider visitors in the past, many of whom published impressions of the area which included descriptions of such events (see in particular Gordon 1984). Revelry, feasting, alcohol consumption and games seem to have been a component of funerals throughout Europe since the Middle Ages and probably for long before (Ariës 1981; Harlow 1997: 141; Spierenburg 1991). While it was the revelry, exuberant emotional displays and the apparent irreverence, as well as the lamenting and bagpipe playing, of older gatherings that captured the interest, and frequent disapproval, of outsiders, it is the solemn dignity and communality of modern Lewis meetings for the dead and bereaved that present-day observers tend to comment upon.\(^2\) A great deal exists in print in accounts by travellers and in works on custom and folklore. I briefly refer here to a few important features and general observations from the past to provide background for a description of present practices, and do not attempt to account for changes in funeral conventions over time, although Church involvement and intervention and the effects of Presbyterian religious revivals are the obvious, most potent factors in the midst of general social and cultural change (Chapter 3; Forrester and Murray 1984; Gordon 1984: 46-51). For a considerable period the Scottish Presbyterian Churches played a relatively small part in mortuary events, allowing wake and funeral excesses to continue along with other customs which would have been considered as expressing ideas contrary to those of this form of institutionalized Christianity.

This chapter is largely concerned with the recent and contemporary organization of these social dramas from the time of death until interment, to honour the deceased, pay condolences, to achieve passage and to acknowledge the crisis, often in the ways that these contrast with earlier convention and custom.\(^3\) I draw considerably on field observation and participation on Lewis and mainly on custom within the Free Church,\(^4\) but would also stress that the current situation is one of evident change, wakes and funerals being increasingly removed from the domestic sphere and managed by outsiders with the result that the distinctiveness of island events is diminishing. The roles people fulfil during wakes and funerals are inevitably largely determined by their gender, depending upon discourses in culture wherein gender ideas are constructed. Roles assumed by men and women as they involve themselves in island obsequies today are grounded in ideas that are fundamental in the culture - for instance, in the spiritual
ideology of the local Churches in relation to the genders and how these are founded in an assumed natural condition that is itself culturally created and mediated. To justify the assignment of roles the validating power of tradition is invoked in secular affairs, in ways that fail, however, to offer an explanation of historical changes in island custom without exposing the specificity and fictiveness of such divisions.

'Better than a wedding'

Writings from before the twentieth century include references to excessive alcohol and tobacco consumption at Highland funerals and wakes, the distribution of food to guests, piping, singing, wailing and recitation, games, dramatic entertainment, and the dancing that was sometimes led by the chief mourner, as well as various items of folklore and custom, especially separation and incorporation rites. Some writers draw attention to then-recent changes in tradition and in cultural norms, for instance by commenting on the disappearance in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries of keening women or pipe music. Obviously, the routine and the atmosphere of the event depended on the identity of the deceased and whether it had been a ‘good death’. The obsequies of gentry and other important figures sometimes included a feast for the guests and charity to locals, including the destitute, and might be extremely extravagant, inviting criticism from commentators like Samuel Johnson, who was glad, in 1773, that funeral hospitality was being reduced (1987: 104, 120). Long after piping and lamenting ceased to be regular funerary activities, wakes and funerals in certain areas persisted as uproarious, chaotic events once alcohol had been circulating for a time. Interview recordings made by the School of Scottish Studies repeat claims that fights were not uncommon; indeed some apparently considered them a requisite of a good funeral, an indication the dead had been given a good and generous ‘send-off’. A sensibility that would be intolerable today allowed the playing of games and dancing, and practical jokes that might even use the corpse as a prop. However, this state of affairs was not always general throughout the Highlands and Islands and would have been the feature of funerals for only particular categories of people, such as those of older folk who had not died before their time. Such responses gave way to much more sedate gatherings and commemorations and new ways of conceptualizing death, the dead, and the relation of the living to the dead. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Lewis Association answered several harsh accusations levelled against the island by Alasdair Alpin MacGregor (1949), including ones in regard to funeral behaviour. One of MacGregor’s claims, which they refuted in their published reports, was that funerals still often deteriorated into shameful and
inebriated confusion; the Association made it clear that then, and for a long time before that, such behaviour as MacGregor described as typical would be regarded as a serious affront to the dead by their family and the whole community (Lewis Association Report No. 6 [c.1949]: 36; c.f. Highland Village Association 1911: 49-50). MacGregor’s attacks still stimulate anger amongst islanders, and their response to this and other allegations by him is an important chapter in the recent history of the Lewis community, how it perceives itself and its relations with the outside world.

The different involvement, indeed the very presence, of the genders in the management of wakes and funerals has, of course, changed with time. With reference to the topic of women’s attendance in the procession and at the burial stage of funerals, it is interesting that, in around 1876, a writer could claim:

Women have long ceased to attend funerals in Scotland. This is the more remarkable, as so late as the year 1715 they formed part of every funeral procession, walking in regular rank, as they still do in the north of England. The men, however, in Scotland, walked in front and the women behind. The disappearance of women from funerals in Scotland seems to have been so gradual, that no contemporary notice of it appears; and so utterly has their attendance on these occasions passed out of remembrance, that were they now to appear their presence would excite comment and astonishment. (Quoted in Simpkins 1914: 171-2)

Although this may then have been the case in much of the country, very many accounts include women as a normal component of the cortège in the Gaidhealtachd in the nineteenth century, often walking, as noted above, behind the bier or coffin while men preceded it (e.g. Burt 1815, vol. 1: 210-15), although they might have gone only part of the way (e.g. Carmichael 1940: 370), not least of all because graveyards were often distant and there were few roads and bridges until the 1880s. Women also had work to do at home, including the consolation of others, or only a few of the chief female mourners would go with the men to the burial. For other areas of Scotland where women do now attend, people often say that this is an innovation, varying between locales in its occurrence, unaware that this has instead been the re-entrance of women into the interment stage of the death sequence.

The evidence for keening and lamenting indicates that women formerly held a central ritual and directing role in Highland and Island obsequies. From some accounts of these traditions it is not always clear whether only certain groups of women (for example, the keeners and the principal mourners) usually joined the men or whether all who were touched by the death could go if they wished. Inevitably customs varied with locale and personal preferences, the kind of death (distinct categories of the dead and particular
kinds of deaths being responded to in different ways), the weather, graveyard location, and other factors. What is of interest here is the contrast between typical female and male roles in modern wakes and funerals, what these convey about women on Lewis, and inequalities in religious life.11

Some themes in studying gatherings for the dead
This section looks at strong and influential themes which infuse Lewis life, have particular relevance for wakes and funerals, and which are gendered: the consumption of alcohol and a psychological dwelling on mortality amongst older and religious people. Alcohol was often consumed to excess during wakes and funerals in the distant past, but general indulgence is also the source for a particular stereotype of the Highlander and, more generally, the Scot.12 It is a topic that explicitly reflects ideas about the ‘correct’, expected characteristics of the genders: aberrant behaviour in the way alcohol is consumed and as a result of intoxication is relatively defined according to one’s gender; women are expected to perform differently to men in drinking situations. Alcohol can be used by some mourners for temporary superficial relief from grief, to soften the sense of loss and fill the space vacated by the deceased, in ways that are similar to how others turn to sources of spiritual consolation for support and solace. Drinking in the past was much more tolerated as a male activity and not acceptable for women, except with much greater moderation, in a more circumscribed range of situations. Alcohol dependence as something that may be partly the result of bereavement is more likely to be a male experience and there are other reasons for this also. Women tend to turn to the churches more often than men for consolation, and it is probable that many more women find themselves being prescribed medication for depression and other dysfunctions after a close death. However, the normal sharing of a dram in the household after a death is still an important act of sociability and hospitality enacted in recognition of expectations about gendered behaviour.

Drinkers in the Highlands and Islands have a singular position as a particular version within the more general type of the inebriated, feckless Northerner, a stereotype shared with the Irish, in opposition to the more sober and efficient Southerner (McDonald 1994). There are some valuable anthropological analyses of the part played by alcohol, especially whisky, in the construction of regional and national identity and of masculinity within Scotland.13 Statistics sometimes seem to substantiate the view that alcoholism reaches its national heights in the region, but research in the 1980s also found
evidence that contradicted many previous findings and claims (Blaxter et al. 1982; Crawford et al. 1985; Crawford 1987). Regardless of statistics supporting or contradicting such assumptions about the islands, it is incontrovertible that alcohol abuse is a major social and medical problem in the area. While it is widely acceptable for women to drink alcohol in the home or in public, in ways that would have been disapproved of a few decades ago, and this can generally be regarded positively as breaking down genderized barriers in social relations, it is worrying that such tolerance plays a role in the growing numbers of younger women who drink heavily. The direct impact and other repercussions of the alcohol problems of men often have their heaviest costs upon women and families, a situation exacerbated by certain attitudes that link virility and initiation into the ‘world of men’ with a man’s capacity to ‘take a skinful’ and the respect that other men hold for heavy drinkers.

Attitudes held by islanders towards drinking are ambivalent and full of contradictions and inconsistencies, as in Scotland generally, and religion has undoubtedly a role in this. Drinking to excess (and for some islanders, especially devout Christians, any drinking) is thought to lead almost inevitably to depression, isolation, feelings of futility, anxiety, the same states that are said to encourage people to drink in the first place. It is often said that the sense of a lack of personal worth which can be an effect of absorbing the teachings of the local denominations is one causative factor in many cases of depression and alcohol abuse. It is not easy to find justified reason to counter this. In the islands there are fewer and less varied opportunities for socializing that do not involve drinking or religion, and church membership restricts one’s participation in other social activities. Even today women’s social activities are far more circumscribed than men’s and more focused on networks of blood and affinal kinfolk and neighbours. Most congregations tend to have more female communicants than male ones, religion being one of the few recreational arenas open to women of any age. In Lewis, the idea of having ‘a good time’ almost always implies the involvement of alcohol, but a discourse which typifies women as more responsible, the everyday guardians of the home and family, asserts that women are not supposed to act in ways that suggest the sort of loss of personal control associated with intoxication, a different sort of control loss than that stemming from particular extreme emotional states gendered as ‘female’. Many men depend upon women to provide a stabilizing factor in their lives, whether as their wife, mother, or an adult daughter or sister.
Observers frequently comment on a distinctly morbid and gloomy side to island character (e.g. Ennew 1980; Parman 1972, 1990a, 1990b; Thompson, Wailey and Lummis 1983), which might be connected with the apparent frequent proclivity for (more or less) self-destruction and negation at the bottom of a bottle, and which can be partly explained as stemming from a Presbyterian doctrine of predestination and ‘the elect’, and frequent exhortations from the pulpit to bear always in mind one’s own mortality and post-mortem fate. Rosaldo outlines this spiritual, existential predicament:

On a logical plane, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination seems flawless: God has chosen the elect, but his decision can never be known by mortals. Among those whose ultimate concern is salvation, the doctrine of predestination is as easy to grasp conceptually as it is impossible to endure in everyday life (unless one happens to be a “religious virtuoso”). For Calvinists... the problem of meaning lies in practice not theory. The dilemma... involves the practical matter of how to live with one’s beliefs, rather than the logical puzzlement produced by abstruse doctrine. (1993: 6-7)21

Ennew’s fieldwork on Lewis in the 1970s led her to the following observations:

There appears to be a dark and brooding side to Hebridean culture which manifests itself in an apparent tendency to dwell upon topics of sudden death and tragedy. This may reflect a genuine statistical trend, for the death rate in the Western Isles is higher than that of the United Kingdom as a whole. This could be a function of the age-structure, and yet from a subjective point of view it appears that there is a higher incidence of sudden and tragic death in the islands....

Living in the Hebrides one gets the impression that there is an ever-present potential for disaster. ... What is remarkable is the extent to which people feel themselves involved in tragedy. (Ennew 1980: 93)22

Deaths, recent and imminent, and the mortality of oneself and others, are constant conversation topics, feature prominently in sermons, and persistently pop up in phrases, such as ‘God willing’, ‘if I am spared’, and ‘if we’re all still alive then’, that many older people use, especially the pious, in everyday, informal discourse.23 One correspondent, who now lives in Orkney, where modern mortuary custom is quite different to the Hebridean situation, mentioned how ‘very, very dramatic’ death seemed when she had lived in Lewis (Annie). Local behaviour and attitudes towards death are regarded by islanders as contrasting with modern standards and the ideology of many other western cultures where death is not spoken about as casually or explicitly. Islanders will speak openly of the deceased, discussing, amongst other topics, stages in her or his demise, how they had heard of the death, previous bereavements, the reactions shown by the family, relatives who have or have not come home from outside the island, and even about the appearance of the corpse and whether the death had been easy or difficult.
A fixation with death seems to be apparent in the present-day conduct of some elderly and, to a lesser extent, middle-aged women who make a point of attending any wakes in the village, sometimes regardless of their degree of relationship to the deceased; they are often women with the curam or who aspire to such status, and many are widows, but need not be individuals with an unusual experience of frequent or severe grief. Others are often privately critical of their overt dolefulness and dwelling on the gloomy as they visit the home of the dead at other times throughout the early stages of the mourning period as well as for wakes, sometimes labelling them disparagingly as ‘professional mourners’ or ‘vultures’; they disapprove of how their presence makes the atmosphere even heavier, pessimistic, of how they may seem intrusive and in the way, and do not let the chief bereaved have needed peace. This seems to reflect changes from how communities previously felt they should respond to the death of a member, congregating around the household and, as with the wakes of old, ensuring almost constant activity and distraction of some kind; the modern attitude is that each person requires her/his ‘own space’ and, ideally, a chance to come to terms with loss in her/his own way, with the help of those around, a balance having to be struck.

Another facet of the behaviour of the group sometimes nicknamed ‘professional mourners’ perhaps reflects an understanding of the role and the typical life-course of Lewis women in the past, when most women could not only expect to be widows at some time, but would face potential dangers in childbirth and be touched by high mortality rates which meant that many were bound to lose siblings or children of their own. At different points most women would have to look after people who were terminally ill or very aged. There is also the fact that a woman, especially a widow, was likely to lose much more than a man who suffered a close bereavement in terms of social and material security, a public voice, status. Furthermore, women were even more doomed within strict Presbyterianism, the weaker sex, guilty for the Fall, and unworthy of any sanctioned role in the religious life of the community. Just like the almost celebratory wakes of the past that gave ‘a good send-off’ to those who had died peacefully at an advanced age and which satisfied ritual necessities according to belief and custom, with structured patterns of behaviour, the solemn, intense taighean aire of today serve an important social function within the socio-cultural context. People of varying degrees of religious faith and of different denominations are led in worship by chiefly lay people, some seated in rooms of the deceased’s home which they probably have never before entered, share hospitality, and pay their respects and condolences.
Dressing formally and observing certain behavioural codes, those attending these events acknowledge tacitly and unconsciously the special liminality of time and space in the wake and the funeral. They witness and perform acts that separate the dead from the living (the religious component, or the coffin being taken from the house and the township with certain rules for how it should be carried), and help the incorporation of the dead into the afterlife and of the living into the next phase of the mourning process in adjustment to the new situation.24

**Na taighean aire - the wakes**

Wakes and funerals are discussed under two separate sections within this chapter, a division which is, in some ways, synthetic in that there are so many broad and specific similarities between the performances at both these kinds of events. I, necessarily, include certain aspects of funerals within the description of wakes, treated first as chronologically anterior events. The funeral is a more formal, staged, public occasion, including the services of professionals, undertakers and a minister, who assume certain leading, visible roles; men dominate funerals while women are more passive in the main acts. Taigh aire (literally ‘house of watching’; pl. taighean aire) is the term applied to a modern wake and to the discontinued all-night gathering that was also referred to as caithris (‘vigil, watching’); na leabhraichean (literally, ‘the books’) is used for the family worship that was once held in most households at least once daily, but which is only really maintained in some communicant homes now, the general form of which is the same as that of the wake service to which the term also refers in Lewis.25 A modern funeral is usually referred to in Lewis with adhlacadh, although there are a range of alternatives, like tiodhlacadh.26

Wakes, past and present, tend to be more domestic, and are, to an extent, more spontaneous. Nowadays, as news of the death starts to circulate, largely via the telephone, arrangements are made for the wakes and funeral. The time and venue of the latter are also announced in church and sometimes noticed in shop windows, particularly if the deceased has been a prominent member of the community.27 Although in many villages it would often have been expected that representatives of most households would attend the funeral automatically, there was a largely unspoken protocol governing the order of people to whom the news was disseminated, which also strengthened the status of those under definite obligation to come, in distinction, perhaps, to those families at a greater physical and relational distance who ought to be represented, but for
whom it was not expected that most able-bodied males would attend. Traditionally, the senior male in a household is expected to represent it.

The wake no longer refers to an all-night vigil, starting around 10 p.m., but to a gathering of neighbours and relatives, usually held in the house each day and evening before the body is interred, whether or not it has been taken or is being kept there. With increasing numbers dying in hospitals, hospices and residential care, it is gradually becoming less the case that people will take the remains to a family home for the period between death and burial, or even just for the service on the day of the burial with the coffin departing from the house. For this reason and because of the pressure placed on the bereaved family and the numbers which can attend, the appropriate church is increasingly used for the actual wake and funeral services, even if the body lies in the house;28 previously, most village families preferred not to take the body to the church and the final funeral service would be held in the home. Exceptions tended to be cases when a person who died away from the island had wished to be buried locally, but no household could serve as an appropriate venue for the wake; if the body was only being returned to the island on the day of the funeral, or if the turn-out for the funeral was expected to be exceptionally large. However, in Lewis villages, probably more so than in Stornoway, it is still normal for the remains to be retained in the home or to be coffined and then taken there for the funeral, with no use being made of the church building.

Mourners, dressed as if for a church service, crowd into the house or church for a short service, the formal religious aspects of which are entirely a male responsibility, as is the case with the funeral.29 Church lay people and other church communicants or members, rather than ministers, lead prayer, Bible reading and singing; although any local ministers who attend will lead a prayer,30 the clergy in the Protestant island communities tend to have relatively little (especially considering the importance of religion in the Hebrides) involvement in these gatherings.31 All Protestant denominations can participate when a community member dies. Women have no official role in the Free Church or the Free Presbyterian Church, other than as voluntary Sunday School teachers, interacting with and responsible for children and their Biblical education32 and they never lead worship in these denominations, except during family worship when the senior professing believer in a household is a woman.33 Regardless of their status or seniority, their adherence to doctrine and spiritual integrity, women are denied as varied or full identities within the island churches as men are granted, a situation which has
subtle and obvious consequences for the roles allowed to them within the culture and the value placed on these.

[They] shouldn’t be even heard in our church. Oh no, women have no say, oh no. And I think, like, these church people, you know like elders and deacons, I think they thought the wife should be subservient to them, you know that they were lesser creatures, you see, than the man. (Sina, 29 June 1995; full transcript of interview in Appendix 6B)

Into the 1960s, an all-night caithris could be enjoyable if the death had been a ‘good’ one, of an older person, and a group of young relatives and their friends would gather after older mourners had left and sit up for a reserved cèilidh. Such a gathering, possibly of a group of people who would seldom see one another, would have the potential for an atmosphere of intimacy, for emotional sharing that would, perhaps, not be typical of regular interactions between those present. Well into the 1970s a caithris might involve Bible-reading late into the night in religious households. More modern sensibilities and religious concerns then meant, of course, that gatherings for the dead were no longer occasions for license. The all-night vigils of an earlier time, which, amongst other functions, included in pre-improvement housing the protection of the corpse from animals and keeping a watch on lights that were left burning, and the ritual purposes of ensuring that protective measures were maintained, were redundant. Where two or three people stay up nowadays, it is from personal preference rather than convention and is often largely to provide company for the sleepless (and, despite modern rationalism, having a corpse in a house is eerie). There is now often no body with which to sit up, the remains only being brought to the house or the church an hour or two before the funeral service.

The closest relatives often participate little in the formal proceedings of wakes unless a male relative has a position in the church. Other, especially older, women console, embrace, kiss and hold the hands of chief female mourners and elderly or particularly distraught bereaved males; several middle aged or younger women will confine themselves to the kitchen, to organize things for the tea which is served after the service and are joined by others for company. Meanwhile men greet arrivals who are seated, often necessarily throughout the house, and ideally according to unspoken rules based on the proximity of the visitor’s relationship to the family and their age seniority. This is also a factor in deciding who should open worship or precent the psalms. All conversation is in slow, hushed tones even during the refreshments after the service and women may weep quietly, although outbursts from chief mourners are acceptable as long as there is no fear that the person will become distressed or even unwell at that
point. Inevitably, the constant stream of visitors and the convention of these services are tiring for the family. Wakes and funerals are one of the few events where middle-aged couples might display their connectedness by sitting beside one another and perhaps holding hands. Most households with even a distant connection to the deceased send at least one representative to the leabhraichean at some point over the two or three days they are held. Given the average earlier mortality for men, not surprisingly, at the core of those in the sitting room, where the focus lies (although the body before and after it is coffin would usually be kept in a bedroom until the funeral or last wake) is often a huddle of widows around possibly a new ‘cohort’ member. Expectations of how individuals should act at the wakes and funerals are influenced by general ideas about gendered identity, especially in regard to a discourse on emotion and emotionality within the culture. Attitudes towards such things as the consumption of alcohol or the use of prescribed medication are variable in relation to the gender of the consumer and are relevant to the subject of how women and men behave at funerary events and during the entire period of mourning (Chapter 6).

An t-adhlacadh - the funeral
As Scottish Presbyterian burial practice does not require a minister, and there may be no more of a service than a short prayer, a funeral is rendered within the context of modern, organized religion as a technically fairly ‘secular’ event, in wider religious and cultural senses. This meant, however, in the past that folk custom, unsanctioned, unofficial, even un-Christian, could continue to be practised for longer than if the clergy had been heavily involved. In 1638 the General Assembly had forbidden funeral sermons, which had been practised since the Reformation, and in 1645 this was settled with the approval of the Westminster Directory for Public Worship by the Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. However, it gradually became common for the minister or an elder to say a prayer in the house, apparently partly because of the development of the ‘kistin’ in importance (Chapter 4). Elders had to certify that statutes regarding the materials used in graveclothes were observed and, so, attended the placement of the body in the coffin, and it was natural that they should say a prayer. It also seems inevitable that the Churches would have realized that the best way to curtail ‘unseemly’ behaviour at wakes and funerals was to sanctify these occasions by endowing them with a religious component. By around the 1880s, a prayer at the graveside was acceptable for the Church of Scotland, although this had still been rare as late as the end of the 1860s. Writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, Grant commented that, although the
Church had no burial ceremony, in less remote Highland areas, at least, 'It is the custom, however, for the minister to attend, generally speaking, to give a somewhat lengthy blessing before the feast, and a short prayer at the grave' (1988: 308).

Today, the Free Church has little more than a brief prayer at the grave and a short word of exhortation (although the Free Church 'guidebook' on procedures and practices does not stipulate a protocol for burials); in the more doctrinally dogmatic Free Presbyterian Church prayers are forbidden; and in the Church of Scotland, praying at the graveside is now normal routine. Indeed, it is still common for the minister not to attend the interment and to go only part of the way with the cortège, the usual practice in many Lewis townships until recently (Macdonald 1984: 68). One Free Church elder is aware of certain problems arising from this lack of commonly accepted guidelines and a requirement that church adherents understand the meaning of their own practices:

Those who frown on [a prayer at the graveside] are somewhat zealous in giving no place to the papish [sic] practice of praying for the dead and while that might seem a nonsense it is only recently that I had an argument with one who is a regular church-goer and who was fully convinced that prayers offered at wakes and funerals were for the benefit of the departed. So maybe the precaution is not so silly after all. (Kenneth, personal correspondence, 4 February 1997; also see Appendix 5G)

The gathering in the house or the church, before the cortège departs with the coffin and proceeds to the cemetery, takes much the same form as a wake, but is inevitably a more critical event, achieving closure on a transition phase wherein the body, coffined or not, is a presence, is accessible and can be visited. At the funeral, separation comes to the fore. The funeral, like the wake is still by anthropological definition, a ritual process (often conducted in virtual silence), a sacred occasion even for those who are not characteristically 'religious' or 'spiritual'; it is outwith the everyday rules of behaviour, the presentation of the self and relationships, and, of course, states of existence. A member of the community, having reached their end as a living entity, is consigned to a field filled with other remains in such a way that her or his soul may pass on into the afterlife or be laid to rest 'decently'. It is a site of commemoration created by the living, and of the complete reforming of relationships between the newly dead and survivors.

In the organization and management of modern wakes or funerals that have some association, because of the deceased’s or the bereaved survivors' denomination, with one of the main Churches, there is an illusion of equality, particularly because of the minor part played by clergy, but the assignment of roles - women provide the tea after the
worship is over and look after the mourners, ‘traditional’ domestic performances, while males, especially church members, assume more structured and specialized parts - suggests otherwise (c.f. Field, Hockey and Small 1997b; Hockey 1997). The Presbyterian doctrine of the elect, not least of all, also shows that at the heart of the dominant religious ideology, all are no more equal at death than they are in life.

Women’s roles in funerals, throughout Scotland, have not been consistently recorded. Because of current Lewis convention, where they generally go no further than the garden or churchyard gate when the men leave for the cemetery, or cladh, locals in the area often assert that this has always been ‘the way’, ‘the tradition’, something that does not require explanation or justification: ‘On the mainland women go to the graveyard but it was never the custom here. But we must not condemn those who do go’ (Murdina; Appendix 4J.7)); ‘Women have never attended the graveside here as they do in the Uists’ (Flora, personal correspondence, September 1996; see Appendix 3I)). Even relatively recent evidence, however, based on memory and oral testimony (for example, data in the School’s Sound Archive), contradicts this just like the historical accounts mentioned above, although not uniformly so between different villages and islands. For example, in Harris, no ministers or women took the often long walk to the Luskentyre or Scarista grounds; late nineteenth century descriptions of funerals in St. Kilda indicate that women attended the burial and maintained the tradition of keening (Harman 1997: 138-40); and several women had in the past used to accompany the cortège for about the first quarter of a mile in Bernera. Women had, in earlier times, followed part of the way in South Uist, where in the early years of the twentieth century, for Protestants and Catholics alike, a (much attenuated, one suspects) form of keening had survived along with the tradition of piping at funerals, and where the women had followed the coffin which was preceded by the men, but with the introduction of motor vehicles, both sexes had regularly started to attend the grave or uagh. In Berneray the missionary had altered the formation there by positioning the coffin at the head of the procession in 1923, and around that time women also ceased to be part of cortèges. In some Lewis villages women would go out to touch the coffin as it passed, but customarily did not join the procession.

In Lewis, women are relegated to the kitchen at wakes and the garden gate at funerals. In Scalpay, the women are allowed to follow the male procession and they lay a hand on the coffin before it is placed in the hearse. The men stand in a respectful semi-circle while the procession of women do this. Having been at funerals in both places, I think the women in Scalpay are allowed more leeway. (Katy-Ann, personal correspondence; Appendix 4F.4)
The proximity or not of the cemetery to the village was always a factor in who could go, so one township could have practices different to those of the next.

The modern Lewis funeral service is generally held around noon or between 2 and 4 p.m., in the house or church, and lasts about half an hour. Like the wake, it consists of prayers, reading and psalm-singing, in Gaelic or English. Many men, more distant mourners, do not attend the service but gather outside to form the cortège at the appropriate time. The usual routine in the present day, in island villages, is that after the procession of men leaves for the cemetery following the service the village burial ground often being separate from any churches or when the service is in one village and the actual interment in another, the women will slowly begin to disperse (after everyone has been served tea in the house if the service has been held there), having watched the cortège depart through windows or from the garden or church grounds. With the lifting of the coffin, its removal from the home, the dead is separated from female life, from regenerative and reproductive potency, from the secular spaces of the village and the domestic, from contexts of relationships based on birth and (hetero-)sexuality, from children, from social and material production. ‘There can be no greater statement of the Hebridean sense of the woman’s place within the homestead than this separation’ (Ennew 1980: 95), perhaps, but the tradition is not as easily explicable, as this comment might suggest, by apparent recourse to a ‘separate spheres’ model. Some of the reasoning insiders offer relies on practical strategies resting on conventional assumptions that the domestic is a female responsibility, such as the often rehearsed explanation that the women must stay behind to prepare the meal which chief mourners will share when the men return, ignoring, not least of all, the fact that the very closest female relatives of the deceased may often not be expected or allowed by the others to organize this; there are usually a number of people waiting for the men to return whose labour is not needed. Most of the people I have spoken with about the convention accept the exclusion of women from the burial, that ‘Men and women play their own particular parts in funerals, both in their own way’ (Murdina, Appendix 41.7), and prefer island custom to that of other areas whether or not they have participated in other traditions. Most feel that the intense emotion, sombreness and gravity of Lewis and Harris wakes and funerals are healthy compared to situations where death is faced less directly and mourners have less involvement with the obsequies. For some the present conventions are crucially tied in with the investment of official religious authority in men only.

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Unaware of, or ignoring, the fact that the accepted norm was relatively recently established, occasional observers and participants rely on assumptions that women are psychologically and physiologically more vulnerable to severe upset, claiming they could not cope with the finality of burial, and perhaps adding apocryphal examples of women who attended the burial of a loved one and were seriously traumatized by the experience (c.f. Hockey 1997).48 Being female does not exempt one from dealing with the taighean aire, which can be exhausting and pressurizing, or from perhaps even laying-out the corpse. It is also usual for the main female mourners to visit the grave later on the same or on the next day. Greater restraint in men supposedly supplies implicit testimony to their greater rationality and self-control; they are ruled by the mental rather than the instinctive, the producers and products of civilized culture more than women, who are closer to elemental nature, less intellectual, less reasoning. This essentializing creates and supports, and is itself then validated and promoted by, quotidian and ideal manifestations of a cultural and philosophical hierarchy valuing masculine conduct over that of females, promulgated and sustained by individuals and groups receiving behavioural and identitarian guidelines in their socialization and living according to these. A few men with whom I have spoken separately about this offer an alternative rationale for the cultural understanding that women should stay away, in that men could not show their feelings in their company, therefore prefer an all-male group, and claim that women recognize this (e.g. from conversation with Kenneth, a Free Church elder, April 1990, and recorded interview with Rev. D. MacKenzie, 26 July 199549), but women’s, historically fairly recent, exclusion seems to be due more to the patriarchal structure of local church government.50

I think an important factor behind why islanders seldom question the current practice is the simple fact of how affecting can be the sheer visual impact of a walking funeral: a long stream of dark-suited and coated men, some wearing hats (many with gaits that even from a distance hint at years spent at sea), proceeds slowly, and in apparent order, along a quiet village road to a graveyard, which is usually quite separate from any church, often above a beach with its headstones facing out to sea. Outsiders and the most rational, least sentimental of individuals are struck by how ‘right’ it seems in its solemnity and uniformity; ‘I think that the respect shown for the departed at funerals is unique to Lewis and Harris. The funeral march is a well conducted sombre affair’ (Flora, personal correspondence, September 1996; see Appendix 3J). Perhaps it impresses because such dramatic examples of ritual, played out by such large numbers of a community, to mark a point in the biological life cycle or any other shared event are,
today, so rare. The formal order of the walking funeral and the dress of the men contrasts with the rural backdrop and even wilder view of the shoreline, landscapes in which humans are normally dressed for labour or very casually. After the committal, the gathering breaks up, small groups chatting and smoking, briefly visiting other graves, before most of the company disperses and returns to regular wear and normal routine, but the emotional effect of the dignity of the funeral, as onlookers in the village watch it go by, from behind windows, makes it easy to ignore the absence of female figures, and from a distance it is harder to perceive, for example, any disorganization in the arrangement of pall-bearers, which, contrary to most accounts, according to men with whom I have spoken in the last few years, is a rare feature of funerals but can be a guarded conversation topic amongst them afterwards.

In recent years, a number of Lewis villages have seen women go to the graveside. When their brother died in 1990 at the age of 56, my mother and her sisters decided to attend the burial, his eldest son also asked his wife to accompany him, and my mother wanted my sister and I to be there. This death had been fairly sudden. As the funeral party had to come fourteen miles by car for my uncle to be buried in his native village, the funeral service having been in his Stornoway home, and it was a stormy Easter day, there was only a short procession from the car park into the graveyard, where we stood slightly apart from the men as they saw to the burial. Although the novelty probably bemused, maybe even annoyed, some of the more distant mourners who did stare at us, the chief ones did not appear inhibited by the female presence and were emotional (perhaps we even helped them to be so). In the specific circumstances, our contravention of accepted convention did not seem inappropriate: my aunts had all come from the mainland and had not had a chance for a proper farewell to the first of their adult siblings to die (and that before either of his parents); like my uncle’s daughter-in-law, they were glad to be there for their husbands; my mother especially wanted to be there for her nephews with whom she has a relationship of friendship too and she made it clear that it was important that my sister and I be there as nieces of the dead man just as his nephews were there. The couples held hands and hugged one another and after the committal some wandered off for a few moments in the wind-battered burial ground, lying above a long stretch of uninterrupted white sand and machair, looking over to the mainland. The women who chose to attend this burial are not concerned with righting the wrongs of ‘sexism’ or exclusion by gender, or even passively concerned with such; they were motivated by their own and family needs and were close enough to be able to articulate these and support each other; for them, to be there for their male relatives and each other, and
simply to attend the grave, overrode any supposed cultural prohibition or possible social disapproval. Perhaps significantly, none of the women who attended are church-goers or otherwise religious; the widow who is, stayed at home. This example also shows the growing importance of individual relationships that are not formed as mechanistically, predictably and uniformly as they often were in the past, especially in the case of couples, marriage in the islands having becoming gradually more companionate and less a strategy for survival, and of friendships between non-kin. In my village (which was previously noted for the extent of its very strong Free and Free Presbyterian Church adherence), one woman before that, who had been brought up by islander parents on the mainland, and a few others since then have attended burials. This change is slowly occurring throughout the islands, although in Lewis and Harris it is still rare, occasional, and many do not approve; it is not a situation where change can be unproblematically instigated in order to achieve balance and to challenge rules that seem exclusionary and with no reasoned foundation, being such an emotional experience, a climactic rite in the most difficult of the life crises.52

The churches, as institutionally central to island culture (and for so long important to Scottish government, identity and education), provide a model for social organization, and there is abundant evidence of the conflict that has flared up over the centuries between lay and professional clergy and maintainers of customs and associated beliefs that were or are not part of official doctrine. The practices and underlying cosmological ideas of the 'folk' belief system included more varied, visible and active roles for women in the spiritual and mental life of the culture, more articulacy, knowledge and ritual authority as permitted mediators between the material and the spiritual, the profane and sacred, the human and the infinite. At funerals keening women excellently exemplified this. Even if professional preachers have had at times relatively little active responsibility in funerals, the patriarchal model of the Churches sets standards for the assignment of roles and ideals for behaviour, without having to tell women to wait at home with their grief and 'mind the stove'. This has now made interment routines seem rather mysterious for females who can only imagine what the experience is exactly like. Given the apparently highly ordered and sombre character of island burial processions, the women at my uncle's grave, for example, were slightly surprised at how casual, unmoved and relaxed many of the mourners who were not close to the dead appeared, how uninterested some were as they waited for the committal and for the grave to be filled; their expectations had been of a much more sadly emotional, intense stage in the events and when they spoke about this, male relatives confirmed that the different
behaviours of the various men present made it a typical funeral for someone of the deceased’s age. Within the culture, the funeral became and still is a ‘male’ event, fictionalized in the imaginations of those who are customarily excluded, and it provides a distinct contrast with the scenes from previous centuries where much of the drama of the event was generated in the performance of the women as they keened and wailed. Funerals and wakes explicitly replicate division by gender of the labour and social responsibilities which prevail generally in the culture.

Conclusion
Conformity to the operative roles in the wake or funeral equals an agreement to perform according to ideas about either of the genders that purportedly decide these roles and this confirms and sustains these: ideas about women’s appropriate religious roles grounded in beliefs about the different spiritual, existential conditions of the genders, ideas about their different emotional and psychological constitutions based on the belief that these are rooted in biology. The roles which women and men have been given, customarily and conventionally, in various stages of the sequence of death experience change as the society and its central eschatological; and more general religious, tenets change, yet they are justified and enforced as the supposed inevitable and right result of unchangeable nature or stable tradition. History, however, exposes the temporal construction of the idea of tradition in much the same way as it exposes the temporary, non-essential, adaptable existence of the genders as ideal but not ‘real’, as normative constructions. By conforming to custom and performing the roles which have been set within the parameters of cultural femaleness, by overlooking the contradictions and being unconcerned with the roots of convention in wake and funeral contexts, women engage themselves in the ‘narrative construction of reality’ that excludes them, on the grounds of being female, from funerals and active participation in other public and formal religious occasions. The performances of the sexes at this time are culturally and historically recommended and the authority of tradition creates a suspicion of what might happen if the rule is broken and women attend a burial. Ultimately, of course, it should be down to the individuals involved, but there could be therapeutic benefits from having the choice to be there or not. As marriages and partnerships have become more companionate and the relations between the sexes more variable, women and men may increasingly want a female presence at funerals. Cultural ideas about emotion are implied in the discussion as crucial influences on custom and norms. The discourses in which these operate and have meaning are given closer and more extensive attention in
the next chapter on mourning behaviour, immediately around the death event and in the longer term, and are referred to in the chapters on lament which move the focus of this work backwards in time.

1 For information on the Irish 'merry wake' and the greater detail that survives for its games, plays and the elements of contest, see Harlow 1997 and Ó Súilleabáin 1967. Ó Cruallaíoch (1990) gives a fascinating analysis of this subject within a cosmological frame, including discussion of iconic and supernatural female figures. Harlow provides a good, concise overview of why wakes as celebrations of the dead were held and of reasons for the ludic aspects of these gatherings.

2 'Formerly, in the Western Islands, funerals sometimes became great orgies, and an old saying illustrative of this is that one funeral is better than twelve Sacramental gatherings. (Is feàrr an tòrradh na da chomanachadh dhìlag.) The Lewis funeral today is, however, most decorous, and in every way in harmony with the situation.' (Report of the Crofters' Commission 1902: xcvi) The evaluation of a funeral or wake as 'better than a wedding' is a familiar idea, particularly with reference to Ireland, played on by writers, like James Joyce. See Richardson on the movement to sobriety in Welsh and English mortuary gatherings (1987: 12-13; 1993: 94).

3 Some of the more serious, as opposed to the ludic, elements of wakes and funerals in the past are covered in Chapters 7 and 8.

4 This denomination predominates, has the most social influence, albeit that that has dramatically waned in the last two decades and continues to do so, in the Lewis village where I have lived and where many of the islanders who have helped with this research are from or live.

5 E.g. in Burt 1815 vol. 1: 210-15 and vol. 2: 189-90; Garnett 1800 vol. 1: 119-20, 162-63; Gordon 1984: 24-28; Grant 1811: 187-8; Pennant 1771: 91-2 and 1776 vol. 1: 263. In contrast, the Hebridean funerals and wakes that Buchanan (1793: 169-70) knew of were, he claimed, decorous and composed compared to those usual in much of Scotland. Most of the general folklore works that were published at the end of the last and start of this century give some coverage of contemporary funeral convention - e.g. Smith (1886: 81-83). C.f. Moldovan (1986: 18) on Hungarian funeral dance customs that probably date back to pagan times.

6 As well as the customary measures taken to protect the departed and the quick just after a death, further rites of passage and protection were necessary components of a proper funeral - and many of these carried on into the second half of this century. Funerals were, naturally, dominated with rites of separation and incorporation, and to ensure the dead's entrance into the next realm. For example, to complicate the soul's possible return the chairs on which the coffin or bier had rested were overturned when it was lifted; the dead had to be carried across running water; and, as in diverse cultures, the dead was taken out of the house not through the door but through a window or an opening made in the thatch or a wall which was promptly closed afterwards. Frazer (1936 vol. 3) describes many examples of this world-wide custom (chapters 1 and 2, especially, with reference to it in Norse sagas. Germanic law and Highland folklore, 101-2) and many others too. With the categories of the dead that lacked stable existential status, or who were regarded as having died too soon, and, so, who could not belong to the normal otherworld, such precautions had to be very stringently applied (c.f. Pentikäinen 1989 and O'Connor 1991). Cutting all ties and removing all fastening pins in the graveclothes involved sympathetic magical assistance to the soul that had to free itself from the body, and, as it was not fully incorporated into the afterlife for a few days after burial, the family sometimes left a drink out for it and the door ajar on those nights in case it should return (e.g. Campbell 1900: 241: Henderson 1911: 52 re c. 1850s: SA 1966/84/A2 South Uist; SA 1968/85/A9 Islay), a practice found internationally (e.g. Cederroth (1988: 45) says that the Muslims of Lombok, Indonesia, observe this custom). Richardson has studied many different symbolic and actual boundaries in British funerary custom (1993).

7 E.g. the NSA (vol. XIV (Inverness-shire part): 172) refers to the way music was hardly a feature of funerals, by the 1830-40s, and the Report of the Crofters' Commission, 1901 (1902: xcvi) comments on the change from the uproarious funerals of the past to restraint and seriousness.

8 'Mourning is worn more extensively and for longer periods than in the south; religious services are held in the bereaved home every night from the death to the funeral; bands of
watchers sometimes keep vigil with the corpse throughout the hours of darkness; the coffin is borne to the grave by a procession of mourners, on foot, who may be gathered from many parts of the island and will, in any case, include most or all of the able-bodied men of the township. Some of these customs have been criticised by the theologically minded as being of pagan origin, but all are carried out with the utmost respect and reverence: intemperance such as Mr MacGregor alleges would be most resented as an affront to the feelings, not only of the bereaved family, but of the whole community (Lewis Association 1943: 36)

9 According to Grant, at the funeral in 1813 or 1814, in Inverdruie, Rothiemurchus, Speyside, of an elderly male relative, which she and her young sisters attended, along with ‘hundreds’ of others, ‘A young girl in her usual best attire walked first, then the coffin’ (1988: 308), and she makes no comment about the exclusion of any women.

10 As mentioned elsewhere in this work, Bruford (1996: 63) has surmised that attempts to avoid confrontations, arising from the clergy’s and others’ opposition to women keeping at the graveside, may have played a part in the exclusion of females from burials in certain areas, although this would only have been one factor amongst many. See Chapter 8.

11 The following accounts are relevant to wake and funeral conventions up to the present and some refer to past tradition: Dorian 1985: 85-87 (Golspie, but comparable to the islands); Ennew 1980: 93-96; Hendry 1983: 176-77; Macdonald 1984: 67-68; MP 1992.26 (an undergraduate research paper based on fieldwork by a Scottish Studies student: Douglas Neally, ‘Customs and Beliefs about Death in the Isle of Lewis Today’); Parman 1990: 139-42; Rea (1964: 29-31) gives an account of a South Uist Catholic funeral, at some date between 1894 and 1904, which is not irrelevant to the present; Thompson, Wailey and Lummis 1983: 284-6; and Vallee’s detailed description and discussion of contemporary Roman Catholic mortuary routines and funerals in the Southern Isles (1954: 45-51; 1955).

This selection of interviews, from both Protestant and Catholic areas, covers various mortuary topics, generally referring to practices and beliefs that within the informant’s lifetime were or are current, with some referring additionally to what they know about the past where there are differences: SA 1969/81 (Berneray, Harris); SA 1971/102 and 103 (South Uist); SA 1973/164 (Lewis); SA 1975/24 (South Uist); SA 1977/40 (Berneray, Lewis); SA 1977/49 (South Uist); SA 1977/94 (Mull); SA 1977/136 (Berneray); SA 1978/82 (Berneray); SA 1984/2 (Harris); SA 1986/41 (Iona); SC 1989/10A (Barra); SC 1992/26 (Lewis).

12 Alcohol and the contexts in which it is consumed have been and are irrefutably important and prominent in island culture, although this should not be over-stated. This has changed historically, from a time when bards praised their chiefs for their generosity with wine or women extolled a man’s drinking abilities in song, and the present-day situation is one full of contradictions and questions. It is understandable that many have been tempted into relaying a facile depiction of island communities as governed by two polar institutions, ‘the Bible and the Bottle’ (a phrase which, for example, gave Parman the title for a chapter in a work on the Western Isles (1976)): it is a view that insiders carry of themselves as a group and sometimes as individuals, although women less so than men, and which sometimes shapes their attitudes to ‘home’ as much as it influences the impressions that outsiders have of the area.

13 For example, Sharon Macdonald 1994; 1997: c.f. Peace’s study (1992) of drinking and the construction of identity in an Irish fishing community which parallels closely the island situation.

14 For example by taking into account the particular nature of NHS care available in the Highlands and Islands, the previous comparison that had shown that a Highlander was 12.5 times more likely to be admitted into hospital for alcoholism than someone in Kent, and which had been the basis for regional studies of the problem, was placed in perspective. Many people needing treatment for alcohol-related problems in the region had to be treated in Inverness at Craig Dunain Hospital and were therefore necessarily in-patients. When out-patient and day-patient figures were calculated for both areas the differences became almost insignificant, very different to the 12.5:1 statistic (Crawford et al 1985; Crawford 1987). It was also found in a survey using self-reporting from 800 people in each of Tayside, Kent and the Highlands that there was little difference in consumption levels (ibid.).

15 Quite aside from anything else, the particular links that have been established between moderate (but not excessive) consumption and breast cancer, one of the main causes of premature death for Scottish women, are enough to create real anxiety about women and
drinking and the way that alcohol and even heavy drinking have now become so much part of female culture where before these were a more masculine sphere.

16 Even women who do not generally approve of excessive drinking are remarkably tolerant of it so long as it does not seriously impinge upon their own lives and will sometimes lay blame on wives of alcoholics for ‘driving them to it’ through ‘nagging’ (‘No wonder he goes into town and gets drunk, she won’t even let him have a dram in the house’). (Various fieldnotes.) There are many who apparently find themselves drinking to excessive antisocial levels as a result of the way in which others sometimes oppose any alcohol consumption. It has been found in other cultures where the prevailing religion advises abstinence and judges drinkers harshly that there are often relatively few moderate drinkers but a high proportion of heavy drinkers because people lack a training in ‘normal’, social drinking and are denied contexts for this (Dr Alex Crawford, then Director of Renfrew Council on Alcohol, re American research (amongst, e.g., Mormons), personal communication, 18 August 1993). Condemnation of his or her drinking habits can intensify the drinker’s negative emotions and self-image, which are perhaps contributory reasons for reliance on alcohol, and can increase the person’s possible isolation.

17 While research has shown that the majority of men but not of women in the islands reported themselves as regular drinkers, most people of both genders did express ideas that alcohol consumption is to be seen in negative terms, but many of these could simultaneously see benefits and a positive side too (Blaxter et al 1982; Crawford et al 1985; Crawford 1987). It has already been noted that many people who do drink themselves also regard alcohol negatively: one can enjoy its consumption for various reasons and have no trouble in regulating one’s consumption but still hold the opinion that, ideally, it something better done without. People will contrast themselves with abstainers who have the *curam* or who are seeking salvation within the churches, and they may say that they envy non-drinkers, but perceive no real reason for becoming ‘teetotal’; others see non-drinkers as less desirable social company and people will talk jokingly with mock dread of ‘dry weddings’ to which they have been invited. For many their relationship with alcohol is full of contradictions, largely because of a sense of guilt; many feel furtive about even very occasional drinking, wary of being ‘found out’ by those strictly opposed to all alcohol, who are often church members, and of the gossip in small communities. This is an important instance of the way that religion, regulation by the churches, affects the private space of the home and circumscribes the public and domestic conduct of many and of how vulnerable people feel to judgement by others. It is interesting that in the past, and even nowadays in the opinions of older folk, different drinks were regarded as more ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’, an idea partly based on mistaken assumptions about the relative potency of certain drinks: whisky and beer were once for men and sherry, port and wine were the expected choices of women.

18 An interesting element of identity arises in the experiences of many men who were previously alcoholics and have become born-again Christians, with ‘the *curam*’, and perhaps have proceeded to a lay position in their church. Reformed, abstinent former heavy drinkers are accorded considerable respect so long as they are not too vocally self-righteous about this, even by other drinkers. There is a recurrent theme in many of these men’s conversion stories, of reaching a critical point of excess in their drinking and sudden spiritual awakening as if they were faced with the realization that there were only two choices available to them, of alcoholic self-annihilation or accepting Christian salvation and turning their back on the past. These narratives are very often dramatic and echo the personal narratives of conversion that one would associate with experiences during evangelical revivals. I have heard examples, both first-hand and from others, of such stories that can include descriptions of hallucinations or visions and feelings of transcendence which some converts use to powerful effect in their lay responsibilities as part of their public ‘witnessing’ of their faith. (Various field observations.)

19 Women who do drink are judged more severely than men, although the consequences of this are both positive and negative, and perhaps may create more ‘secret drinkers’ amongst women who have scarce opportunity for developing moderate, acceptable behaviour in group drinking situations. Doctors admit that they are more ready to diagnose alcoholism for women than men, allowing a higher level of dysfunction in males before deciding that there is a problem that has to be formally dealt with.

20 It has been noted by many writers than in colloquial Gaelic men, especially bachelors, are routinely referred to as ‘boys’, *baileach*, even into middle age until they become ‘old men’,
bodaich. That this does not simply originate in the use of patronymic forms of address and seems to reflect a tolerance for conduct in men that would not be acceptable for women who have the capacity to 'control themselves'. This is, of course, an idea that very much has permeated attitudes to sexuality in the past and even for many people today.

21 Although they characterize, not entirely precisely, Hebridean Presbyterianism, and its concomitant denial of worldly things and of the self in preparation for life after death, as simply Calvinistic, as do most commentators. Thompson, Wailey and Lummis make the point that the doctrine of the elect 'may have been a spur to Swiss enterprise, or a “most blessed and comfortable doctrine” in Elizabethan England, but it had acquired another, much more disheartening meaning for the people of the Western Isles. Goodrich-Freer thought “the depression of the Lewis people is intellectual rather than physical”; and observers today find that the doctrine of predestination still “weighs very heavily” with them. For most it implies a contemplation of personal unworthiness' (1983: 292).

22 Maclean, I think, expresses one element of this tragic sentiment as he contemplates some local suicides in Ardnamurchan and turns to the islands: ‘All three were men and all chose to drown. That is a Hebridean form of self-destruction, a kind of acknowledgement or a resumption of origins’ (1986: 172-3).

23 Parman quotes an incomer to Lewis, ‘Hilda, the teacher from Detroit: “I didn’t see Geall until I was twenty, when my father decided to retire here; but as soon as I came, I saw, magnified, the feelings that I had grown up with: the feeling that I was doomed; that everyone is sinful; it’s the human burden of original sin, and there’s nothing you can do about it. It’s “in the blood” or God’s will; and people sit around saying “oich, oich” and waiting to find out if they’ve been chosen for salvation.”’ (1990: 134)

24 Of course, extreme behaviour in the past (whether drunken game-playing or grief stricken ceremonial weeping) much more explicitly indicated the transitional status of the mourners as much as other customs characterized the dead as an entity in passage.

25 Other terms like falair, as ‘funeral. funeral entertainment, lykewakes’, were once common but, as far as I know, are not really used in Lewis now. *Falair*. (gen.) -e. (pl.) -ean (fem. n.); also *falar*; in Uist *falaraidh* or *falaraidh*; and *alaire, alair*, or *alaire* for funeral (Carmichael 1971: 7); ‘Alaire, provisions for a funeral, especially whisky. Also biscuits, cheese’ (MacDonald 1966: 39 re Skye).

26 *Adhlacadh*, (gen.) *adhlacaidh* (masc. n.), and *adhlaic* (gen.) *adhlaic* (fem. n.), 'funeral, burial, ceremony of interment'; *tidhlaic*, (gen.) *tidhlaic* (masc. n.) and *tidhlaicadh*, (gen.) *tidhlaicadh* (masc. n.), 'funeral, gift, donation'; *tòrradh*, (gen.) *tòrraidh* (masc. n.), 'burial, act of burying; burial solemnities or procession; wake; heaping up' ‘S ion’ uair a chaithd e/i ’n lùib tòrraidh’; ‘It’s often that he/she has been caught up in a funeral procession, was said of those with second sight who might be physically carried along or pushed aside by phantom funerals at night. *Tiodhlaicadh* is used in much the same way as *adhlaicadh* in Lewis, although the former term can also be used for the burial of animals and objects, whereas the latter is limited to human reference. *Tòrraidh* is more commonly used in the Southern Isles. *Fios an tòrraidh* or *fios torraidh*, literally 'the funeral invitation', was a conventional expression once used in many areas to denote the giving of notice to someone of funeral details.

27 In straggling, dispersed settlements, the sight of a fire lit on a hill could communicate that someone in a nearby household had died. It was once customary to burn the straw bedding of the deceased person and use this as signal to other villagers. In the days before telephones, two boys were usually sent around on foot, bicycle or pony, to broadcast the news to other neighbourhoods and outlying settlements, for a small payment or a treat. When I have asked people in their seventies and eighties about funeral invitations in Lewis in the past they assert that everyone was invited and that the special sending out of boys there was mainly a practical requirement for outlying areas of the village and for other settlements.

28 It is important that the term ‘funeral service’ has to be employed here in a qualified way, not only for the context of Western Isles Presbyterianism, but for Scotland historically.

29 It is also men who administrate the local funeral fund in most, if not all, villages. The funeral fund is a scheme whereby people pay regular contributions for the maintenance of the local graveyard and to secure a fair for the individuals covered. The fund helps with such things as the cost of transporting back remains to the island from elsewhere so many islanders who live away from the area contribute to such a scheme.
In the case of a Catholic family, mass would be said by the priest.

See Vallee's (1954: 45-51 and 1955) detailed account of wakes and funerals as he observed and participated in these in the 1950s in Barra, where the population was at that time 95% Roman Catholic. As in the other Southern Isles it was frequently the case that some women would attend the burial, unlike the situation in Lewis and Harris.

Church officers in the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church unequivocally see no inconsistency in trusting the critical education of the youngest generation to women but do not envisage a day when there will be any conceivable need or desire for female elders and deacons, far less ministers. The situation, is of course, different in the Church of Scotland, and there are female ministers in Gaidhealtachd areas.

‘Her exclusion from the cemaat, the congregation or religious community reflects her lack of socially, ratified spiritual identity’ (Delaney 1991: 312). In contrast to the Presbyterian situation, the litany was once led for the deceased by someone of their own gender in Barra (SA 1970/349/A5) and, presumably, other Catholic communities.

Only the Biblical Psalms of David are sung for public worship in the Free and Free Presbyterian Church traditions.

Of course, there are and have been local exceptions, for example in Scarp, off Harris, in the first half of this century, the missionary or minister said a committal prayer and read verses from Psalms 16 or 107, and the men were led by a precentor in singing a psalm, at the grave (Duncan 1995: 189).

Many of the essays in Forrester and Murray 1984 touch on the attitudes of the Scottish Churches to their participation in funeral services; Gordon (1984: 46-51) summarizes some of the main changes in this.

Hockey points out that lay addresses tend to be delivered by men (1997: 94).

Cladh, (gen.) cladh/cladha (masc. n.), ‘graveyard; trench; mound; cill, (gen.) cille, (pl.) cilltean (fem. n.), ‘graveyard; church, cell’; réllig, (gen.) réllige, (pl.) rélligean (fem. n.), ‘burial ground, grave, crypt; a family grave or a layer in a graveyard; stone chest where bones dug out of graves were placed’.

E.g. SA 1970/349/A5 (Barra) and SA 1984/2/A4.


This is according to the testimony of Donald Alasdair Johnson - SA 1971/103/A1 (South Uist); c.f. SA 1968/190/A11, a Harris description of the same arrangement of the company which recurs in many places.

SA 1977/49/B3. Uaigh, (gen.) uaighe, (pl.) uaighean (fem. n.), ‘grave, tomb; den, cave’.

SA 136/A17 and B1.

SA 1973/164/A8 (Lewis).

This is an innovation in the island of which many strongly disapprove, according to Morag MacLeod (noted in conversation and from personal correspondence).

Nowadays there are increasingly fewer walking funerals where the cortège will proceed the entire route on foot. Until recently this was still quite normal for burials taking place in the same village as the service. Although the weather and other factors can influence the organizers’ decision on this, the older idea of having to carry the dead as an act of honour is less present now and the coffin only has to be carried a short part of the way as a sufficient token before the company temporarily disbands to drive to the graveyard. See Gordon's chapter on walking funerals in the past (1984: 60-65).

One correspondent gave her own succinct view: ‘As men are supernumeraries at birth, to make up they have taken over funerals’ (Catherine; Appendix 4C.7).

Women’s especial ‘receptivity to the dangers of death’ has been the grounds for their complete exclusion from funerals in many cultures (e.g. Helander 1988: 126). There are narratives, ranging from legends with supernatural overtones to family traditions about people who become mad with grief; and in conversations about this subject people will sometimes relate a handed-down account of how a great-great relative, or some other past local, had allegedly been driven insane with sorrow and loss. Other examples of this are discussed in Chapter 6 with reference to ‘mourning’, as a condition that is more or less culturally defined, and Chapter 8 regarding the figure of the lamentor.

An extract from this taped interview is included as Appendix 6C.
There may, however, be other reasons for why many Highland women in the distant past may have chosen not to go to the burial, or why their presence was not approved of, such as the issue of the potential level of drunkenness and disorder that occasionally occurred during long processions and burials in some areas.

At the time I was at home, during the Easter vacation of my first undergraduate year at university, and was working on an essay about traditional death folklore in the Western Isles. This was a short piece of work and was not concerned with contemporary practice, but I noted my observations about events. I felt a certain guilt about doing this and was confused as this was the closest bereavement I had experienced up to that point. My uncle’s death had a profound impact on the family, for various reasons. The decision of his sisters and daughter-in-law to break with tradition was significant. Although the notes I took then were for personal reasons and not made as ‘fieldnotes’, I returned to them for this project.

A Free Church minister, the Rev. D. MacKenzie, told me in an interview about his niece’s decision to attend her father’s burial, and of how this passed over without any comment that he was aware of, but that when elders in one congregation had recently objected to another deceased local’s daughter’s intention to attend her father’s burial, he advised them, “I think you should advise her because she’ll be the talk of the place, because of the custom. But,” aye’s mise [I said], “if she wants to go you can’t keep her.” (Recorded interview, 26 July 1995; see Appendix 6C.)
CHAPTER 6
THE PERFORMANCE OF MOURNING

Introduction

‘Mourning’ can be understood as a general condition of grieving experienced by the bereaved community and individuals, and as a liminal period of adjustment, during which significant expressions of grief occur and when certain expectations are held by others of those who are defined as being ‘in mourning’. In the sequence of death-connected experiences, grieving can be a lengthy phase extending long after other stages, and need not commence only with the death but may have continuity with the experience of anticipating and preparing for a death, and is ultimately delimited only by personal experience. People involved in caring roles, in wakes and funerals, and in the composition and performance of laments, have undergone various kinds and intensities of mourning. This chapter discusses some female mourning behaviours with reference to cultural expectations and to the continual formation of identity in performance, drawing mainly on published sources, various field observations, written correspondence with informants, and one particular interview. Some of the general changes that mark one as ‘in mourning’ feature in both the period from death until burial and in more chronic mourning, whereas other behaviours are more situation-specific. I hope to show that appropriate conduct and performance, social and creative, exist within discursive matrices that are gender-creating and -created.

Topics referred to here are: cultural ideas about expressing sadness (and emotion more generally), and individual conformity to, and transgressions of, these; short-term behavioural restrictions and status indicators for the bereaved; and longer-term status alterations and the reformulation of relationships which are the consequences of the death of someone close, particularly for a widow. Adopting non-habitual features of appearance, mourning dress, defines the bereaved person visually and should be done according to a sign system shared by the community; it also confirms for the mourner her identity as a gendered individual. During periods in history when the adoption of mourning wear for a period after the funeral has been a generally observed convention, most categories of the bereaved return to normal clothing and grooming habits after an appropriate period has elapsed. In the past the widow was the exception, perhaps wearing full or reduced mourning for the rest of her life. Significantly, Lewis women’s chronic assumption of mourning appearance in the past, and occasionally in the present, seems to relate to ideas about women in local religious ideology, and to the religious identity of individuals.
Even within island communities where religious ideals and ideology permeate the everyday for a significant portion of the population, mourning actions nowadays lie within a more secular social life and emotional value system than formerly. Ideas of acceptable behaviour are for many older people, especially, thoroughly influenced by closely structured Presbyterian doctrine which has shaped their expectations and stresses the boundedness of the individual and the centrality of her or his relationship with God, although this central element of Lewis society and culture has diminished somewhat in the last few decades. The awareness of mortality and the Christian afterlife that island Presbyterianism inculcates in congregations has significant consequences for people’s experiences of bereavement, and contrasts sharply with older folk beliefs about the fate of the dead and their relation to the living. My concern here is with mourning at the level of the individual rather than analysis of group expressions such as those that occur in gatherings connected with the death where a number of people, or subgroups within the gathering, are assumed or appear, through their verbal and other displays, to share certain emotions with a similar intensity.

Definitions of mourning
Mourning describes the, more or less ‘natural’, spontaneous reactions and adjustments to the death of another person. It is a state defined by culture according to discourses regarding spiritual beliefs and emotions, and to ideas of liminality when mourning is perceived as passage through a life crisis. It is a condition governed by cultural rules which apply to the forms in which grief and loss are outwardly expressed and to interior individual experience; culture members internalize understandings of what it is appropriate or natural to feel and experience, as well as how to behave. Bereavement, as a state where the loss of another person becomes one of the most significant characteristics of the griever, is a relative concept and unique experience, lasting for different periods and having different degrees of significance for individuals: one person might never leave behind their grief for someone with whom they were especially close, while another soon moves away from feeling that the experience is centrally relevant.

Grieving is quantified and described according to shared understandings which may be vague and unspoken, or which can be, as in some cultures, formally set time periods, terminated by, for example, the commemoration of the death event at an anniversary. In various stages after a death, the bereaved can be treated by others according to differing
degrees of potential extreme opposites, with either particular care, sympathy and the bestowal of temporary privileges, or with avoidance, fear and in ways that can cause hardship for them. Widows are especially marked out for such treatment, in many cultures undergoing radical changes in position and identity. While in temporally defined mourning, the bereaved is expected to act in appropriate ways separating them from and defining them for others, ways which ‘liminalize’ them to an extent and maintain the prominence of their relationships with the deceased. Many restrictions that are accepted by and imposed upon the bereaved relate to social life and recreation.

Categories of mourners behave and are treated in different ways, in different phases of mourning, with a gradual diminishing of the degree to which bereavement is a salient feature in how the mourner is regarded by themselves and others. In far less formalized ways than in many others, Scottish culture still sustains certain ideas of how a mourner should react and behave and of how others should respond, although there has been a weakening in common knowledge of the ‘traditions’ or protocol of grieving, so that fewer people have definite preconceived ideas about mourning. Previously, people held clearer notions about, for example, the periods for which mourning dress should be worn for different relatives. The sorts of behaviour which might invite censure now are, for instance, if someone is seen to resume a public social life too soon after the bereavement, or does not act with due solicitude and respect towards other mourners. Equally, after a certain time others are less expected to offer condolences to, and to talk about the death with, the bereaved. There is the notion of there being a point at which the bereaved should start to ‘get back to normal’, ‘get on with life’, and move out of the state determined by her or his relationship with the deceased. Not doing this can be seen as failure or lack of effort. Up until the last couple of decades, throughout Scotland, the mourning period was tangibly, visibly expressed and experienced through the wearing of mourning dress, the duration of this practice and the ‘depth’ of mourning (for example, as indicated in the amount of black worn) depending on the bereaved’s relationship to the deceased. There seems to have been considerable local variation regarding, for instance, the effects of the proximity of the relationship between the dead and mourner on grieving behaviour expectations.

Religious doctrine and eschatological and spiritual ideas inevitably influence the experience of grief in their provision of notions about the condition and fate of the soul and the possibility of there being continued connections with the living. From evidence in past beliefs, even into the early twentieth century, spiritual conceptualizations of a
vernacular island eschatology, allowed a closer interconnectedness between the mortal world and the otherworld with some influence from orthodox Christian ideology. Calendar festivities, fairy, ghost and other supernatural legends, mortuary and funerary custom, and some general everyday practices were founded on belief in the potential for communication and interaction between living mortals and the supernatural, contact and interconnections the living were often keen to avoid. Presbyterian belief on Lewis does not preclude continued connections of some kind and many devout Christians understand experiences of ghosts and second sight in religious terms, as part of the order of things created by their God. This kind of relationship with departed souls, in the seeing of ghosts, premonitions, and other events, is, however, very different to those which some might regard as ‘superstitious’ or ‘paganistic’ tradition and lore; the Christian believer should not seek such things (God is the only supernatural with whom one should communicate) and ambiguous, non-human entities (such as fairies, bogles, water horses, banshees) were long ago rendered the exotica of a strange past of heathen ignorance in the view of the staunch believer - for amusement, perhaps, but not to be believed in, if they are ever considered at all. The depth of one’s religious faith, particularly whether or not the deceased and the grieving are curamach, certainly influences the mourning process; the status of a long confirmed Christian, dying at a late age, shapes the reactions of those who are consoled, indeed, even grateful, that the deceased has been released from a sinful world and reached their eternal destination, even if it might be felt that their death is a particularly great loss. Most people are missed with a mixture of idiosyncratic personal responses, how loss is to be handled in line with cultural ideas, and one’s belief in an afterlife, if any such notion is held.

Vague statistical estimates and records of death rates can, perhaps, give an impression of what such deaths could have meant for communities in the past but this is inevitably rather abstract. Harman’s excellent study (1997) of St. Kilda repeatedly conveys the pervasion of everyday life by death: fowling, fishing and other activities on treacherous ledges and slopes saw that few men attained old age, and occasionally women too met such accidental deaths. It is important to consider that specifically female understandings of death would have been shaped in the islands, as elsewhere, by experiences of perinatal, childhood and maternal morbidity and mortality throughout history. Until the twentieth century, one of the demographic scourges in the north-west coastal areas and islands was neonatal tetanus, probably the main cause of the 30 to 40 deaths per 1,000 live births occurring between four and fourteen days after parturition in most of Lewis, Harris, and South Uist, at least, in the first half of the nineteenth century.³ Consolations
for the death of a child obviously differ with ideas of their afterlife offered by folk or official religion. Direct instances that survive of individual experience offer one perspective. For example, a number of surviving lullaby fragments refer to supernatural abduction of a child which had probably actually died, or was seriously ill or handicapped in some way in the case of a fairy changeling. Evidence of mourning behaviour, unfortunately, is relatively scant. When examples do arise they are often extreme instances, such as those of madness caused by grief, in legends, tales and memorates, and from the content of, for example, lament texts. From these we can pass some comment on how feelings were understood and communicated in the recent past by assuming basic continuity with the present.

Cultural discourse of (and about) emotion
A principle factor shaping the ways in which death is supposed to be responded to inheres in culturally grounded understandings of emotions. Cross-cultural and diachronic comparisons of reactions to death indicate expansive variation in this and the need to situate expressions and the experience of losing someone within what could be described as a discourse of emotion. Whether or not any set of universally recognizable basic emotions exists, detailed understandings, evaluations and handlings of feeling-responses vary inter- and intraculturally. Staged rituals and other means can stimulate, alter and maintain emotions but this does not mean that feelings aroused by folk ceremony, religious ritual or creative displays are less genuine than feelings that appear to be more spontaneous or ‘natural’. I do not outline here the generalities of such a discourse in the context of the islands, but pay attention to some prominent aspects of how acceptable and expectable mourning behaviours relate to such an idea, of how there are certain understandings that constitute a ‘discourse’ of grief within a wider one on emotions and feelings. Within such a system of ideas, one example of a particularly strong general concept is that of ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ grief, expressed in everyday talk, and obliquely in the past in cautionary oral legends, and grounded in Christian eschatology.

Any set of notions about and discourse on behaviour or emotions are inevitably founded upon, and contribute to, ideas about gender. ‘[Q]ualities that define the emotional also define women. For this reason, any discourse on emotion is also, at least implicitly, a discourse on gender’ (Lutz 1990: 69; c.f. Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Field, Hockey and Small 1997a, 1997b; Hockey 1997; Leavitt 1996; Nenola-Kallio 1982: 109-111). The semiotic poetics of emotions in a culture, which rituals rely on to have effect, are
differentially accessible to and appropriate for actors according to characteristics like gender, attributive status, age, and the particular context. People control actions and expressions of grief, and internalize particular understandings of how they ought properly to feel and experience, and constantly express and articulate, and struggle to deal with, this process and also their awareness of it. Revealingly, this is very often framed when they talk of behaviour in terms of performance and acting roles, determined by one’s degree of identification with, acceptance of, and conduct in accordance with, conventional notions about one’s gender. Women are regarded in most cultures as innately more emotionally and empathically demonstrative, and, partly from this, tend to have a wider range of emotionally interactive roles to play. Negatively, women are seen as unable to keep personal responses from rupturing their boundaries as individuals, as contained selves: they are implicitly like children who need to learn to control instincts, are less intellectual and governed by reason; the positive facilitative, integrating, and supportive potential of what might be termed as female nature is devalued. Prestige and power tend to be earned through, amongst other things, the exercise of reason and ‘masculine’ qualities like emotional continence, so boys learn to be emotionally inexpressive in the process of growing up into men whom society expects to inhabit positions of power (Sattel 1983). Mourning is sometimes seen, cross-culturally, as indicative of weakness, softness, poor emotional control, ascribed more to women and, often, lower status groups. In a culture, like the islands in the past, where the appropriate display of grief was requisite (for example, as ritual behaviour), women’s status justified the delegation to them of the heavier burden of grief-expression. Undeniably local keening women could be of a very lowly situation even if, when their services were required, they were appreciated as essential ritual experts in the community (c.f. Nenola-Kallio 1982: 110).

Hockey (1997) discusses how, generally, outward mourning is very different in contemporary Britain to what it was like in the past. Women’s emotional expressivity is no longer expected to be a much more visible element of public mourning: like men, what women should provide are limited signal clues that the proper grieving reactions are being undergone, but elsewhere, in private. Hockey investigates the question of why, then, cultural representations, especially visual ones in the mass media or stereotypes in writing on grief, privilege with high visibility and broad representative status the experiences of women to an extent not grounded in social practice (c.f. Hallam 1997). Not only are images of mourning thoroughly feminized, but it is widows’, mothers’, and generally women’s grief, which tends to be the basis for research and generalizing
statements for society generally, an exception to the usual practice of generalizations being founded on male experience.

Ordinarily, island women still present observable evidence of grief and sadness to a greater extent than men, which could be regarded as a sign of weakness and lack of control, or interpreted positively as ‘more healthy’ and ‘natural’ than the bottling up of feelings. This is the evaluation Lewis women are inclined to offer. That separate emotions are conceived as, even verbally described in terms that identify them as, more or less ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ exposes a base level for the polarization of many pairs of emotions; stronger association with one gender reinforces understandings of when and where a particular emotion is appropriate and how it should be expressed. An individual lives with and through such ideas, in conformity, or not, with what is ‘natural’ and ‘normal’, a process that reiterates and reinforces a gendered identity performed and maintained through discursively situated behaviours.

"Unhealthy' mourning
There is implied in certain items of folklore and oral literature and an explicit expression in popular opinion, past and present, of an idea, changing over time, that there is natural mourning and unhealthy, destructive grief. A warning against prolonged and excessive grieving is encapsulated in Anglo-Scots ballads like ‘The Unquiet Grave’ and folk narratives expressing the belief that this would hinder the repose of the deceased. Women’s supposed greater susceptibility to damaging grief has given partial justification for female exclusion from Lewis and Harris burials, and arises elsewhere, for example, in Gaelic tales and legends of individuals driven insane by grief, a disruption that can lead to permanent or temporary, critical, anomic, that they may specifically revert to a state ‘closer to nature’. In Barra in 1901, a tinker woman gave a poem to the collector Alexander Carmichael, along with the background to its composition which is just such a story: the insanity of a woman who was responsible for the accidental death of her new-born infant, in her arms, when in the act of trying to save her young son’s life, despite the fact that she was still in confinement and almost too weak to move.

When she saw what had occurred, her reason fled; she sprang to her feet and with lightning speed flew to the hills and joined the deer. There she grew as fleet of foot, as sharp of sight, as keen of scent and as wild of nature as the wild deer themselves.

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Many efforts were made to capture the woman, but they availed nothing and were at last discontinued. When the deer came down from the heights above to the straths below, the woman was in their midst, feeding wherever they fed and moving wherever they moved. When the crofters sent their dogs to drive the deer from their corn, the woman was the first to see and to hear, the first to flee and to lead the way up the steep corries, over the deep chasms and along the narrow devious passes to the mountain summits beyond, never slipping, never tripping, never hesitating however great the speed, however difficult the way.

(Carmichael 1941: 339)

Seven years later, by law, the man could marry again:

the ceremony was about to begin, when the man’s wife appeared in their midst and took her place beside her husband. All was surprise and confusion, no one knowing what to do or say. The ‘pears-eaglais,’ cleric, who was to perform the marriage, examined the woman, and finding her sane and sensible, dispersed the people.

The woman was well clothed and wisely spoken, but where she had obtained her clothing, not to mention her reason, no one understood. She was covered with fine fur or soft down, ‘mar chuilean moineis a chuain no mar laogh eilid ruadh nam beann,’ ‘like the cub of the grey seal of the ocean or the fawn of the red hind of the mountains.’ (ibid.)

The poem, called ‘A’ Choilich Dhuibh’, ‘The Black Cock’, was supposed to have been composed by the mother, at Garbhadh Mór in Badenoch, and describes her time amongst the deer (Carmichael 1941: 338-343).

More widely relevant is the tradition in Celtic literature of a grief- and guilt-maddened male, the geilt, such as the famous, almost archetypal ‘wild man’, Suibhne, or Lailoken in the life of St. Kentigern/Mungo (Chadwick 1942; MacQueen and MacQueen 1989; Partridge 1980). In this tradition, as in the Badenoch legend, the altered condition of the central figure includes changes in their physical state too: often unusual body hair growth; new, perhaps supernatural, capacities for speed and movement not normally found in humans; and acceptance by wild animals and birds with which he sometimes lives. The extreme alterations in behaviour and constitution reflect, on an almost metaphorical level, removal from society and the rational towards the more elemental, wild side of the human, a more instinct and feeling-based condition. The example of the geilt is a warning of the madness and abjection that can ensue if one does not manage to control grief, and, in particular, grief intensified by feelings of guilt which are all too often undergone by many mourners when there is little reason for them to have such emotions. The figure of the wild man, or rarely wild woman, shares some interesting characteristics with the figure of the traditional keening woman in Irish and Scottish tradition.
The correspondence of Anne Grant (1755-1838), a Highland minister’s wife, reflects how the dangers connected with childbearing traversed the socio-economic spectrum. In one letter, written shortly after delivering a child, she expresses fears for her own health (1845 vol. 1: 202); in 1786 she writes of the sudden death of a friend from ‘a kind of fever incident to nurses (though rarely fatal). . . . You cannot think how I was affected by her loss.’ (218); throughout her letters there are references to and contemplation of the several children that she lost. Even in correspondence to a friend who was a new mother, in 1789, she writes, ‘the moral and melancholy turn which my thoughts have lately taken, leaves me to associate even the cradle with the grave, its sure, however, distant successor’ (265), although in an earlier reply that year to Charlotte Grant, a close friend and a relative of her husband, who had lived with the family for years, she refers to

your letter, in which you animadvert, very justly, on the folly, not to say guilt, of wasting that time and thought in fruitless mourning for the dead [one of the writer’s sons], which ought to have been employed in useful attention to those who are left. . . . I must again run the round of earthly cares and low pursuits, and wait patiently until my appointed day come. “For I shall go to him, but he shall not come to me.” . . . I always think of him, but with more composure. I view him as having passed the fiery trial of suffering, and as regarding us with tender compassion’ (vol. 1: 258).

Her writing articulates her awareness of the need to temper her undeniable personal sorrow with her Christian belief in a better afterlife for those who deserve it and of claims upon her exercised by the living and her duties to them. She refers to having her behaviour censured by Charlotte, and, one presumes, others too who hold an idea of what is appropriate grief and its expression. Although she accepts and agrees with this, the very fact that she makes a conscious effort to act (at least) ‘appropriately’ testifies to the conflicts that can arise between a sense of what it is correct to do and how one feels, and the sense of split loyalties a mourner can encounter between the dead and the living.9

In a very different, modern instance, Alasdair MacLean (1986: 144) recalls how after his mother died in 1973, his sister, who worked the family croft in Ardnamurchan with their father, checked the widower’s grief because, she insisted, he would otherwise destroy himself. To persuade him to exercise more emotional continence she told him of a mother in the area who had been reproached for excessive mourning as, according to folk belief, this would impede her daughter’s spirit from escaping the vicinity. MacLean quietly notes that this ‘advice’ had the effect his sister sought, though (pointedly perhaps) he also records that his father died only a few months later. The healthy model
of grief nowadays expects one to come to terms gradually, but fairly soon, with the death, not to be dominated by it, but not to deny that the death has occurred. Unhealthy manifestations are easier to identify and define because aberrant; grief can be blamed for physical illness, mental illness such as chronic depression, reclusive withdrawal from normal life, alcoholism, and resortion to long-term use of prescribed medication. Not infrequently, on Lewis, an individual, a woman particularly, will become leantuinn in the church and seek religious conversion or actually become cùramach soon after a major loss, or otherwise display an intensified leaning toward spiritual concerns, even if only temporarily. This might be noticeable in an increased frequency of attendance at church gatherings, changes in the conversation topics the mourner chooses and in the ways she expresses herself in speech, or changes in social participation, as well as perhaps more general temporary alterations that signify mourning like alterations in appearance and general behaviour, and non-participation in social events. Such a response tends to be regarded neutrally, sometimes positively, by others.

_Understanding a death and grief_

Most of the women with whom I have spoken about grief insist that the genders have equal capacity for feeling loss, but their natural abilities to control and temper this and other emotions are regarded, as in other cultures, as gender-variable. The observable behaviour of individuals is taken as proof of this.

[M]en try to hide their emotion, why I don’t know, it’s no shame to shed tears over the loss of loved ones. Women on the other hand do not hide their tears, but I believe that the man’s grief is as deep as the woman’s. (Murdina, Free Church communicant; Appendix 41.7)

One Christian, whose devotion is a dominant influence on her opinions and understanding of life, believes that men and women feel grief differently: what is more important, however, are the ways religious experiences and character produce distinctions in how people feel and deal with bereavement.

Yes, I believe that we experience grief in a different way and again our beliefs come to play here. Of course there is the natural loss, but those who do not believe in an afterlife are not going to mourn like those who do. There is mourning indeed for someone who led a careless life and went to the grave unprepared. What of the soul? (Ishbel, Free Presbyterian communicant; Appendix 4E. 7)

In this, Ishbel is not typical of many communicants and adherents whose expressed views on emotion reflect a discourse broadly shared with non-church-goers, although obviously these can differ when ideas of the afterlife are more of an issue. Women’s
greater proclivity towards emotional expressivity, their ‘nature’ to let feelings overcome them, are not negatively valued by island women in the context of mourning where ‘masculine’ virtues such as courage and rationality are less appropriate and admirable than at other times. However, women obviously require bravery at the time of a death partly because there tends to be others reliant on them and most must avoid becoming so lost in grief that they become over-dependent on others.

There is also no doubt that indulgence in alcohol sometimes serves the same purpose for some of the bereaved as calmative medications, and gender differentiation is a factor here: men are more likely to use alcohol to dull grief, either resorting to it or being given it by someone else; many older women will not consume alcohol at all, but females are more likely to be prescribed calmative medication by their general practitioner to help them deal with the immediate or the chronic effects of bereavement, and to be recommended professional help such as counselling. It is not considered manly for a male to weep, but I think both sexes grieve equally. Women, by crying, can ease their heartbreak and can speak more openly about their sorrow, while men conceal their emotions. This is probably why men who are not Christians turn to strong drink for solace. (Nan, Free Church communicant; Appendix 4J.9)

Weeping in the presence of others is less acceptable in terms of ideal models for males, while it may even be almost expected of women in certain contexts. Perhaps spontaneous crying seems to be somehow more permissible to those whose boundaries are frequently breached by other overflows - menses, lactate, amniotic fluid, those same adults whose physiology biological essentialists would have as the root cause of greater female emotionality. From my own questioning about this and observation, it also seems that island women feel a peculiar sympathy for a crying man, whatever the cause, for it is taken as evidence of such extreme and uncontrollable feelings that ‘even a man cannot cope’; some women talk almost maternally of a crying male, although they might still say that they dislike and feel uneasy to see it.

As a group ‘muted’ within dominant masculine discourse whose own language can be cast as a dialectic divergence from mainstream language, women are often trying to communicate many kinds of information via crying. Evidence given by women from several European countries in the 1980s reports them crying more often than men for all kinds of emotions and more than twice as often as men for sad ones (Hill 1990: 40-41); although this does vary, grown men have not usually been supposed to cry in the past,
whereas female tears can indicate weakness or openness, voiceless psychological desperation, or be used as a ‘feminine wile’. Hill suggests that the European findings and Urban’s analysis (1988) of cross-cultural data from beyond Europe on crying and ritual weeping would support the idea, needing much further research, that ‘the construction of self-coherence for women in many societies may require more public emotional work, particularly through the long-wave emotion of “sadness” than is required for men’ (Hill 1990: 41). Furthermore, most women express a conviction (and accompanying frustration) that they make much more emotional ‘effort’ in relations and interactions in the everyday world and that men rely upon them for this; emotional displays, or performances, the result of accepting at that moment internal responses according to the socialized individual’s sense of what is appropriate, are part of the perpetual creation of the self, and more empathetic, affirmative and supportive labour is taken as characteristic of women’s interaction with each other and with men, as noted in discourse analysis, contrasting with more competitive ‘male’ styles of speech and gesture. Emotional cooperation and revelation are taken as facets of a feminine identity, held as proof of it. These, not least of all, determine how people communicate with others and how compulsory emotional labour is allocated.

When Hill refers to the ‘selfhood’ for which greater emotional labour is essential for women, and uses the concept, for example, in interpreting the ‘metacommunicative’ weeping of a Mexicano-speaking woman as she relates to Hill her life-story, she means ‘an ongoing dialogic construction, both in dialogue “outward” and in dialogue “inward”’ (1990: 44, n.10). If we take the formation of identity to be performative, it is always also ‘dialogic’, and occurs within a culture with, for example, its own context- and actor-dependent variables of those ‘icons of crying’, which Urban (1988) discusses, and other signalling behaviours. With specific ‘mutations’, according to the actor and because they exist within matrices of role-characteristics and of meanings, the conventions of mourning allowed to each gender differ; the woman mourner ‘knows’ unconsciously how she should behave consistently with other elements of her gendered identity which she creatively and adaptively constantly performs, and to which she must conform, in order to have self-coherence, which, in itself, requires differentiation from, recognition of and dialogue with, the outside world inhabited by ‘others’.

A Free Church minister gave this explanation when questioned during a taped interview about women’s exclusion from funerals: ‘Well, you see, I think it had something to do with the mourning.’ I replied that men mourn also. ‘Yes, but men are harder, they’re
harder, you see. And the women, you see, they’re mourning, you see them weeping’ (Rev. D. MacKenzie; Appendix 6C). Although women are socialized into being more open about feelings and men more restrained, greater emotional demonstrativeness by women is taken as proof of their nature. Expression is taken to be indicative of some internal essential truth, but as gender is constructed, the expression of emotion not only describes and seems to provide evidence of its source, it also works in the ongoing creation process of its supposed origin. People’s interpretation is evidence of this, that it contributes to the process according to a cultural discourse of gender. The performative efficacy of emotions as gender signifiers is clearly manifest.

In contrast to the Rev. MacKenzie’s appeal to a model where observable manifestation provides irrefutable proof of an essential female nature, comments by Katy-Ann suggest that other motivations are implicated in performances of mourning and other emotions by women. She clearly articulates an awareness of the acting involved in the process of fulfilling the outward appearance of her gender, of working to present evidence that is supposedly consistent with her identity as a woman, and expresses the ambivalence and even conflict one can experience from such performances which can be inconsistent with one’s internal state or will regarding actions:

   Men and women feel grief similarly but the women are expected to show it, the men to hide it. This puts an awful strain on both. Many men have to bottle their feelings up tightly. Many women feel callous if they can’t produce the requisite tears, or demeaned that they are expected to. (Katy-Ann, non-church-goer; Appendix 4F.4)

It is not a matter of mimicking actions and acts which have been observed and then absorbed by the individual as templates for how she should respond according to cultural discourses that intersect in the creation of an acceptable notion of gendered identity. There is also the question of how an individual is engaged in negotiating between the internal and external, between the various options in the perpetual process of constructing a coherent sense of who she is. A discourse of feminine gender, or of ‘womanly’ identity, gives meaning to, and justification for, those signifying behaviours that are appropriate expressions and responses to the situation - in this case, that of bereavement and the ways in which reactions to this loss are revealed to others. But there is also the experiencing of conflict, of a perceived need to work to achieve a tolerable relation between what the person is feeling and how she understands she should be feeling and behaving according to expectations of her as gendered. Talk about emotion is one of the richest areas for empirical observation of the ways in which an individual’s understanding of her gender and of how she maintains that identity are typified by
ambiguity, ambivalence, by sustained necessary effort, frequent conflict and processes of negotiating the demands of different interplaying discourses constituting ideas of gender. Articulations, like Katy-Ann’s, of the labour needed in the ongoing maintenance of a consistent identity, in the outward display of feelings, provide evidence of the ficticity of any claims about gendered actions, and, therefore, gender itself, as always ‘natural’, ‘inevitable’.

Most of the women with whom I have spoken about this in informal conversation or interview settings, or with whom I have corresponded on this topic, either state or imply that women are luckier to be able to express sadness and loss in ways not generally permissible to men, implying that it might be beneficial if men could do the same; women’s greater openness is described as a more ‘natural’ way to behave for people. As Thompson points out, where a conventional idea of ‘effective grieving’ requires emotional expressiveness, ‘more instrumental, stereotypically masculine patterns of response’ are nowadays pathologized, to an extent (1997: 76). Considering the candid expression of emotions, many islanders, women and men, often say that greater general openness in recent times has improved relationships and understandings between various categories of people, parents and children or partners together being the two groups mentioned most often in this regard. Very often when I ask people about family life in the past compared to the present, particularly on the subject of the relations between mothers and daughters and between husbands and wives, one aspect regarded as typical of the present which is characterized as far preferable to former conditions stems from a perception that individuals are today more frank with one another about feelings and opinions, facilitating closer relationships, although there are those who see disadvantages in perceived excesses of emotional openness.

One woman’s ‘making sense’ - Jessie’s narrative
The ways in which a person talks about the death of a significant other can reveal attitudes to death, especially in regard to how they understand and ‘cope’ with the event. For people who believe very firmly that marriage is for life and have had long partnerships, grieving for a spouse sometimes never entirely relents, and many older people talk of being ready or of wanting to die once their spouse has gone, and of reunion with them afterwards. Jessie is in her early eighties, a native of my own village on Lewis whom I know very well and whom I have interviewed several times for various research projects. In the course of a recorded interview (29 June 1995; full
transcription in Appendix 6A), which was not aimed to obtain information about death, but led us though her life history in a general way, she spends a considerable amount of time describing the gradual deterioration in her husband’s health in the period before his death (Appendix 6A.3). I had asked her about becoming a grandmother and growing old when she switched to talking about her husband’s ageing and the approach of his death, part of her experience of growing old. This signifies clearly how important this subject is to her, although Murdo, her husband, died several years ago and I did not prompt a lengthy response to the question I asked. Her account shows how strongly events are located for a person by their contiguity with other memories of personal significance rather than according to externals of calendar dates or some imposed model of the ‘life cycle’. The amount of time and detail she gives to this narrative is especially interesting for me, as it is the kind of event an informant might not often judge suitable for being related in an interview situation, or they might consider that such information is such an individual experience that it would be of little interest or ‘use’ to anyone.15

Jessie’s narrative comes across very strikingly as part of endeavouring to know and control the experience of someone else’s ageing, illness, death and absence, an answer partly to compensate for pain and loneliness, despite being surrounded by a close family and neighbourhood. It illustrates the confusion characteristic of this experience for many, and that perspectives and feelings, and memories of these, change in time. What renders this narrative additionally significant for me is that Jessie has related this portion of her life at least three other times that I can remember, once since this interview, and perhaps even more often, in normal conversation contexts, in her living room over cups of tea. She is not forgetful and her repetition of these memories, thoughts and emotions indicates their importance to her, that they are things which occupy her frequently, and that she feels comfortable enough to spend time with me in this way, where the articulation of her feelings and personal opinions are as important as any conversation based on the exchange of other kinds of information. Her rehearsal of this part of her life is a commemoration, a remembrance years after her husband’s death and her initial mourning; she talks of frequent loneliness and of her age, especially as she has lost three sisters in the last few years, but as a widow, it is her spouse’s death she focuses upon, and which she is sanctioned to use as representative of other griefs. Deaths are inevitably, for someone of her age, a central topic of concern and conversation. Foregrounded also, however, are the needs of the ill person and Jessie’s struggle to meet her caring responsibilities. At the time of such a crisis, those engaged in caring can be primarily caught up in urgent practical needs to such an extent that there is little energy

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or time left to spend on ‘making sense’ of what is going on. Reliance on family and community also comes out in her story.

She sets her husband’s death in the context of his ageing and a deterioration in his health over a few years, which was not, however, a decline that would have inevitably led to his being expected to die so soon or when he did. One of the most important elements of Jessie’s character is not overtly present in the text of her narrative: her religious faith, knowledge of which would require the interpreter to know her fairly well and which allows a far more profound and subtle comprehension of what is implied about her perception of events, of her emotional responses, both during the stages of her husband’s decline and in the present looking back. There is a strong sense in the ways she talks about deaths close to her that events must be accepted as preordained by God, the natural process of things, while, concurrently, the ways in which she expresses her emotions and thoughts as she remembers them at the time of Murdo’s death, very much reveal that the experience was strongly characterized by a struggle to understand what was happening and very often her failure, as it felt to her, to do so in ways that would allow her to feel that she had control over the situation, a potential locus of inner conflict.

For Jessie her spouse’s death involves not only the immediate events before and after the crisis, but entails remembrance of a long preceding phase during most of which time he was not, of course, dying but just showing signs of ageing. Different stages of Murdo’s increasing frailty and debility are described in the context of, initially, him not appearing to seek paid employment, then that of the seasonal round of labour on a croft and in fishing, so that points in his decline are marked by him becoming observably unable to perform particular tasks, and also to fulfil social obligations (such as attending the funeral of a close friend). After a gradual decline which could be simply taken as part of the ordinary process of growing old, Jessie decided that Murdo required medical attention. She had been surprised when he had agreed because of his characteristic stubbornness whereby he would deny there was anything wrong and persevere, although, having attended his general practitioner, he then tried to hide the diagnosis from her. Jessie judges this to have been an important point in the background to his death which was a couple of years later and to which she then jumps in her narrative. She focuses especially, with length and detail, and an increased narrative reliance on direct speech, on one critical turning point of decline where his imminent end became quite likely in her retrospective opinion.
She uses her memories from the period before his death to deal with the loss, as if she has to retrospectively ‘prepare’ herself for the event long afterwards, modifying her grief in the process of trying to understand what has happened. Her narrative must be understood in the context of the life of someone who had been ill and frail in childhood and was never as healthy as she would have wished; although she has led a life of hard work and self-sacrifice, and has nursed several relatives in their final days, she has also been accustomed to think of herself as somewhat frailer than many others, so the idea that her mainstay, Murdo, was failing and would die before her was perhaps a subject she tried to avoid directly considering for some time. As well as being so close to the situation that small changes in his health could have been hard to perceive, she frames her observations with a self-doubt regularly expressed in her conversation.

She notes stages in his decline with the use of negatives and vagueness, not with statements of definite observations (‘I noticed in some ways that he wasn’t himself’, ‘I didn’t know what it was’, ‘I still didn’t think there was anything wrong’, ‘I never thought’), and her acknowledgement of his decline is gradual, slowed down by a fear of accepting it. Although he did not die immediately, but some time afterwards, Jessie’s perception of events on a critical weekend, when Murdo came close to dying and was hospitalized, reflects a sharp change in her understanding and expectations of his condition (‘I thought he was dead as a matter of fact’), and she talks as if she then knew that his death would inevitably come soon after. She takes far less time or descriptive effort over her recollection of the period when he was in and out of hospital with respiratory and heart problems, and when he eventually died at home. Jessie’s narrative exposes in powerful ways that bereavement is often as much an experience of bewilderment, incomprehension, of not knowing what events mean and, therefore, what one’s emotions should be, as it is one of irresistible loss and sadness. Her remembrance shows that mourning is not a condition she sees starting only with the death event, but that it has significant continuity with preceding conditions, of prior thoughts, expectations, fears, and feelings, that grieving can begin in anticipation of the loss. Memory changes understanding, allowing the before and after to become simultaneous.

**Widowhood**

Their different cultural experiences and social positions mean that males and females have different typical mournings. Losing a spouse in the past caused even more dramatic
status changes for wives. Weisner (1995: 73-4) points out that most European languages reflect this where, contrary to the usual practice, the word for ‘widower’ derives from that of ‘widow’, and that the former term in English only entered common currency in the eighteenth century when a spouse’s death was coming to be perceived as an emotional issue rather than an economic one. Where men traditionally have more activities and relationships outside of the home, this can aid recovery in ways unavailable to a woman, much of whose work may be in the home, where she may have simply more physical reminders of her grief, and less opportunity for diversion, with many of her everyday chores not needing to be other than solitary; she may also need to rely more on close kin for support; and, traditionally, had fewer opportunities for making a living. Jessie’s experience is gendered in that she passes through different caring roles and becomes a widow, a type of person, who has a more circumscribed life outside of the home and family, especially with age, whereas even a retired man may have many more opportunities for participation, and a wider range of associates, in village life. Socially, in terms of identity and status, women, generally, have more to retain beneficially from maintaining a close connection with a dead male; they can retain positive vestiges of identity gained by association with him through reminding others and themselves of the past situation by claiming a continued relationship with the deceased. The inevitable unconscious investment in maintaining dissolved ties is a factor in why remembering and memorializing the dead are such female responsibilities, whether in the repetition of praise verses in òrain luaidh (waulking songs), Greek grave-visiting (Danforth 1982; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Seremetakis 1991), or the memorial letters submitted to present-day US newspapers (Dégh 1994: 153-199).

In a society where the heterosexual couple is the core of the household unit, and where the distribution of wealth, status and power is inequitable in men’s favour, spouseless women are disadvantaged in material and practical senses. In what might be characterized as ‘tradition-oriented’ cultures, like that of the Western Isles up to recent times, marriage was what really bestowed adult identity, and childbirth further confirmed this, according to the dominant cultural model of womanhood. Women’s appropriate life course within patriarchy includes, averagely, child-bearing and rearing, and this tends to need, in most cultures, a marital status for a legitimacy that confers upon one certain rights and protections. The woman who chooses not to have children and the unmarried mother have been regarded as anomalies. When a household relies on the labour of its members and is defined by conformity to a cultural model where social authority is invested in a senior male, the woman without a partner who can claim that
authority on behalf of her and others in the household faces problems. Having to rely on others, like kin, meant a diminution in authority, responsibility and adult status: uxorial identity could be eclipsed in the new dependence by a revived filial or sisterly one. Gender divisions in labour, skills, and responsibilities can also make adaptation after a spouse’s death harder for both genders. A husband has generally had greater earning power (even in the islands in the past when little labour was for money); provided physical protection and strength for certain kinds of labour; could attain positions of village-level influence and respect as an elder or deacon, a talented psalm-precentor or lay preacher, a grazings clerk, a respected skipper, or a skilled shearer; and in the past was more usually likely to become a publicly recognized, celebrated tradition-bearer or musical performer. There was little chance of gaining distinction outside of domestic work spheres for women in the islands in the past, although obviously there were exceptions, such as respected and acknowledged singers, local ‘historians’, narrative tellers, and those with specialized roles like the midwife or laying-out woman.

Widowhood in old age in the Hebrides could almost have been a state of abjection, dependent on charity, if family support was not sufficient or forthcoming, although usually practical help would only be unavailable when the community was in profound crisis or one had few friends or kinspeople around. The vulnerability of the widow and her dependants, especially if the household was geographically isolated or if the community was particularly impoverished, was considerable. Without a husband’s earning power and labour it could become very difficult to pay rent on land and other bills and to fulfil obligations in kind or with labour, in addition to the problems of ensuring that work essential for the household was done. Widows who fell into rent and other arrears could be easy targets for eviction and other punitive measures, simultaneously being made exemplary caveats to others by landowners and their representatives. It can be a condition without real status or definition, except in negative terms as that of someone who has gone beyond having any chances to lead a life according to the culturally sanctioned model: it is a state of chronic loss, of lack and denial. This should not, of course, be taken to imply that the fate of the widow, or the widower, was invariably a miserable, neglected one. Grandparents, for example, like other aged and unmarried relations, had roles in the extended households of relatives, and would generally be accorded a certain respect and privilege as elders. Although homes and crofts would be handed over to the next generation, they might still, to an extent, be regarded as the property of elderly parents until their decease.
In married life, much of the status and credit a Lewis woman gained was likely to depend on her uxorial, maternal, or other care-giving roles, while her husband would at least have greater opportunity to have his voice formally heard in the public life of the village. If she was post-menopausal, she had already lost certain aspects of womanly identity as a potential child-bearer, although certainly a woman could often gain honour and regard in her family and community with age. Her situation could even improve, especially if her dependants were few, but any esteem she gained with age seniority can be regarded as highly ambiguous and constraining, acquired once she was approaching the end of her life, only given at a stage where physically and in other ways she could have very limited influence on those around her and on the course of her own fate. Historically, widowhood usually meant one lacked half of the fundamental unit necessary to form the basic core of a crofter-fishing household, and during a particular phase in the history of the islands, covering much of the twentieth century (but difficult to date) the widow was customarily marked by her adoption, for very many years or the remainder of her life, of black clothing, a reminder of her state of loss and alteration.

The nature of marriage defines the nature of widowhood, a diachronically varying condition. Not surprisingly there was a high rate of remarriage in the islands in the past, often quite shortly after the bereavement.24 Obvious candidates for remarriage would be young or middle-aged people with children, marrying others who had been single or married, with or without a family of their own; in the generation preceding my grandparents, occasional third marriages occurred if a man lost more than one wife and had a family to raise or still wanted to start one. The older generation are often adamant that people had to remarry to survive, that it was their responsibility to do so, especially if they were a widower with children. This pragmatist approach fitted the crofting and fishing-based socio-economic situation which shaped the instrumentality of marriage in the culture as a practical partnership which conferred adult status and allowed one to be sexually active and reproductive, part of a productive team.25 Even with remarriage, earlier natural male mortality and husbands’ frequent age seniority meant that most villages would have a number of widows ineligible for remarriage because of age or for whom there were no potential spouses available, although it was not unknown for even elderly individuals to marry, to set up home together for companionship just as people of the same gender, siblings or cousins would often do if they did not have a place in another household.
Besides and beyond the loss of a spouse, widowhood, as a social condition, tends to be seen as largely negative and deleterious, defined by an absence. However, excepting worsened social and material circumstances (but even in poverty too), it has been and is a crisis and adjustment that many woman experience in ambivalent terms. While it in no way detracts from continued love for a deceased spouse or minimizes grief at their absence, many women nowadays find that there can arise positive changes in their lives. Peggy, however, for example, does not, mention any particular changes that were beneficial in any way for her but mentions loss and thorough alterations in her everyday routines.

Becoming a widow changed my life in the community quite a lot but I found most people sympathetic and helpful. It has changed my life in most ways - even the thought of having to change a light-bulb or clean my windows or do the garden is a chore, apart from the companionship of my husband. I put away the boat when my husband died as I didn’t feel comfortable going out fishing alone nor yet depending on anyone else to take me. (Personal correspondence, 1996; see Appendix U)

Peggy seems to have shared in many outdoor (like fishing) and other activities with her husband to an extent untypical in the islands beyond specific tasks needing shared labour effort, and her correspondence portrays her as someone who is self-resourceful, independent, resilient.26 Certainly for many women losing their partner means recognizing for the first time an entire responsibility for running a household, a daunting task for some requiring considerable adjustment, even if they no longer have dependants, and this on probably a permanent basis, and many enjoy the challenge. I know many widows who speak of gaining self-confidence and a sense of independence and inner resources they had not been aware they possessed: ‘Becoming a widow made me a stronger person. I had to think for myself and make decisions regarding house maintenance’ (Annie, personal correspondence; see Appendix 3B and 4A). This is often the case with women who have thoroughly accepted the idea of the husband as the household head and the dominant marriage partner, and who have particularly internalized ideas of feminine identity in terms of dependency and submissiveness, regardless of what their lives have actually been like and their individual qualities. The impact widow(er)hood can have on how one is defined by others and oneself and has opportunities for a social life is of considerable importance for both genders after the loss of spouse, although differently. Women may have far fewer opportunities for socializing and recreational activities beyond those with close family and friends, and given the settlement patterns of small Lewis villages, with Hebridean weather, older widows are often heavily reliant on others visiting them or offering transport. Almost no women in their mid-sixties and upwards drive, although many men of that age group
have cars, vans or motor scooters; mobility has a crucial bearing on the freedom of Lewis women.

*Mourning wear*

Why mourning should be marked by changes in appearance, which may be deliberate or the result of extreme unusual behaviour, is an interesting issue, sometimes answered by explanations of a primitive, basic need for disguise when there was a fear of the dead seeking continued connections with the living, or of reinforcing the desolation suffered for both mourners themselves and for others. There are numerous ways, within a single culture, that mourning status, and the degrees within it, can be signalled through the manipulation of appearance, although the colour of clothing and lack of ornamentation are the main means in Scotland. Self-mutilation, pounding one’s chest, and apparent lack of self-care may also be interpreted in other cultures as attempts, along with less violent mourning impositions, to show the dead they are deeply missed. When islanders explain the practice of going into mourning dress, beyond it being justified as grounded in tradition or convention, reasons typically offered are that the bereaved person wishes to convey the depth of their sadness in this additional way; that her (or his) visual presentation should be consistent with their mood and frame of mind; that this is a sign to others of how they should respond to and treat the mourning person; that it is natural for someone in grief not to want to care for their appearance in regular ways, despite, ironically, the effort possibly needed in making such changes. Clothing is selected in the assumption it will generate certain reactions in those with whom the wearer interacts.\(^{28}\)

As the particular colour of mourning in much of Europe,\(^{29}\) black carries with it a host of potent significations largely based on its relations or associations with darkness; the idea of death as sleep; the dark of the grave and human ignorance of what lies beyond death; the limitless and the sometimes oppression of the night sky; a blankness, like white, to be inscribed upon, but unlike white, one that can swallow up what is added to it; the colour of old blood and severe bruises; a vacuum, or an entity that can engulf. It endows its wearer with gravitas and authority; or chic sophistication, classic elegance or ‘sexiness’; or with qualities of counter-culture membership; or it can make one appear more moody, or threatening - all depending on styles and how the wearer behaves. It is not a colour for young children, or pregnant women, or those in activities where there is importance placed on hygiene and cleanliness, and, because of its general associations, older people often voice a dislike of seeing younger people wearing a lot of it. Its
acceptance for ordinary wear and its perennial fashionability obfuscate its former more particular association with bereavement. Black covers most Bibles in island homes and dresses the preachers, and traditionally, characterizes, with other dark shades, an image of the Christian Lewis woman.

Reliance, partial or total, on domestic production employing indigenous pigments and fixatives, limited the spectrum to an extent; through traditional herbal lore a wide range of natural colours were achievable, but black was difficult to produce and, so, was not significant in subsistence times. From the memories of living people and the material and photographic evidence, it seems that most, especially as they aged, wore a lot of dark fabrics and used white cotton and linen for certain garments and household linen. Head-coverings also seem to have increased in size with a woman’s age or with marriage. Buxton writes of Mingulay that, when in mourning, the plaide mhòr (great plaid), which was a regular outer garment and head covering for older women, was used to cover most of the face (1995: 93). The garb of the elderly and the bereaved would contrast less dramatically with ‘normal’ dress than it would in culture areas with folk art traditions using polychromatic or strong colour designs. A life of much outdoor labour and the cramped, smoky houses of the past better fitted with dark, neutral colours, but the apparently previous island predilection for shades characterized as sombre and sober is also an appropriate reflection of a particular Presbyterian world-view. There is also a local tradition that the long-term assumption of black and dark colours by mourners only really took hold in the early twentieth century in response to the losses of the First World War and, particularly, the Iolaire tragedy, in line with norms established elsewhere in Scotland in the Victorian era.

Past conventions included variations in mourning dress partly tied to the relational proximity between deceased and survivor and the period that had elapsed. For example, a Lewis writer recalls that,

Dark clothes were worn for brothers and sisters or parents for three years, for first cousins for two years and second cousins for a year. As the people were all closely related they were seldom out of mourning for someone. (Macdonald 1984:68)

Rules about black apparel for various classes of mourners, and other rules of behaviour (like constraints on social participation), were modified, and men continued to wear less black than women: black hat bands and armbands or diamonds sewn onto one’s sleeve, and a black tie may be the only signifier nowadays if any is adopted. Lack of material resources would have meant that islanders historically would seldom have had special
clothes for mourning anyway; most owned a small number of garments which were worn until dilapidated beyond use and often recycled into something else. One Lewis woman recalls how her mother, a devout Christian, when widowed in the 1940s, had only worn black for church (the practice still of many mourners, not only widows) and ‘probably only till the first mourning wore out. She was very practical and was left with eight young children’ (Seonag, Appendix 5E). Having to add the expense of mourning garments to that of other mortuary costs was, at that time, impossible for some, and people often donated or lent items to the main mourners. Widowers wore black diamonds or bands on the upper, outer left sleeve of jackets and black coats, ties or hat-bands for a year or more. When Murdina’s father died when she was 22, 53 years ago, she donned complete black:

I didn’t mind wearing it at first but I must admit the longer I wore it the more I came to detest it. In those days you couldn’t relieve it with any bright colours or even light coloured stockings. This went on for a year or two. Before that one was in mourning for five. I am sure my mother was, though after that period we made her wear something to brighten it up. (Appendix 5D)

Some families dressed children and adolescents in mourning for a period after the funeral, but even a half-century ago some did not conform to this:

Once walking from Lionel school to North Dell, shortly after the death of my father, a woman asked me in for a cup of tea - it must have been raining. She started to tell me how sorry she was my mother had not put me into black. I did not tell my mother. Perhaps others felt like [that woman]. I don’t think my mother ever worried about the opinions of others. She was a devout Christian with a mind of her own. (Seonag, Appendix 5E)

Before my family moved back there in 1979, summer holidays were spent on Lewis. One of the contrasts between life in the village and in our home town of Inverness came from the unusual (to me) appearance of church-goers and of widows, especially those who had decided to wear black, and almost all women of the oldest generation nearly always wore a headscarf or hat out of doors. While one grandmother was a darkly clothed Free Church widow, the other dressed in lots of checked and floral coloured fabrics. Because I associated widows with my paternal grandmother and other church women who would visit her, as a child I connected widowhood and the *ciram* very closely; my impression for a long time was that being born-again happened almost automatically as a result of a husband’s death, when women had to stop wearing colours and adopt a slow, quiet, seriousness in their bearing and conversation.
Younger widows and those who remarried would follow different standards, but many born in the early decades of the twentieth century, and even many who were widowed as late as the 1970s, often went into black for life, particularly if they were fervent Christians, and this could be compounded by further serious loss, like that of offspring, but whether or not women felt they had a duty as such to mourn in this way is unclear. Banntraichean, and sometimes others in long-term mourning, historically shared important elements of appearance with their headscarved counterparts throughout much of Europe where a peasant economy and culture persisted or had only recently developed into something else; their typical outfit superficially could belong in many parts of the Balkans, or Mediterranean villages, as much as to a Lewis baile or clachan (village), their weather-worn faces and work-bent backs endowing the wearers in these various scenes with even more visual similarity. In recent decades most widows have gradually adopted reduced mourning by introducing lighter colours and patterned fabrics into everyday attire, perhaps continuing to wear one black item or deeper mourning for some time for church services or in public. One often-heard idea on Lewis today is that a widow should indicate her status for six months or a year, and many do this by wearing mainly dark shades of grey, brown or blue in that time, with, perhaps, some black garments.

If an individual chooses to extend her visual bereavement others would not want or would be reluctant to influence the mourner's behaviour unless it came to seem excessively emotionally indulgent, therefore, possibly 'unhealthy', or as exhibitionist. The contrasting stringent and restrictive regulations which single out the widow in many cultures, in, for instance, island vestimentary codes of the past, reflect how women generally have acquired social status and roles according to their relations with male significant others. The loss of a husband creates a special profile for a community member who has attained adult status through matrimony and probably maternity, but loses the partner who facilitated this 'majority', and in whom the household, or at least the nuclear grouping most affected, had a public representative. The female spouse without a partner was partly redundant, an anomaly, as someone who has been sexually active and may still be fertile. Her garb, which was imposed by traditional discourse, served to ensure that she was comprehensible to other culture members; it became a metaphor for her whole being and her spiritual identity as someone subject to particular taboos; it both expressed for her and reminded her of what had happened and how she should conduct herself. One correspondent pointed out another aspect of the signalling in widow's weeds - 'I also think it is a sign when widows are dressed in mourning black
that they are not ready to begin new relationships with men’ (Nan, Appendix 5C) - confirming the ways that women’s identity is perceived to be based to a significant degree on relations with men. A bereaved appearance demands appropriate attention and treatment from others too.

Others can judge how someone mourns, whether they seem to have recovered and adjusted ‘too easily’ or are unable to move on from grief, whether they are acting appropriately in terms of socializing (and especially if with members of the opposite sex), and observing, generally unspoken, rules of conduct. The behaviour that is expected differs for either gender according to cultural ideology, especially relating to emotions and how these are taken to reflect ‘natural facts’. For women, whose mobility and behaviour are already more restricted, life choices more limited, and conduct in some ways more circumscribed, widowhood is an intensification of various elements of gender discourse which have operated in their lives. Dress is only one of the many ways in which the bereaved female has been placed under more pressure to declare overtly her relations with others, but this may have garnered the mourner some compensation in their condition, so there could be an element of social investment in the vestimentary decision to assume chronic mourning wear. One correspondent recognizes aspects of this in the behaviour of people around her: ‘My sister-in-law, who was younger than I, went into mourning for each of her brothers who died in fairly recent times. I know it sounds unkind, but I think she enjoyed the attention and sympathy extended to folk in deep mourning’ (Seonag, Appendix 5E).

Nowadays the decision to wear ‘weeds’ for a dead relative is often taken to avoid offending other family members who feel it is important, although these are likely to be a minority, perhaps even of one. This conformity, to avoid offending, especially, older more conservative others, strongly influences people’s appearance at church also. Seonag had worn black until the funeral after her mother had died on Lewis in the 1980s in concession to the wishes of a sister-in-law who had been looking after her mother and in whose home she had died. Others emphasize the centrality of tradition in the practice, and point out how wearing extensive black is still customary in many cultures:

Out of respect and custom I have worn black for every member of my family who has died since, but only for a short period. It’s not a custom that’s particular to the islands; it’s worn in royal circles and in many areas and countries. Even now I would still wear black out of respect and no matter where people come from or their culture they have their own way of dressing in reaction under these circumstances. (Murdina, Appendix 5D)
The extent of mourning wear and the length of time such signs are borne are increasingly matters of personal preference, although there has usually been some allowance for this anyway. For instance, Nan writes: ‘I was devastated when my mother died at the age of 57, two years after my father, also aged 57 years. My whole world went black, and supposing nobody else had ever worn it, I could not bear to dress in any other colour’ (Appendix 5C). People’s notions of what is appropriate are, however, more individual now that their knowledge of, and the instrumentality of, past vestimentary codes have diminished.

In line with the mainstream of British society, the mourning fashions of the twentieth century have changed to the extent that far fewer, and then mostly older women, wear predominantly black after the funeral, although many will wear it for that event and wakes, and possibly during the period before burial if they are principal mourners. Very few widows in my own village wear deepest black once they have reached a stage where they feel they can participate in life outside the home. In the two World Wars almost every islander lost someone close, perhaps several kinspeople or acquaintances, so grief was unexceptional and there was less purpose in marking oneself out as bereaved, liminal, requesting special treatment, and, so, much of the ‘etiquette’ of mourning dress custom was discarded. From being a norm once fulfilled and supported by the community, to go into mourning dress for a protracted period after the funeral has become in the last couple of decades something mainly done by women who already dress according to more conservative, perhaps ‘old-fashioned’, standards and styles, and are generally religious, although some professing Christians disapprove of mourning wear per se. One Free Church elder wrote of his own opinions on women’s mourning wear:

I have never approved much of the wearing of black. There is nothing in scripture as far as I know to justify it and it is most likely a practice left over from Roman Catholicism. (Kenneth, Appendix 5G)

Even in 1972, when my paternal grandmother donned black, subsequently wearing it for many years, it was contrary to the wishes of her late husband who had been a Free Church elder and ten years her senior. For the nineteen years she outlived him, my conservative grandmother predominantly wore various dark colours, after she had phased-out exclusive black, although this did not indicate widowhood as saliently as it would have done if dark colours had not also been fairly typical of elderly womanhood in the islands. Twenty-five years later, in 1997, several conversations I was part of indicated a number of people’s concern over one of my great aunts in Lewis, who had recently lost her husband, and had chosen to assume black after the funeral. As was my
grandmother, she is a devout Free Church communicant, and her sister-in-law’s earlier opposition to the wishes of her spouse and family, but not her devotional, gender and age-based peer group, was recalled.39 To follow the older rules about black outfits for a period after the burial is nowadays thought of as ‘morbid’, ‘depressing’, ‘unhealthy’, as not ‘getting over it and on with life’.

Choosing to adopt extended mourning appearances and an inclination to become more absorbed in spiritual and religious matters often seem to be parallel adaptations in the grieving of certain women, daughters and mothers as well as wives. As noted in Chapter 3, the older forms of deepest mourning wear are almost synonymous with a former version of appearance once assumed by women communicants within conservative congregations. As already claimed, wearing extended, deep mourning seems to have been a potential means of regaining status lost with the bereavement through an intensified traditional and religious status. As with more orthodox church-members, the choice to dress in a certain way for grieving women is in part a matter of establishing identity. Through the mobilization of this vestimentary code, they signal to others, and understand for themselves, their identity; they partially create their identity through physical appearance in a way that allows a coherent image, even if there is no liability imposed on them. When women have taken this option, in recent years, it is further interpretable as a form of invoking a ‘past’ discourse regarding particular sets of relations between people and statuses in the wider world; it is motivated by a set of values and a hierarchy of interpretative options which differ from the ‘modern’ ones that object to extended mourning dress and behaviour; it is an assertion of the validity of particular aspects of fabricated religious tradition; and it expresses the wearer’s preferences for acting, and negotiating an identity, within a particular discourse implicated in the creation of gendered identities and reflexivities.

**Conclusion**

This chapter does not examine particular kinds of occasions but considers the subject generally, exploring ideas of gender and emotion, acceptable and unhealthy mourning, and the specific creation of identity in widow’s wear. Discourses of or about emotion, culturally determining ideas about mourning, are powerful constraining forces, often instruments in women’s suppression, shoring-up essentialist typifications of femininity and masculinity. Emotion and expressivity tend to be defined in reference to the feminine and, furthermore, the female, and mourning is essentially about the
management of feelings and the appropriate signalling of experience in ways that are meaningful within the culture. For such reasons, mourning is not only an intensely gendered condition or experience, but one which carries strong associations with stereotypes of the feminine.

In the eighteenth century Gaidhealtachd it was women who performed the intense sorrow of the community in their keening, and in the 1990s mass media images of women still tend to represent responses to tragedy (Hockey 1997) (although this appears to be changing in Britain). Certain ideally typified emotions, characterized as having closer connections with and a basis in the ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’, testify to a constructed logic resting on the notion of the ‘natural’. The expression of emotions does much more than relay the supposed internal state of the experiencer into the outside world. Like performative speech acts, consistent and correct expressions of emotions and repeated, reinforced internalized understandings of emotions communicate messages about each of the genders, and the identity of the individual; they simultaneously actually produce the condition to which they refer as if it were their source and reason. Expressions of, talk about, and internal processes of handling emotions are reiterations of acts which have in the past signified and do signify gender. Women’s consciousness of presenting themselves in ways that include acceptable emotional behaviours indicates the elements of performance and negotiation involved, an ‘acting’ performed through historic citations of signifying acts which indicate ideas about gender. Despite multiple, simultaneous levels of awareness and the very possibility of negotiation which refutes claims about the inevitability of gender, for the most part the consensus to conform to and recognize gender signifiers holds. This cannot, however, negate the evidence that, like speech performatives and other ‘acts’ of gender, gender-bearing and -creating expressions and understandings of emotions, which contribute to the maintenance of gendered identity for the individual and her outward conformity to normative gender, themselves achieve their effects as the results of what are otherwise perceived to be only their surface manifestations, and through cumulative, history-invoking powers as repeated behaviours which echo, combine, add to and strengthen other signifiers of gender.

With the demise of traditional mortuary rituals and the informal knowledge of how to structure bereavement, people in Scotland, as in many other countries, have become, in recent decades, possibly less competent to express grief confidently in effective and expected ways. Ritualized conduct and performances, like that of the hysterical keening
woman, belong to history or alien cultures, the ‘Other’, and are behaviours many islanders would find it impossible to perform themselves. There is an uneasy balance between loss of control and violent, physical grief being seen as excessive and bad and the belief that some expression of emotion is good, healthy, and indeed appropriate (even if just appearance), so there is much uncertainty about how to mourn, publicly and privately (as reflected in many of the essays in Field, Hockey and Small 1997). Because of the markedly gendered character of mourning it constitutes a stage on which competency as female and male has been compellingly demanded of performers. One impression is that grieving seems to be a conservative ‘performance genre’ supporting particular, often essentialist gender ideas, but as in the past, changes are occurring with challenges to these in culture and society generally so that it may be in the future a less ‘feminine’ condition than often characterized; the negotiation of gender identity in grieving will become quite different, as it was, for example, when vocal articulation and dramatic physical display of sorrow were performed by women who participated in traditional lamentation.

1 Mourning dress is discussed below; see Chapter 3’s more general discussion of personal appearance and identity.
2 In many cultures, particular categories of the bereaved must observe stringent taboos.
3 At that time, the figure in these islands was double the rate found in east coast Ross and Cromarty, but was still lower than that of St. Kilda. Between 1830 and 1891, of 160 baptisms and live births, 92 St. Kildan babies died within a few weeks of birth, mostly from tetanus, and from 1866 to 1870 of fourteen births none survived (Harman 1997: 262-3; c.f. Clegg 1976, 1984, 1987). Considering previous high infant and childhood mortality rates, it is unsurprising that when one looks at lament texts, deaths of children do not seem to have had the sort of significance needed to be marked in verse, and, unsurprisingly, as in other cultures, most surviving laments and elegies are eulogistic poems for dead males. Frequently, in the case of the Gaelic songs and fragments that have survived, someone with whom the ‘speaker’ in the lament was in love, whether this had been reciprocated or not.
4 See Lutz and White’s (1986) review of work on the anthropology of emotions, including the question of cross-cultural differences and similarities; c.f. Leavitt 1996.
5 This might tie in with, for example, why upper classes, in the Highlands and Islands, had once hired mourners and whether they were emulated by others who paid keening women (c.f. Nenola-Kallio 1982: 109-111). ‘Comparative research into mourning in 78 cultures showed, for example, that although in some of the cultures no differences could be observed between the sexes in weeping or other forms of emotion in connection with death, there were indeed differences in the majority, and they were always to women’s advantage [sic]. In other words, in cultures in which there are differences between the sexes in the expression of grief, the women expressed grief more often than the men. We can further conclude from the same study that the expression of grief is more intense and more varied in many of the primitive cultures studied than in, for example, western countries today.’ (Nenola-Kallio 1982: 109)
6 The interesting and often dramatic connection between madness and grief has not been considered at any length here, although it briefly arises in Chapters 7 and 8.
7 Female versions of the geilt figure are rare.
8 Partridge (1980) has conducted an important discussion of the similarities between the geilt tradition and descriptions of the figure of the keener.
After years of correspondence to, or about, Charlotte, Anne Grant writes a letter in 1800 speaking of her death three weeks after giving birth (1845 vol. 2: 151), one year after she herself had lost her eldest, fifteen year old son and given birth to another. A brief discussion of alcohol is conducted in Chapter 5 on wakes and funerals, events for which strong drink was once an essential component.

From my own observation, I would point out that there are changing attitudes to prescribed medication for conditions such as problems with one’s ‘nerves’, depression and anxiety: in the past, long-term treatment of this kind was much more of a female experience but there seems to be an increasing number of men nowadays who turn to the medical profession for help with psychiatric and emotional difficulties and accept medication like anti-depressants and tranquillisers. Such attitudinal and behavioural change must inevitably be having an influence on experiences of bereavement.

It is also possible that in the islands crying by both genders is, perhaps, a more frequently occurring form of self-expression than in much of Scotland for even less extreme feelings and in situations where it happens in empathetic response to another’s emotions rather than from one’s own immediate experience. This tendency and tolerance partly ties in with the greater degree of physical closeness seen between people in conversation or, for example, when walking together, that is normal in the islands, and these perhaps also relate to the greater tolerance for silence in company that Mackinnon noted as culturally significant (1977: 17).


I mention some of Urban’s conclusions in Chapter 7.

I have found that people whom I already know sometimes choose not to tell about experiences like this one during taped interviews if they expect I already know or can learn about it in ordinary conversation, even if this is not always the case (sometimes because I was too young or not even living in the community at the time of the events referred to) or I would particularly like to have them speak about it. In this instance, Murdo was an older relative and friend of my father and I was old enough, she might assume, to have some memories of the later stages of Murdo’s decline, so Jessie might have been expected to reason that I did not need the details of different crises and stages in Murdo’s deterioration. In fact, I could only very vaguely remember any details and had not, as a young teenager, felt engaged with these events at the time when I had barely had any personal involvement with Jessie although I was a friend of her granddaughter. She had different expectations of what I would know and understand and this shaped how she related her memories as the tape ran on.

She was born into the Free Presbyterian Church but moved, as has been traditional, to the Free Church of her husband’s family. Jessie is deeply religious but also seems imbued with a sense of spiritual humility which suggests that, whether born-again or not, she would not seek to take public communion in her congregation, that she would always doubt her own worthiness to claim and receive such declarative recognition of her condition. The Free Presbyterian Church is more restrictive and demanding than the Free Church in regard to those who wish to become members and have their conversion acknowledged in public.

Untypically, for women of her generation, she had brought up only one child, her other dying in infancy, and her reproductive history would probably have been connected to more general underlying health problems.

His own deliberate concealment of how he was feeling physically, his denial of exhaustion and pain until it became impossible to hide or refuse it, compounded Jessie’s confusion, and to challenge Murdo to admit to how he felt was to risk possible arguments and an increase in his intransigence.

That Jessie chose this ‘story’ during a phase in the conversation when she was talking about her own ageing points to the importance of the concept of death, generalized, specified, and their own, to how individuals think about themselves, particularly as they grow old, influencing their sense and maintenance of identity and self-image (see Minister 1992). Furthermore, the example of Jessie’s narration offers a site for a consideration of the part played by religious belief in the way an individual interprets and expresses their feelings: for the devout Christian the experience of, for example, anger or frustration in response to a death can conflict very
seriously with their faith in divinely ordained destiny that no mortal can deny and precipitate additional struggle in bereavement.

20 Weisner looks at the status of widows in early modern Europe, considering their poverty, but also the independence enjoyed by those with means to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions (1995: 73-75).

21 In many cultures, of course, the bereaved has often become a focus of others’ fears in respect of death, contagion by it, especially spouses as those who had presumably had the closest, latest contact with the dead and, therefore, one of the strongest potential links with their ghost, and many of the precautions taken arose from Frayer described involved special treatment of the widowed person, whether man or woman (Frazer 1936: passim). Aboriginal and Native American bans on widows speaking for prescribed lengths of time were partly thought to stem from a fear of the bereaved attracting a husband’s ghost which would be jealous that she was now living without him (ibid.: 39-42); throughout India a widow was often forced into swift remarriage to free her from her dead husband (ibid.: 207-17), and there are other institutions like the Levirate, although there are also frequent injunctions against rapid remarriage. Amongst one New Guinean group, the loss of wife meant utter social death for a man who would be ostracized, feared and abused, had his property and home destroyed or confiscated, could not remarry and, indeed, was forced to live outwith the community, hiding and scraping an existence, and frequently also attributed with sorcery skills as a result of the experience (ibid.: 201-2). In many cultures, other restrictions are placed, for various periods on, for example, the bereaved spouse’s religious participation, their conduct towards others, their cultural and labour participation, dietary habits and appearance.

22 Innumerable international comparisons could be made here from all elements of folk and complex social structures, in religious belief, law, categories of individuals, for example, amongst the Zapotec of Central America there is a distinction between ‘child music’ and ‘adult music’, so that an old unmarried woman received the funeral rites of a child with, however, ‘adult music’ to acknowledge her age, the combination indicating her ambiguous social identity (Herzfeld 1981: 52).

23 Anne Grant, who was much better off than the average Gaidhealtachd woman, recognized the material consequences of widowhood, but, in an emotionally restrained letter to an acquaintance, insists anyway that these worry her little: ‘The storm of adversity has indeed been let loose upon me, and shattered my fabric of happiness; so frequent, so heavy were the shocks, that it is no wonder I lay stunned among the ruins.... I will not tell you that when half my heart was torn away, the other half ached at the separation.... Pecuniary evils I neither feel nor fear. God is all-sufficient, and my trust in him is unlimited. I cannot at this time write longer, or I would tell you how indulgent the Duke of Gordon has been, in permitting me to continue somewhat longer on the farm, at the old rate’ (1845 vol. 2:166-67).

24 Profiling Stornoway parish, a contributor to the First Statistical Account wrote: ‘The common people of this island marry very early, and when death separates them, if the surviving party, whether male or female, finds it convenient to engage a second or third time in that state, some of them remain a few weeks, and some only a few days in widowhood; so that grief for the loss of a husband or wife is an affliction little known among the lower class of people here. A woman in this country, whose husband shot himself accidentally, by an unguarded management of a firelock, settled her contract of marriage, in the way she thought fit, before the body of her husband was interred, and was married the next day after she performed that last duty to the deceased.’ (Statistical Account, vol. XX: 38-9)

25 As in cultures similar to that of the Western Isles into the early decades of the twentieth century, whether peasant-based or proto-industrial, reproduction meant workers, continuity, an insurance policy for old age; the large family would perhaps have been the norm even if modern contraceptive technology had been available; and in an earlier time, the birth-rate did not only imply tenants for chieftains, but also fighting men, services, and wombs in which clan-members would be carried. In Barra, for example, it was said that MacNeill would assign one a second spouse (Martin 1981: 97).

26 She writes, ‘I have always been able to adapt to my own company, when necessary, as I read a lot and listen to music and sometimes watch television in the evenings. And during the day, I have contact with the family, neighbours and people I meet on the road and in the shops, although I don’t do much visiting as such.’ Another quotation from a letter from Peggy reflects
her character well and her independence: 'I was 54 when I first became a grandmother. It certainly reminded me that I was getting older but I happened to be in the Sheriff Court, sitting beside the Sheriff on the bench, when a message was handed to me about the birth of my first grandchild. At the time, we had just been standing up to bow to the Sheriff on his appearance and I remember feeling that I wanted to yell, "Hey! What about me - I'm a Granny. You should rise and bow to me too!". See Appendix 3U also.

27 The striking appearance of lamenting women which was an important aspect of their performance is briefly considered in Chapter 8. In other cultures, amongst the most encountered customs, often reversals or inversion of ordinary habit, are the loosening or shaving of hair; the genders sometimes reversing regular practice, or the tearing of one's hair in violent grief; self-laceration; going unwashed for several days or smearing the body with pigments or other substances such as ash; the absence of jewellery and other adornment; and the wearing of clothes inside-out or back-to-front (e.g. Schubert 1995b: 93) mentions the Bulgarian custom of tying the headscarf under the chin instead of at the top of the head when in mourning and of wearing belts the wrong way round).

28 Schubert discusses this aspect of attire, how others decode apparel signs and express their reactions: 'a whole series of ritual acts can follow such as within the Balkan context of the activation of all known female mourners in order to lament for the dead - for to ignore this is regarded as a great shame.... [A] vestimentary message regulates not only communication, but also interaction. It can then invoke replication by vestimentary means.' (Schubert 1995b: 93, emphasis in original)

29 There are areas, for example in Germany, Hungary and the Balkans, where white is an additional or the principle colour for bereavement, and a colour like its opposite strongly associated with the underworld. For example, in an area of Macedonia that Schubert (1995a) has studied, the headscarf for everyday wear is black with coloured embroidery; black headscarves with a little white decoration were worn for profound mourning and, as time passed, the white ornamentation increased until one would be wearing a white scarf with black embellishments.

30 Headscarf conventions in the Balkans provide a comparison where there are existing instances of traditional clothing being worn, even although it is generally only used for festive occasions and perhaps church; young girls wear scarves of stronger, richer, brighter colours which stand out more, the darker more plain scarves of older women reflect their diminished importance and in the social structure, and their reduced visibility (Schubert 1995b: 96).

31 Nan wrote that 'Several old women who were patients told me, when I was nursing, that in previous generations the elderly did not wear black clothes so much. It was a habit that was acquired and continued from the time of the HMS Iolaire disaster.' (Appendix 5C) See Dòmhnallach (1978) for an account and oral history of the sinking of the HMS Iolaire.

32 The first time a boy wears a black necktie is almost a minor rite of passage, one more small step towards the world of adult experience that includes dealing with mortality, a sign he may be eligible for an active role in a funeral. The folklorist Margaret Bennett closes an anthology of extracts describing Scottish life-cycle customs and beliefs taken from published, manuscript and other archival sources with an extract from her own journal. It refers to the day in 1989 when the Borders folk singer Willie Scott was being buried and his son had been asked to pipe at the ceremony in Edinburgh: 'Today I bought my son a black tie. Fred offered to lend him one but I said, "No, Martyn's eighteen and there comes a time in every young lad's life when he has to have his own black tie." "Aye," Fred said, "true enough, and the more time goes by the more he'll need it."' (1992: 269).

33 'In my own younger days, all the widows wore black for life. I particularly recall one elderly lady who dared to wear a grey cardigan and the neighbours called her the merry widow!' (Nan, Appendix 5C)

34 An essential part of the vacation was to cèilidh on various kin and neighbours of my mother’s and my father’s families there. One ‘real caileach’ we always visited we nicknamed ‘the Black Auntie’. She was more usually referred to in adult’s conversation by her patronymic, or her sloinneadh (see below) if it was necessary to specify which Anne she was, but both my sister and I found that we could not pronounce and memorize this and we already had an aunt named Anne. Our great aunt’s appearance provided us with the most obvious way for referring to her. She was the long-time widow of a paternal great-uncle, whose aprons or flowered or checked
nylon ‘overalls’ would usually, even on warm, sunny days, be her only visible non-black garments, and she was really unusual at that time in the village.

Sloinn (a’ sloinneadh, present participle) is the verb for bestowing a surname on a person or tracing one’s pedigree, literally implying ‘descending’, with the noun sloinneadh, -idh, -idhean (masc.), meaning a surname, patronymic, or the activity of tracing one’s genealogy. This is the word used for the system of referring to individuals by the use of their Christian name, or the relational words like bean (wife), nighean (daughter), mac (son), or banntrach (widow) followed by the name of most frequently their father or husband and only occasionally mother, and then the name of that parent’s or spouse’s father, e.g. Bean Iain Thormaid is ‘the wife of Norman’s John’. This nomenclature system was what mattered in daily village life when Gaelic was still the primary medium for communication and surnames were seldom used for unofficial and informal purposes, and it is still employed in general conversation along with nicknames, sometimes even by those who do not speak very much Gaelic, not least of all because of the number of people sharing the same first and family name in island townships. In modern colloquial Lewis Gaelic usage sloinneadh is nearly always employed with the meaning ‘surname’, something to identify the subject in addition to, or instead of, their Gaelic identification, so that if one asks a local for the sloinneadh of someone, perhaps because only their Christian name is known to the questioner, usually prompts a reply made of an English rendered surname, but a Scalpay native, Morag MacLeod of the SSS, provided this information: ‘I think sloinneadh is used to mean surname only in Lewis. It was always patronymic to me and, in another context, genealogy, where some would use sloinnteireachd [usually sloinnteachd (fem. n.), ‘act or habit of tracing genealogies; genealogy’] - a favourite pastime amongst Gaels, certainly in my family. We would not, however, say “what is his sloinneadh - dè ‘n sloinneadh a th’air?” but something like “ciamar a sloinneadh/ears tu e?” - what family would you put him in?” (hard to translate). Unfortunately - as far as I’m concerned - Lewisians are creeping into other areas because of radio. If someone said to me “Dè ‘n sloinneadh a th’air?”, I might answer them with the surname, assuming that was what they meant.’ (From personal correspondence.)

35 Banntrach, -aich, - aichean (fem. noun), widow, widower. Although there is no Gaelic modification of the word parallel to the English ‘widower’ for masculine usage, the definition ‘widower’ is given second in dictionaries. Bantrachas, -as, -ais (masc. noun), widowhood. These words relate etymologically to bean, a woman.

36 The limitations in the roles prescribed for widows cross-culturally, and the centrality of vestimentary codes in the cultural definition of her and how she can express herself, are exemplified by a Somalian case where the word asay denotes the white cloth that she wears over head or around her whole body, but is also used to refer to the widow, who is bound in semi-isolation by the strict mourning regulations for about three months (Helander 1988: 126).

37 Nan always wears a black item for about a month for any close relative, but probably most people adopt no such sign after the funeral.

38 Her decision was probably strengthened by the loss of a son in his late twenties a year before my grandfather’s death.

39 I was not in Lewis for my great-uncle’s funeral, but went home shortly after for a fortnight. In that period my great-aunt, who lives in another village, was often spoken about - my parents would call her and in other conversations people would discuss how the family were adapting. I took notes down about some of these conversations. On one occasion, for example, my mother and I were talking to a sales assistant and two other women from our village in a clothes shop in Stornoway. The other shoppers had that day run into my great-aunt and her daughter-in-law. This was the new widow’s first trip into town since the death and she had come in primarily to buy more black clothes. The consensus was that this was unhealthy for her. One of the women remembered how my grandmother had gone into mourning and we spoke about this for a few minutes.
PART 3

WEEPING FOR THE DEAD
AND SINGING ONESELF
CHAPTER 7
WOMEN’S TRADITIONAL SONG AND SINGING FOR THE DEAD

Introduction
As in many cultures, special public singing and weeping for the dead, as essential parts of the sequence of mourning, were regarded as female activities in Gaelic-speaking Scotland. Two chapters now look at some aspects of lament as a genre and lamenting as a performance tradition within the wider spectrum of women’s creative expression. This section differs from the preceding theme-based, substantive chapters which comment on recent and present-day situations as well as the past and are ordered according to the sequence of experience from the death event through to the extended mourning period; this and the next chapter deal with a performance tradition which belongs very much to history, for weeping and wailing for the dead disappeared in most areas in the nineteenth century and completely in the early twentieth century. In terms of the sequence of experience, laments were composed and sung and keening was performed near the time of the death, over the body, at wakes, and they would reach a climax during the burial, functioning ritually to manage liminality and transition. Dramatic weeping accompanied the singing by a soloist or a series of soloists and a chorus, and other marked behaviours typified the practice, whether the keener was a hired ‘professional’ or simply a mourner skilled in the conventions of the genre. Mortuary songs could be composed long after bereavement, during and after the defined mourning period, being repeated to commemorate the deceased or remember the experience of that particular loss and others, and can still be sung, some centuries after their composition, for entertainment and personal expression. This discussion of lamenting for the dead involves themes found in other chapters: the gender-founded division of emotional and caring labour; religious and ritual roles; women mobilizing coding strategies in polysemous vocal and musical creative expression; historical changes in the cultural construction of gender ideals. As a woman sang and wept for the dead she was enacting, in possibly highly dramatic ways, her gender, singing her identity, and performatively creating and maintaining gender, within the culture generally, and in terms of her individual...
negotiation of being feminine according to the discourses in which she was performing and presenting herself.

The present chapter gives an overview of relevant elements of the Gaelic folk-song tradition that survived through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Lamenting shared important elements with other poetic genres and performance modes, most notably the songs and the singing performance at communal tweed waulkings, or fullings, prior to that process being mechanized, and a type which can be characterized as verse of personal complaint. These are outlined before I turn to singing and wailing for the dead as varied, cross-cultural practices and discuss how these activities and cultural products have been realized in the Scottish Gaelic context. A great deal of older threnodic verse might not have survived outside of its transmission within different performance milieus like waulkings. Waulking and lamenting contexts are compared in the next chapter which brings together descriptions of keening and discusses some textual features of laments and the mobilization of coding strategies, before drawing some general conclusions about lament performances as forums in which gender was foregrounded in ways that reflect its discursive constitution as negotiated and processual. Cultural ideas about gender, grounded in the supposed ‘nature’ of females and males, would have decided that keening and public displays of grief were the ritual responsibilities of primarily women rather than men. A more restrained reaction to death was expected of men, and for a very limited few there was the role of the formal elegist. A web of discourses about gender and emotions provided a conceptual substantiation for the logic behind this allocation of activities and licence of particular behaviours.

Women’s traditional song in Gaelic - the main categories
The verse traditions of island women were well outlined and illustrated in a classification that Ross (1957) proposed for Scottish Gaelic ‘folk-song’. Ross focused on the contemporary situation: the recently founded School of Scottish Studies was vigorously gathering oral culture which had been almost unheard outside of the
Gaidhealtachd (and much of this was to disappear in subsequent decades). He systematized his classification from analysis of audio recordings in the Sound Archive of the School and texts in manuscripts and published collections, so his scheme represents a summary of the main kinds of song that had recently circulated and were still then circulating as Gaelic folk tradition, one dominated by women’s waulking song, or òran luaidh (sing.; pl. òrain luaidh). Although by no means definitive, and despite its many failings, the classification Ross devised does have an organizational and cross-referential usefulness, as a basic tool for working with a broad range of Gaelic song.

Many ‘folk’ items were and are, of course, of ‘literary’ provenance and written and oral media have interacted constantly, but ‘folk-song’ in this discussion refers to the status of a received variant having arrived at its performance via primarily singers and singing, rather than print media and formal teaching, and to how informal learning and choice have determined which songs survive. Analogously, in a body of women’s song, such as the waulking tradition, some of the poetry will have been created by men: what defines a song then is not ‘authorship’, but its transmission within a female milieu, that women more than men chose to repeat and share a song, that it possibly owes its survival to having been sustained within a women’s folk culture.

Immediately, problematics of overlap and multiplication are apparent with the attempted catalogue, which is on the first level structured according to four criteria for establishing other groups of song genres. The initial step is to decide which of the following is the most important feature in defining a song: its theme; its structure; its co-survival and co-dependence on a supernatural narrative; or its occupational or ritual function. The second category of songs which Ross defined according to the salience of their structure, ensnares ballads, macaronics, pibroch songs and puirt-a-beul (mouth music) and is of little interest here, although examples of such songs have been adaptively absorbed into genres classified under the other three headings. Ross gives the third category the hardly illuminating appellation of ‘folk aetiology’, primarily meaning by this òrain shidh (‘fairy
songs’), songs connected with legends concerning supernatural entities, linked by this criterion and not by any based on metre or melody.8

Órain luaidh one might expect to see under the fourth group of functional labour and ritual songs, but in this category Ross includes duain Challuin (Hogmanay songs), eòlais (charms and incantations), órain basaidh (‘clapping songs’, rhymes used at the end of a fulling when the cloth was being folded), and songs that are used to accompany rocking or lulling a child - tàlaidhean,9 and others for rowing, spinning, milking, or harvesting. Ross himself qualifies the application of this criterion: ‘Since the employment of a song in an occupation is so often incidental to its origin or theme, occupational type names are only used where some peculiarity of content is discernible’ (98). For instance, many of the textually fuller lullabies are actually also laments for a spouse or lover killed violently, and the singer may talk of the baby (if a son) growing up to avenge the death; others are fairy songs. There are several basic differences between waulking songs and these other functional genres: for example, other occupational ones are structured differently and swap and criss-cross genres easily; they often refer to the task while órain luaidh do not;10 and several types are often performed solo and lack the choral refrains that are such a distinctive feature of órain luaidh.

Ross most fully delineates the categories defined under his first heading where ‘theme’ is taken to be the pre-eminent feature of the songs and by which they are categorised. Here are grouped: (1) ‘songs with an intersexual aspect’ - general love songs, matchmaking, night-visiting, pregnancy, rejection, and complaint (tàmait, pl. tàmailean) songs; (2) hunting, ‘homeland’, and topographical songs; (3) panegyric in the form of eulogy, elegy or lament; (4) satire, in the form of the genre aoir11 or flyting; and (5) ‘miscellaneous themes’, including religious, Jacobite and ‘merry’ songs and bacchanalia (96). Most órain luaidh belong in this extensive thematically defined category. It may seem unnecessary to describe song genres with little pertinence to death, but Ross’ proposed classification summarizes the Gaelic ‘folk-song’ tradition as defined at the time of his writing, offering a background to the subject of lament.
Few laments survived through oral transmission as (more or less) discrete song ‘texts’, and those that did are not always poems which are more likely to have a relatively well-founded or definite attribution of composership, or to have the circumstances of their composition established within ‘folk history’, any more than other fragmentary material. A considerable amount of lament and elegiac verse survives as segments within songs performed in other genres, surviving in textual or audio recordings, by far the most significant category being those songs which accompanied manual tweed fulling. Much threnodic verse also belongs within a general panegyric tradition, survived as lullabies, or is close to personal complaint songs.

Órain luaidh and tàmailtean

Órain luaidh stand apart as a wide-ranging corpus13 appropriating poetry from most of the genres Ross placed under his initial organizational criteria; the term can indicate virtually nothing specific about the possible range of themes in a particular example, just that a song has been performed in a luadh context and will structurally conform to one of the functionally determined types found within this ‘meta-genre’. It can deal with themes from a broad range of possibilities. Most recordings and performances that have been ‘entextualized’, in being reduced to song texts with perhaps some contextualization, consist of verse definable according to theme or content, or in terms of alternative and original contexts. Very often a luadh text from a single performance consists of a ‘collage’ constructed from fragments or selections from two or more songs, possibly originating in other genres, their rhymes and rhythms bent to suit the work, or from other órain luaidh. As well as songs created directly and originally for a luadh application, the corpus adapted and assimilated the work of formal, professional poets, other labour song forms, love songs, laments, and flytings.14

Most órain luaidh are built up with stanzas, couplets or even single lines found in other performances or texts, pulled from a reservoir of poetry, rather than songs with entirely
original lines, one theme and wholly independent existences, so different parts of one waulking song can originate in several sources, such as narrative songs, laments and eulogies; when only parts of these songs are assembled together at a waulking their previous meaning is, of course, disrupted, they are incomplete and laid contiguous to dislocated fragments of other songs that can have quite different subjects, moods and imagery. This is largely what is meant by the improvisatory element of waulking songs. MacInnes (1971: 60-61; c.f. 1987b, 1987c), describing the whole genre, using Craig's (1949) collection in particular as exemplary, notes the striking lack of coherence in individual examples: abrupt textual leaps between subjects and tones disorientate the reader or listener; often only the minimal aspects of any kind of plot are present; the same passage can exist in different songs; and the overwhelming potency of expression, the vitality and vividness of imagery are central. Although there are several reasons for the inherent 'incoherence' of the form, including transmission effects and the need to lengthen songs by addition to last the duration of the labour, MacInnes insists that this element is essential to the form itself (ibid.).

Texts of juxtaposed excerpts from various songs appear to lack internal logical organization and an easily accessible sense for the modern listener or reader. This problem underlines the need to contextualize such 'folk-songs', and to treat such verbal art creations as not simply objects or texts, or even isolated events, but as processes where meanings and functions emerge through various interactions. As Caraveli (1982) describes it, songs like these rely on their existence being in interaction with 'a world outside the song', in order that they develop referential, social and symbolic meaning. One must try to take into account the different knowledge, aesthetics and values of the community who created these phenomena, the history, local narrative traditions and contemporary social relations with which participants and audience-members could fill in the gaps and reconstruct a whole story suggested by a fragment; understand why it had been placed beside another; and reach for underlying social messages and the various intentions of the composer and the singer. The community would be able to relate past situations to their own immediate interests and concerns and would share
aesthetic ideas grounded in tradition and the present, and understandings of the patterning and structure of these songs which differ from those held by a modern audience. The performer needs sufficient competence to satisfy the formal demands of the performance genre and to manipulate components to achieve her intended effect and communication, accepting responsibility for her work; the audience, as participants in the process of creating the song, required competence for its reception and the interpretation of the whole event.

Within the community, certain groups, by gender, age, family membership or status, for example, would share understandings or competences not possessed by, or open to, others, allowing for the possibility in songs of coded communication accessible to particular groups. As Mvula writes, ‘work songs as verbal art are not just ordinary creative and expressive behaviour that is prevalent during work sessions as a means of entertainment to turn hard work into play. Women’s songs are intimately related to women’s assessment of their daily experiences within the world of women and men’ (1986: 265). The communication effected in work songs and laments can counter images of the Third World woman (in the case Mvula discusses) or the historical island peasant woman as subordinate, passive and repressed, by instancing assertive verbal expression in the voicing of her concerns and description of the world, her deployment of rhetorically powerful expressive strategies, and the use of the song form as a way to negotiate with others an alternative kind of identity she is engaged in constructing.\textsuperscript{17}

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of, and potential dependence one could invest in, waulking song texts and their historical performance context in an investigation of female experiences and self-expression in Gaelic Scotland. ‘[T]hey give a vivid picture of life in the Highlands and Islands in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries from the women’s point of view’ (Campbell and Collinson 1977: 2) in their content, and were a significant performance tradition into as late as the twentieth century, many areas seeing their last functionally genuine waulkings in the 1940s and 1950s. Most surviving, discrete, \textit{luadh} songs appear to have been composed
in the seventeenth century, of early provenance in terms of the extant vernacular literature, but are generally impossible to date precisely.\textsuperscript{18} It is from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that poetic traditions in the vernacular, to which this genre belongs, reveal themselves to our retrospective view. By this time mutuality and similarities shared by the vernacular sphere and many areas of the classical literature were intrinsically, explicitly evident with regard to ideas, concerns and rhetoric. The seventeenth century was a critical phase during which many of the social and religious reformulations nascent in sixteenth century Scotland crystallized and consolidated their influences upon Gaelic culture and society; opening with the Union of the Crowns, the century saw the intensification of many trends, and the further empowering of forces that would radically reshape the \textit{Gaidhealtachd} and have considerable effects upon classical and ‘demotic’ cultural creativity (Thomson 1987b, 1989, 1990, 1992).

The main concerns of women’s Gaelic verse are relations between the genders in one way or another and qualities that are praised in a chief are fairly similar to those appearing in personal songs about lovers and family members. Because of their frequent fabrication from parts of existing songs, one waulking song can include verses both of near-encomium for a leader and of more subjective praise for a lover or dead relative that may share imagery and echo the same values. Earlier \textit{drain luaidh} and other instances of women’s poetry in surviving laments, and elegies proper, are more grounded in the ideals encapsulated in the ‘panegyric code’ (see MacInnes 1978, 1987a),\textsuperscript{19} evidence that the warrior and aristocratic ideals of the official, formal poetry, and the class that supported and created it, were shared to some extent across much of the social spectrum for a considerable time. Later ones may have more direct relevance to the actual material lives of the composing and performing community, although, as the ‘folk tradition’ itself was gradually depleted, it seems to have actually been the case that more formalistic and stereotypic elements came to be relied on as fewer people possessed the skills needed for various forms, and there was a diminution of the stock of resources available. Routine and exercise became, in many cases, substitutes for acquired and practised skills,
knowledge shared by the community, and for original creativity involving improvisation according to ‘vernacular rules’.  

As sources of historical evidence the amenability of such poetry to any useful interpretation might be called into doubt, of course, for a host of reasons, not least of all by pointing out that the values encapsulated and ideals promulgated by many of the earlier texts were anachronistic and irrelevant to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when much of this poetry was recorded. Compositions explicitly grounded in or, at least, redolent of a past social order and (by then) obsolescent moral codes and ideas may have had but a tenuous (and symbolic) relevance to the everyday lives of the women who have been documented as keeping alive this material and continuing to create within this idiom. This is a slight objection, however, when seen against the fact that women chose to repeat the songs (and compose fresh ones that owed to the older forms). This highlights the need to appreciate the complexities involved in attempting to interpret such creative products. There has to have been something with which women continued to identify, which they found attractive (even if it might be nostalgia for historical and fictional past glories) and reusable in earlier as well as later songs, however unusual it might seem that, for example, married women in a thoroughly post-Disruption Hebridean township might find something compelling and with which to identify in, and want to perform songs from, an earlier amatory strain of poetry created by a society that apparently exercised erotic licence far beyond the countenance of the later community. Maclnnes credits waulking songs as embodying the primary, most potent, lyrical mode, the ‘Dionysian strain’ of the Gaelic oral literature of their era (1971; 1978: especially 481ff.), encapsulating an ethos that might, at first, appear entirely alien from that of strict, fervent Presbyterianism which established its hold on the Gaidhealtachd in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The surviving texts cry out for further research from new perspectives, as well as the development of those ones established by studies published over the decades. Many scholars have focused on the structural characteristics of òrain luaidh, something not
relevant here but which is undeniably of considerable interest. The relations between solo lines and group responses, the use of repetition, and the vocable refrains that are enigmatic in themselves, have been particular foci. The tremendously varied refrains which are semantically empty may have had some pristine, now lost meaningfulness, and without them the songs lack much of their effect and lose much of their emotional power. In relation to threnodic song performance, there has been some fascinating and well-informed speculation about the original part played by the vocables that survive in refrains and other elements of the performance. MacInnes (1971) has already written that these were perhaps the most ancient parts of Gaelic work songs, and Ó Madagain has proposed that the articulation of vocables may well have once been what constituted the keening vocalization, anterior to other uses of lyrics in the dirge, ‘in other words it may have been the original keen’ (1989: 33).

The *luadh* was at one point an exclusively female event and, as already mentioned, the songs performed there primarily dealt with interpersonal relationships, usually between a woman (the composer using a first person voice) and a man. As well as ‘*támaltean*’, a particular class of song which is briefly discussed just below, eulogistic love poems, and an array of other borrowings (for very often illustrative rather than narrative effect), from nature, hunting and bardic verse, a substantial proportion of *órain luaidh* are laments for someone known personally by the composer.

*Támalt* is a type that subsumes instances of other intersexual themed songs and is well represented in the major collections of waulking songs (Campbell and Collinson 1969, 1977, 1981; Craig 1949). The word literally denotes ‘scandal, disgrace; insult, disparagement; chagrin or the sense of shame or indignity’, an indication of the tone in which the singer expresses herself. Her song often answers slanderous allegations against her of pregnancy, rumours of the paternity and circumstances of conception, or her sexual conduct as a single woman; it responds to unfair treatment and judgement by others (sometimes including banishment by one’s family), exposing their hypocrisy, callousness and collusion in suppressing certain kinds of knowledge and maintaining
structures founded on differential standards for the genders; it is a direct accusation and sometimes a challenge to her accusers, or an account of events from her perspective which is presumably being neglected or denied. Disturbingly many tâmailtean and other songs refer to rape, other forms of abuse by men, incest, and seduction followed by desertion. Some tâmailtean fit the term ‘laments for oneself’. The implication is that the perpetrator goes relatively or completely unchecked, while the blame and the burden of consequences is directed upon the woman. The songs were undoubtedly partly cathartic, and a channelled expression of experiences, feelings, thoughts; even if the composer was not actually verbalizing personal experience, she was framing and articulating experiences she probably knew other women had suffered and which she felt were important.

Making a song of complaint is an attempt to effect change in the world beyond the individual as well as being a personal plea, an appeal to others to try, at least, to empathize, to sympathize with the speaker’s plight; a reaction-seeking exposure of the community’s flawed standards, its lack of equally humane treatment of men and women; a way to show how others’ behaviour impacts upon the individual’s sense of herself. The songs voice truths about specific factual circumstances, about general mores and community conduct of which the majority might prefer to remain non-cognisant or to ignore or repress as knowledge. Songs are created for others to hear and a sung form is often chosen when the singer cannot express herself in alternative ways, when what she wants to convey would not be tolerated, by possibly herself, as well as by others, if more directly articulated.25 Granting that verses and sections of tâmailtean and other kinds of songs (like many laments which are also protests against circumstances and the treatment of the deceased or the bereaved), conscripted in the process of building song mosaics for use at waulkings, may be repeated partly because of the attraction of the tune or aural quality of the words without too much attention being paid to the sense of the words, one cannot, however, deny that their very survival is partly a reflector of continued negative ideas of womanhood and of abusive treatment of women in the culture. Some of this material is quite stock, but even set images and lines had to be
selected for some reason by the composer, and, thereafter, by those who have repeated the song.

Many later singers would still know stories connected with certain texts, maybe because they were linked to local characters and places or ascribed to former members of the community. Women would learn and repeat songs created by others to vent their own inner turmoil and thoughts; to express their sympathy and understanding for the composer and others whose experiences resembled hers; to warn others of the potential perfidy of men and of other women’s harsh judgements; or to rebuke those who would take the equivalent role of the composer’s original addressees. It would be easy to employ the coding strategy of impersonation in performing such songs, using another’s words to sing for oneself, at the same time achieving a form for indirect accusation or criticism. When a támait was incorporated into a waulking performance the intrinsic element of distraction could be exploited by the performers. Singing a támait, if not an act of articulating personal experience, could still be an attempt to influence the actions and opinions of others, to encourage or instigate solidarity amongst women, represented by the banal, or waulking team, any one of whom might in the future or the past have found herself or someone close to her in a similar position to that of the original composer.

*Singing and weeping at a death*

The focus shifts in this section onto a general discussion of vocal performances connected with a death, before being relocated onto Gaelic culture later in this chapter. A particular form of singing which is generally accompanied by weeping and is performed after a death, at obsequies, at commemorative events, or in personal remembering, or all of these, has been found as such a pervasive, cross-cultural activity that it is sometimes described as if it were universal behaviour and it continues, of course, in many cultures (see, for example, Alexiou 1974; Badwe Ajuwon 1981; Bourke 1988a, 1988b, 1993; Brakeley 1950; Caraveli 1982 and 1985; Chaves 1980; Danforth 1982; Dömötör 1988;
Herzfeld 1981; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Honko 1974; Lysaght 1978, 1997a; Nenola-Kallio 1982; Ó Súilleabháin 1967: 130-45; Partridge 1980, 1983; Seremetakis 1991; Sherzer 1987a and 1987b; Urban 1988). Such vocalization, however, takes many forms, and ‘lament’, as a noun or a verb, is not a term that can be applied cross-culturally without qualification and specific definition according to local traditions. Used too generally, ‘lament’ and ‘lamenting’ can obscure differences between, for example, ululation (that seems spontaneous and disordered to outsiders’ ears, but might be performed according to established patterns), and wailing with vocables, or between a song, where wailing and crying noises are important, and highly stylized, formal elegy; in disparate cultures, at different periods, sometimes within particular social groupings, ‘lament’, especially when the activity occurs along with, or includes, crying and wailing, can denote an extensive range of behaviours or forms carrying local values and meanings, from an elaborate structured verse form practised by specialists, to ‘tuneful weeping’, to violent wailing.

The distinction between different vocalizations is vital, but more important also is their common separation from, and contrast with, normal speech, singing and crying in other circumstances, and their common connections with death. In many cultures there are other, perhaps specific, kinds of noise-making to accompany lamenting, whether with instruments or speech or because of special activities, where din-creation is used to scare-off lurking spirits and create the requisite atmosphere.

Noise or silence, individually or in alternation, provide, like white and black, shaven and hairy, opportunities for symbolic representation and heightened drama . . . . Noise is sometimes seen to facilitate communication between humans and the supernatural . . . . In the din of the modern world, we may forget how extraordinary and rare truly loud noise was to most of the previous generations on the earth. It continues to connote power . . . , but it has lost its sacred character.

(Huntington and Metcalf 1995: 67)

The hushed restraint and watchful reserve that most modern westerners ideally observe in the presence of death contrast dramatically with the expected, ‘normal’ reactions and
mortuary customs which were historically conventional in their same cultures or are still found in many others.

Cross-temporally and trans-culturally, lamenting and weeping conventions tend to share some general formal and functional features, including their frequent creation and performance by women rather than by men or both genders. Focusing on dirges rather than more formal genres like elegy, Honko comments, ‘Death dirges are the most widespread and almost universal genre of lament poetry, the weepers are in most cases women’ (1974: 11). Some of Urban’s conclusions from his studies of ritual wailing in Amerindian Brazil (1988) are worthwhile mentioning here for they apply generally to crying and are relevant to questions about social order and action and the operation of cultural discourses on emotions in these, especially as certain expressive actions, or ‘icons of crying’ as Urban terms them,\(^{30}\) are cross-cultural features of formalized weeping and also occur in ‘ordinary’ crying. Urban proposes from comparative evidence ‘that in cultures where men wail, women also wail, but not vice versa’ (1988: 395). Many cultures have expressly permitted only women to lament and weep ritually (and occasionally it is only the most deeply bereaved who are appropriate lamenters) (e.g. Badwe Ajuwon 1981: 274-5). It would similarly be most unusual to find a culture where spontaneous, loss-expressing tears in other contexts are acceptable or expected behaviour for men but not for women, and where men can compose and sing verse elegies and laments, it is still likely that ceremonial wailing is solely or mainly the responsibility of women.

This relates to the ‘task-allocation’ of emotional labour in customary keening in the past, and to the ways people act at Lewis wakes and other gatherings. The Scottish evidence identifies lament singing and keening as a female duty. Although in Ireland men occasionally filled this role, the division of activities was generally the same there and the entry on ‘mourning’ (Métraux 1950: 754) in The Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (Leach 1950) refers to the ‘Irish wake in which the women wail in the parlor while the men drink in the kitchen’. Brody, who
succinctly describes keening as prolonged and intoned weeping, writes that in the west of Ireland as in Gaelic Scotland, ‘keening was the special duty of older women and they would maintain a more or less continuous wailing through the first night after the death and then during the funeral procession’ (1973: 83). The lament, when part of a vernacular poetic tradition, possesses conventions associated with characteristics of women’s verbal creativity in other genres, and valuable studies of lament set it in the context of a multi-generic tradition.

Ethnographers have proposed individual interpretations of the possible meanings of public weeping and singing for the dead in various cultures. Principally and generally, traditional lamenting and tuneful wailing are described as the expression of immediate and spontaneous grief, that can both intensify or assuage emotions in the singers and others; one of their principal functions is to praise the dead, partly to honour, partly to appease and pacify the soul, especially in case it should interfere with the quick; they display proper grief to others on the part of the mourners, evidence that the bereaved is, respectfully and appropriately, experiencing the event according to cultural expectations of conduct and ideas about emotion; and when they are part of mortuary custom on a religious level in particular, with the lamenter as psychopomp, the funerary ceremonies would be incomplete without singing and wailing. Interpreters have analyzed these performances or activities in the context of other death rituals and other occasions involving similar behaviour. Inevitably, explanations have been grounded in the particular interpreter’s general conceptualizations of cultural processes and social phenomena. Ideas such as that of communitas (developed particularly by Turner, e.g. 1969: 46ff.) and of group interaction, or the religious functions of lamenting and weeping as part of transitional passage rites, are themes which have been concentrated upon. Radcliffe-Brown, for example, focusing on Andaman society, regarded ceremonial weeping (whether by more than one person and, therefore, reciprocal, or by one person crying for another who is passive) as functioning to affirm social connections, the continuity of bonds between people that persist despite the transformations effected by rites of passage (Huntington and Metcalf 1995: 45-6). Durkheim went further,
attempting to demonstrate that the unique function of ritual generally is a renewal and strengthening of communality and social bonds (ibid.: 49-51), and simultaneously to explain, then, the connections, between the joyful calendar festivities and the self-mutilation, violence, and destructive chaos of the funerary behaviour of the Australian Aborigines whose customs he documented. While he granted that the internal emotions of ritual participants cannot be straightforwardly deduced from observable behaviour, Durkheim claimed that without those same emotions, which most observers would probably assume were being experienced actually being present, the ritual would be socially ineffective. In the case of Aboriginal mourning, Durkheim explains that initial anger and sorrow are the feelings which intensify with one’s participation in the ritual, although this in itself does not lead to emotional solidarity and social affirmation:

What Durkheim finds important to his sociological theory, however, is the way that other members of society feel moral pressure to put their behavior in harmony with the feelings of the truly bereaved. Those who feel no direct sorrow themselves will nonetheless weep and inflict suffering and inconvenience upon themselves. Can this be other than a positive affirmation of their commitment, not only to their suffering neighbors, but also to an abstract value of neighborliness, of society?

One need not join Durkheim in answering in the affirmative. (Huntington and Metcalf 1995: 51)

Durkheim’s analysis suggests how social bonds and the adherence to community norms are important motivations for people to engage in these behaviours apart from any emotion they ‘feel’, a view worthwhile considering even if one might not entirely agree with his conclusions. There is no theory offered here for why islanders have wept, wailed, sung, composed laments, and played bagpipes at deaths and obsequies, and I merely cite Radcliffe-Brown’s and Durkheim’s propositions as ones that various scholars still use as interpretative starting points for discussion of ritual activities and meanings, and they do have validity as the basis for understanding some aspects of lamenting as a communal event, although I do not explore that dimension here.

Apart from sadness, laments function to express anger more than any other sort of feeling. Indeed, it can be bitterness and rage that are conveyed most forcefully and
explicitly. Confused anger is an inevitable response in bereavement as the survivor struggles with the question of ‘Why?’ and may upbraid the deceased for deserting her and the community. But, at the same time, along with the release of so much excessive emotion, other angers are expressed. Studies of women’s lament show how composers and performers use this verbal art form to articulate grievances about their social situation; to level accusations; and to deliver criticism of the dead, the community and family. This is tolerated in an atmosphere of transition and suspension from normal rules of social relations and conduct.

Lamenting in public and formalized weeping ruptures the private/public dichotomy model of female and male roles, even in cultures where this binary model might be applicable to many major aspects of social life. The personal, emotional, individual, the empathic, the uncontrolled, and apparently relatively unsocialized, comes to the fore; the public, male-dominated world of outwardly orderly formal religion and tradition-sanctified ceremony either spectates or comes up against (at least for a while) this intense external display of the normally internal and minimally expressed. Female performers take centre stage in a traditional context in a mixed sex gathering, inverting normal rules for gender roles. The lamenter and other close mourners, and sometimes professional keeners, either in a principal lamenting role or as part of a responsive group ‘sharing the bill’ with the lamenter, exhibit unusual behaviours that might typify bereavement reactions or be more notably characteristic of dirge and lament singers in particular. Examples of this are violent or rhythmic movement, the loosening and tearing of hair, the undoing of garments or assumption of clothing not normally worn, abstention from washing, partial or total fasting, and self-deprivation of sleep, extreme behaviours which suggest a lapse from sanity on the part of the keener. Surviving descriptions of keening in Scotland and Ireland indicate that the women involved and some of the others who were present acted in some of these excessive manners.

In a Scottish Gaelic context, there are both formal and less definite distinctions among the different vocal behaviours or performances that occurred in connection with and
response to a death. Commentators, both native and outsider, are not always clear in their meanings, using the same terms for different phenomena. Inevitably, observers with little or no Gaelic were often unable to distinguish wordless wailing from articulated vocables with no clear, apparent semantic sense but which might have been conventionally recognized as expressive of certain emotions and states of mind, and actual speech and song. There was the general weeping and wailing of mourners that could be unprompted, spontaneous, even involuntary, and in which many, and perhaps even everyone, would be expected to join; the more ‘premeditated’ lamenting involving some element of verbal creativity, whether by a recognized, perhaps hired, local talent, or a close mourner more or less extemporaneously exercising the requisite skills, usually including some input from others; and full song laments and elegies perhaps composed some time after the burial, which would be performed at other times, entering oral circulation, and maybe surviving to be recorded. Here are two separate areas of interest within this study: lamenting and keening either by a professional or a genuine mourner as performance, a practice described in accounts that usually include no or little actual poetic content; and the textual lament material that has survived in various contexts, fragmentarily or in versions that have evolved through oral transmission, to end up preserved in manuscript and audio records. An examination of either form of evidence can be valuably laid adjacent to and combined with investigation of the other in complementary ways.

Turning to the vocabulary of singing for the dead,37 first of all, cumha38 has covered various kinds of behaviour or creation, meaning ‘mourning, lamentation, sorrow; elegy, poem in praise of the dead, eulogy; epic poem; dirge; doleful voice’ (Dwelly). Caoidh39 has also meant ‘lament’, as a noun or verb, but today refers primarily to mourning, and caoin40 a variant verb for ‘mourn’, is evidently the probable provenance of the English word ‘keen’; both can denote wailing, weeping and moaning, and there is the noun caoineadh,41 ‘crying, lamentation wailing howling’. It is difficult to characterize what all these different forms of articulation actually referred to and keening was clearly not simply ‘meaningless’ wailing.42 Marbhreann43 is generally used with reference to more
formal creation, for elegy or funeral song, without reference to weeping or wailing and frequently appears in the titles given to threnodic poems. Tuireadh can mean the act of ‘mourning, deploring, bewailing; weeping; lamentation, lament for the dead, wail, dirge, elegy; melancholy narrative; death-song’ (Dwelly), and also ‘mourning’ in contemporary Gaelic. Carmichael writes that bean tuiream denoted ‘a professional weeper’ (1900b: 292). Caointeach, ‘a mourner’, was a name also given, along with caoineag and caointeag, to a legendary supernatural keener who foretells of death and has close affinities, sometimes identity, with the banshee.

The term corranach refers to the keening performed at the funeral or wake. The verb igh, which usually means ‘shout, call out’, is very common in everyday usage and need not carry any suggestions of the subject’s emotional state, but this and related words, have had in the past associations with death. Dwelly gives the noun igh, ‘cry’, the additional definition of an aural death omen, and this might relate to the belief in the banshee or other harbingers of death who announced themselves with wailing and sounds like keening, and of a ‘long continued swelling cry, as of women when hearing of some disastrous catastrophe’. Macintosh discusses the semantic possibilities of the noun iorram, which usually denotes a rowing song, or another used for rhythmic labour, by pointing to its use in iorram na truaighe, as a dirge or for keening (1947: 25). It may seem initially odd that there should have been analogy or parallel drawn between verse constructed to relieve the boredom and regulate the rhythm of repetitive, tedious work (the usual idea of the iorram), and a song of grief, except perhaps in so far that intense weeping and the physical experience can include, for example, rocking to and fro, but the etymological explanation lies in the actual internal form of the verse type.

**Laments and elegies**

I have used the words lament and lamenting for an activity and product, but have so far merely mentioned the elegy; the distinction between these terms requires explanation,
partly because, in its later stages, the waulking tradition and the whole of Gaelic folk song, actually preserved many elements of elegiac composition as well as lament ones, as far as these had previously been somewhat (but not entirely) distinct. Although this may seem anomalous, it reflects and relates to what can only be described as a decline in stylistic, thematic, generic and contextual heterogeneity and variety within Gaelic poetic tradition that resulted in heavier reliance on formulaic diction, stereotypes and set patterns, or led to the creation of new modes and conventions. Elegy and lament, where they coexist as forms with different contexts, are normally describable (although not, of course, exclusively) as male and female-produced forms, respectively, for a number of reasons, some qualitative, some formal and structural, others performance-based. The elegy, in written and oral literatures, generally refers to a more highly structured genre, a literary form, associated often with a particular metre, regulated by compositional rules which may require a certain level of training and specialization, and performed in an official context by a solo reciter or singer, perhaps some time after the death and burial, or during the actual obsequies. It is a panegyric obituary eulogizing the deceased, emphasizing their social status and worldly trappings, which even someone with only a distant association with the subject could produce with the requisite information and skills, through recourse to stereotypical imagery; it can be an officially commissioned statement of group loss and is frequently not the work of a main mourner (although there are exceptions). The official or otherwise appointed threnodist would be duty-bound to create within the strictures of a classically shaped diction, exhibiting mastery of panegyric rhetoric and one of the elegist’s foremost concerns is that the work produced be aesthetically satisfying.

If a society restricts or denies women access to literary training, other kinds of education, and to formal poetic offices, the elegy inevitably is ‘man’s work’; official memorializing for the group is not left in female hands and may require historical, genealogical, and political knowledge most women would not have. Obviously, in many cultures, as in the classical literary Gaelic one, the elegy was a genre of the upper social echelons and, if originally from a non-literate tradition, will probably enter written form before lament
texts, so one would expect that single examples have greater chances of textual stability, even if they come to survive as primarily oral phenomena. The elegy is, in many traditions, a conservative form, honed through cumulative achievements in terms of techniques and literary knowledge, a genre usually serving to laud the status quo as it was when the subject died. The generally high social position of its subject and the relatively elevated status or formal role of its maker, made it a potential tool of reaction, sanctified by tradition. It is an act of homage by a professional, poetic office. While the elegist sometimes depicts himself or herself in a fictive filial or uxorial relation to the subject, the lamentor usually fills the role of lover, mother, sister, foster-mother or nurse.

Laments and lamenting are more spontaneous and improvisational, created and performed closer to the event, which is frequently a violent, tragic, sudden or premature death (as far as many surviving laments are concerned, and perhaps partly why they endured). Very often composition was by one of the most profoundly bereaved, especially mothers, lovers and sisters, emphatically expressing her personal loss, although lamenting by ‘professionals’ was also common, of course. Lamenting, keening, and group weeping with some performance element, are more likely to accompany actual obsequial rites, need no formal training as such, and were often undertaken over the body; the lament can be solo, and repeated alone, but often involves others and may as an extempore composition have been created by several women taking turns to add their praise of the dead and articulation of the loss, and others who act as a chorus. One imagines that many were very loosely structured songs that with remembrance and repetition might become more tightly structured (but perhaps less affectively powerful). Through this genre the female performer finds a voice. In the performance of laments there were frequently violent emotional displays, weeping, wailing, by the main lamentor and others; the elegy could be successfully delivered with restraint and control. Cultural discourses of emotion, based on and providing the partial basis for gender ideas, provide further foundation for the characterization of these forms. The lament is more personal, idiosyncratic, deals with the singer’s feelings as much if not more than those of
others and describes the deceased; its concentration on the positive qualities of the deceased relentlessly reminds survivors of their loss; it often exaggerates the departed’s virtues, and, thus, adds to the grief; it is an expression rather than an elegiac description of loss and sorrow; it is a highly charged form disrupting usual norms of emotional continence, reticence and of order, and hence it belongs to the ‘feminine’, the unruly; the words performed are more ephemeral and may be less audible amidst the other activity of a funeral and less premeditated than the elegiac memoriam.

Part of the particular intimacy with the dead a lament can evoke arises from women having a greater involvement in caring for others’ bodies, alive or dead; as illustrated by examples in the next chapter, in many laments the corpse, and perhaps the composer in physical contact with it, can be depicted quite graphically; elegies tend to portray the dead as if ‘lying in state’, given a dignity that may belie the actual condition of the corpse. Lament reveals and exemplifies the expressive resources available within the general tradition, shaped by and through the operation of cultural discourses of gender identity; lamenting was an obsequial role assigned to women that declined, just as their direct contact with the dead declines later on. It exemplified the emotional labour expected of women based on notions of essential femaleness while exposing the historicity of these by sharply contradicting other constructions of femininity. The practice and the material of lamenting sharpen the contrast for us between women’s past ritual and formal direct involvement in death, their cultural management of the event, and more modern discourses that have disallowed active female participation in formal aspects of worship.

Although Ross discusses the elegy first and separately in his classification, he returns to it under the category of lament (1957: 116-18), partly because the idea of the lament can be more inclusive and elegies often owe their survival to being adapted as more ‘lament-like’ within the waulking tradition. The elegy per se is a more circumscribed, metrically determined type, originally composed in eight or four line stanzas, usually without any refrain, according to a long-established pattern for this kind of panegyric used in
medieval and early modern Irish memorial poetry. Those collected from oral tradition, by the School of Scottish Studies and others, are not remnants of bardic literature, but are all in the eight line stressed stanza form used after the collapse of the bardic tradition, and ‘they show clearly that the elegy, although a poetic type of considerable antiquity survived as a living genre until very recent times’ (116). Apart from in the refrains, most extant laments, however, use one of two metres, the first a syllabic metre, where the ‘stanza consists of an irregular number of lines related by final assonance only’ (117), the other based on the rhymed couplet, usually sung with an external refrain, but sometimes disrupted by refrains between the couplet lines. Similarly, the first form, when sung, has its stanzas broken up in various ways by interruptive refrains and repetitions of lines, an example of how in Gaelic ‘we must speak in terms of poetic metre and song metre. These do not necessarily coincide’ (117, Ross’ italics). It should be unnecessary to point out that, although the genre appears under the heading ‘panegyric’, praise of the dead is not, of course, the only or always the most salient purpose of lament, which often concerns itself with the composer’s emotional expression. Ross observes that nearly all surviving laments are women’s compositions, sustained in the luadh milieu and forms, but no songs of these lament types appear to originate from after circa 1800. Gradually, it seems, even the most profoundly bereaved came to use more typically elegiac structure and conventions for expression, as well as description, of their sorrow, as there was a steady decrease in the amount of compositions related to death and memorializing which could survive into the present.

The supercession of formal structural characteristics of the elegy over those of the lament,58 was part of a development whereby the ‘folk’ tradition increasingly absorbed the techniques of the formal ‘literary’ styles and modes of composition, as the cultural institutions and social structures that had underlain this division radically altered, many literary features surviving largely through a ‘downwards’ filtering into the vernacular. Particular characteristics of lament would have started to disappear with the weakening of the performance tradition in the face of opposition to keening at funerals and wakes. The consequence of this was a verse literature of mourning that is less direct,
impassioned and powerful, although what did survive is undeniably valuable and preserves examples and suggestions of what was generated before the decline set in. Moreover, it is the activities of keening and of singing laments in other contexts by women, and their reasons for those performances, regardless of the material’s generic provenance, that are particularly important.

An element of improvisation in composition with recourse to a body of stereotypic figurative or rhetorical conventions features in many lament traditions. The keener directly addresses the dead, calling him or her by name, and may appeal to them to return, chiding them for desertion of the living, ‘check’ that they really are dead, and demand a reason for their going; this use of the first to second person form intensifies the sense of intimacy and connection between the singer and deceased, and there is often in the content no recognition of other parties being present, apart from the implicit assumption of some hearer that accompanies any vocal articulation. The singer may alternate between referring to the dead in the second and the third person, a typical lament convention in other languages, too. It is important not to see lament as purely sentimental or self-indulgent, to remember that in the context of older belief systems it had functioned ritually, helping to effect the passage of the dead, the lamenter assuming the role of psychopomp and being also engaged in ceremonially displaying, reinforcing, and contributing to, the redefinition of the solidarity of the living, intensifying the liminal status of the singer-mourner, and closing the threshold between life and death.

**Conclusion**

As a tradition defined by its association with one gender, keening was a marked arena wherein particular facets of femininity were prominent and implied. The enactment and observation of these would reinforce discursively grounded notions about gendered identity, making contributions to the perpetual process within the culture of maintaining ideal and normative constructions of the genders and gender binarism. However, some aspects of this women’s tradition undermines the legitimacy of claims made in other
contexts about feminine identity, exposing the temporality and specificity of such ideas which have been and are presented as putative essential facts grounded in a reality of being female. The emotional vigour and clear expression of anger, bitterness, the desire for revenge, and an eagerness to deal unflinchingly with physical realities, that are present in much of this poetry credit the composers or performers with an emotional and psychological constitution very different to other profiles constructed through cultural discourses as typical of women, as, for example, in the recent reasoning that it is partly because of an innate emotional frailty, softness and gentleness, that women have in some areas, like Lewis and Harris, been excluded from burials.

As far as the individual would be concerned, her participation in ritualized weeping and in singing, during mortuary gatherings and in personal response to grief, must be seen as part of her personal perpetual construction of an identity, her negotiation with and within various discourses about women. This is, therefore, an area in which to observe gender as a performed identity and as performatively constructed. Dissensions from and subversions of ideal gender constructions are evidenced in the ways coding strategies were used by lamenters. Historical contradictions of prevailing norms taken to be natural, immutable, unambivalent, and self-justifying, expose the constructedness and vulnerability of gender ideals, reveal that gendered identity is acted out and dependent on individuals and their culture knowing and agreeing to adhere to (but also being able to challenge and subvert) particular scripts, methods, rules of conduct and systems of signification.

1 I use ‘lamenting’ to refer to a performance generally and to imply the singing of words, and ‘keening’ when laying more emphasis on the element of weeping and wailing in a performance which do not necessarily involve words or vocables.
2 The term Ross uses, as well as ‘sub-literary tradition’ a phrase that today most would be reluctant or refuse to employ.
3 This was at a time when the Aarne-Thompson index was already being systematically applied to tales in many countries and Anglo-Scottish ballad collectors could work with the Child catalogue in mind. There were then around 2,000 items in the School’s audio archive. In the article (Ross 1957) in which he explicated his catalogue, Ross presents his cross referencing and documentation of recorded texts, not for the purposes of exhaustive documentation but to expose the recurrence of a type over time and space. See Thomson 1954.
For further exemplification of the broad tradition, one can refer to Ross’ article (1961) on the repertoire of the late Nan MacKinnon of Vatersay, whose repertoire of over 450 songs, recorded entirely from memory, reflects the variety and range of genres and topics that were available to Gaelic singers. Nan MacKinnon, who had learnt almost all of her songs from her Mingulay-raised mother, had probably the largest Gaelic song corpus recorded from a single individual, and was unique at a time when much of that song culture was disappearing or already lost.

Some of the examples he uses in the article in expositing his system seem to be appointed almost arbitrarily, the application of his criteria depending on degrees and a subjective assessment element that weakens the usefulness of the classification.

One has to qualify the use of ‘ballad’ for Gaelic song. Unlike the Anglo-Scottish tradition, Gaelic narrative songs are not impersonal accounts, but are often in the first person by someone who is profoundly and closely affected by the events. It is also a matter of degree and subjective evaluation as to how much narrative a song needs to qualify. The category is a much more fuzzy one than when referring to Anglo-Scottish ballads.

E.g. a few ballads were used to accompany waulking. ‘A’ Bhean Eudach’ (‘The Jealous Woman’) is known by several titles and is one of the most widely recorded of Gaelic narrative songs, used as a lullaby and an ēran luaidh. Tradition attributes it to a revenant mother murdered by her own sister, or sometimes another female, who takes her place in the household; the ghost sings this to her children and thus alerts the living to what happened. Or, the usurper is unable to cope with her guilt and is overheard repeating her victim’s words of pleading and lamentation that comprise the lyrics. Often the details of the song and story traditions are localized, e.g. a South Uist legend connects it with at Iochdair, another text ‘Nighean Dhómhnaili Riabhach’ (‘Grey Donald’s Daughter’) (Creighton and MacLeod 1964: 158-60) is connected in oral tradition with a rock in Skye, and the Tolmie Collection has two Skye versions entitled ‘Bean Mhic a’ Mhaoir’ (‘Wife of the Son of the Maor/Bailiff’) (Tolmie 1911: 205-7). The School has multi-verse examples and portions of not more than one stanza (e.g. Kate Nicolson’s (South Uist) rendition with eleven verses of four-line stanzas, SA 1965/81/A2). It is often compared to ‘Binnorie’ or ‘The Tw Sisters’ and international correlates of this, however, besides the theme of sorricide and of the dead exposing the crime, a widespread motif, connections with the Gaelic song are not yet soundly established or ascertained. ‘Am Bròn Binn’ (‘The Sweet Sorrow’) is an Arthurian narrative poem which was used as a waulking song. There are various manuscript and other versions recorded from oral tradition (Campbell and Collinson 1977: text XLI, 18-27, with notes, 189-193).

Ross insists such songs require the associated narrative to be meaningful to singers and listeners. As an example, Ross says of ‘S ole an obair do theachdairnean cadail’, ‘It is clear that such a text needs the support of a story which relates the circumstances under which it was composed’ (1957: 135.). The title translates ‘Evil is the work for messengers of sleep’, and the song is also known by its refrain, ‘Hu ru aig tóiseach na tráchad’ (‘Hu ru, at the start of the ebb-tide’). This tradition tells of how a man on his way to fetch the midwife for his young wife lies down at a ford to wait for the tide to turn and falls asleep. He is roused by a fairy singing this song which relates how his wife has already died and is being laid out. (See, e.g., Tocher 1, 8 (1971-72): 244-45 (from SA 1954/31/A9) for a Barra version of the legend and song from Annie Johnston.) Ross does not explain why this lament need be classified here, while a lullaby-lament such as ‘Cha tig Mór mo bhean dhachaidh’ (‘Marion my wife will not come home’) is not mentioned as needing the background story to make it meaningful enough to be repeated and sustained, although its origin contributes to the song being interesting. Although their co-existence is undoubtedly mutually enriching, increasing one’s interest in either text, such songs
have the same chance as many others of surviving alone and the content of such songs sometimes need suggest nothing other worldly at all.

9 Táladh, -a'ídhe, -a'ídean (masc. n.), lullaby, cradle song; related to ideas of caressing and calming and soothing. Táladh, a' táladh (vb.), tame caress, hush.

10 There are exceptions to this, mainly male compositions that were ‘art’ imitations of the folk form.

11 A particular form of satirical verse irrelevant to this study.

12 According to Campbell and Collinson (1977), the last authentic, functional waulkings occurred in Lewis, at Shawbost on the west side of the island in 1952, in Skye at Kilmuir in 1945, in Harris c.1945, and in Barra probably before 1918. There are many published modern and mostly secondary descriptions of the technical and social aspects of the waulking process by, e.g., Bourke 1988a; Campbell and Collinson 1969: 1-37, and 3-16 especially, and they also give a useful list of published descriptions which at the time of their publishing would have been fairly comprehensive; and Burt 1815: 48; Carmichael 1941: 88-89; Garnett 1800: 158; Goodrich-Freer 1902b: 254-62; Gordon Cumming 1883: 273; Hendry 1983: 98-100; MacKellar 1887; Martin 1981: 57; Rea 1964: 31-33; Shaw 1986: 6-7; Tolmie 1911: 147-9; and Tocher 8, 50 (1995): 5-31 (using SA 1951/19/B4 and SA 1951/10/A7).

Waulking songs are still very popular today, often in adaptations by popular artists with instrumental accompaniment, but aside from this modern survival, which seems to be essential if interest is to be stimulated in the form, they are also performed at simulated waulkings at festivals and other events. There are some audio and film recordings of genuine (that is, functional) waulkings but even these were obviously very late, near to the demise of the practice.


14 Hardly any flytings have endured in the drain luidh tradition, but surviving examples are full, strong texts. See Campbell and Collinson 1977: text LXVII, 112-121, 226-32; text LXVIII, 124-29, 232-237.

15 ‘Looking at the extant body of texts, one gets the impression that this is a kaleidoscope of poetic images out of which certain more permanent forms are from time to time created... [Some songs] and even short sections in songs of highly irregular pattern, can possess an astonishing power to recreate a situation or a mood: they function as organic poems, not as mere random collocations of images.’ (MacInnes 1971: 60-61)

16 Distinct parallels can be drawn with Greek folk-song. Caraveli shows how important it is to treat such songs in a way that contextualizes them as far as possible as events which take their meanings and meaningfulness from being performances. In the tradition she studies longer narrative songs were easily accessible and comprehensible. ‘There is, however, a considerable corpus of folk-songs and a range of performance styles in most local repertories that appear to lack any of these devices for “making sense” common to other more familiar types of poetry: beginnings, middles or endings, smooth transitions from theme to theme, even minimal plot, etc. It is performance, rather than song type, which renders this body of folk poetry incomprehensible by western aesthetics. Whereas written collections of folksongs present us with apparently complete versions of songs, performance often yields songs which appear fragmentary.’ (Caraveli 1982: 129)

17 ‘[B]y singing about their problems which they encounter in the family, the women define and redefine their position in the family. As a licensed mechanism which is available within the private domain of the women, the women illustrate that they can influence men’s behavior and the behavior of other relations.’ (Mvula 1986: 272)
female sphere meant they were an important forum wherein both what was shared by, as well as the differences between, women could be played out in relief, where members of the banal (the group of women at a waulking) would extract different messages from songs depending on age, life experiences and individual world-view in addition to what might be shared by the women as separate from male aesthetics and knowledge.

18 One can only speculate on the origin of their choral form which has clear affinities with other group genres such as carole-like dance ballads and warrior-welcoming songs, the performance of both of which had ceased long before órain luaidh became redundant (MacInnes 1971; 1978: 481ff.). ‘We can only say that they reflect the peculiar social circumstances of the era of the clan system before the social dichotomy of peasant and landlord was established in the mid-eighteenth century’ (Ross 1961: 22-23).

19 The ‘panegyric code’ is a term for the conventions which comprised the encomiastic rhetoric of bardic verse, particularly employed in eulogies and especially elegies for clan leaders, but also negatively in satires, by official clan poets. Component features of the code provide the themes and tone of much Gaelic poetry, especially before circa 1745, when its century and a half high age came to an end. MacInnes provides an excellent exposition of this codification of diction made up of sets of conventionalized images, including well illustrated discussion of how the rhetorical conventions of panegyric were, under adaptation for those forms, found in women’s verse. The topics he identifies as singular foci for elaboration by poets engaged in using this rhetoric are: the allies’, where enumeration of actual or fictive allegiances between clans also presents within the broad tradition an imagined Gaelic unity (1978: 448-9); interwoven with the first topos is the ‘address to the subject’ which is actually a complex invocation of the networks, by blood and ancestry and by marriage and alliance, to which the chief belongs, that can include the use of patronymics, and references to genealogical and patrimonial place-names (449-52); ‘social roles’ includes martial, political, legal, and hospitable ones, his mastery in activities like hunting, sailing, horseriding, his paternalism, education and cultivation (452-55); ‘the household’ pays attention to his wealth, generosity and social nature (456); and other important, separate topoi are his physical attractiveness (456-7), his obsequies (457), and a variety of kennings that refer to him, the family or the clan with images of, for example, trees and birds of prey (457-9). C.f. Watson 1919.

20 A slow increased visibility of órain luaidh outside natural performance contexts from the late eighteenth century, quantitatively manifest in their recognition as a creative commodity by commentators and later collectors, will have arisen from several causes - for example, there was increased outsider curiosity about the texts and music that were used in the remote and foreign Highlands and Islands described in published travelogues.

21 Furthermore, it is significant that it is with these that many singers, who had learnt waulking songs as part of a living (though very often by then terminally ailing) tradition, identified or entitled the songs: while collectors might use first or other lines of verses for a title, traditional singers recognized the assemblage of lyrics that constituted a particular, repeated óran luaidh by reference to its refrain of vocables or words or a combination of these elements.

22 Ó Madagain speculates about the possible status as protective charms or spells of vocalic refrains in Gaelic lullabies, and, by implication, other occupational genres. The functions and provenance of this poetic feature are still mysterious. ‘Some of the lullabies that have been preserved both in Scotland and Ireland had vocables only, to be repeated over and over’ (1989: 33), and had we examples of keenings composed of vocables only the theories about the earlier form taken by lamenting would be almost certainly borne out.
The term can be extended to generally other poetry of complaint (e.g. about dispossession of one’s land, or the pressing of one’s menfolk into military service), but Ross identifies the ‘genre’ particularly with songs by women about their relationships with men and their subsequent treatment by other women and men: ‘Since the most frequent source of a Támait is a seduction [sic - meaning rape?], subsequent pregnancy, and abandonment by the lover (sic), it has been placed in the inter-sexual grouping’ (1957: 109). Other themes of complaint found in song are the arranged or unhappy marriage, and the stealing of a lover by another woman.

Of course, many Gaelic songs celebrate pregnancy and seem to testify that bearing an illegitimate brought little shame if the father was of higher social status, and texts even offer praise verses on him according to eulogistic conventions (e.g. Campbell and Collinson 1969: text XXXIII, 140). Some even express a wish to be pregnant as proof of having intercourse with someone desirable but perhaps maritally ineligible to the women because of the man’s superior social position. A great deal could be said about this genre and its social implications but it is sufficient to say here that it should not be interpreted as evidence of there being no shame or censure ensuing from such a situation. Such songs are certainly often acts of ‘putting on a brave face’ in response to one’s treatment by others. Despite what we might try to draw from these texts and their contexts for positive inferences about the lives of island women generally - the implicit and explicit criticism of hypocrisy and communal connivance at the construction of truths and interpretations of these to serve the status quo, the contingency of this voice through songs, and the spirit of defiance - most Támaitean and many other songs with an ‘intersexual’ theme are to some degree disturbing, even when one tries to reconstruct as far as possible the cultural performance and productive contexts for them, or to consider the claims of those who assert that the context and the times mitigate any negative ideology and practice which these songs are testament to as perceived from the position of a researcher today.

Támaitean can be quite defiant in tone at points: for example, whether she really feels that way or not, the speaker will sometimes deny any sense of guilt or shame at her pregnancy and the conduct that led to it, or she attacks the moral character of her accusers. That any defiance and, indeed, any voice at all are possible here reflects the different layers, the ambivalences in the sexual mores of the community, the complicated relations and contradictions between sexual ideals and moral normatives and a possible reality of tolerated and illicit sexual behaviour. This was, of course, certainly not a society where rape and other serious abuses of women by men went unpunished or were ignored or accepted as normal; people recognized a wrong had been committed in some way or the singers would never have produced such songs and these would not have been repeated to survive into print, but clearly there was a system of dominant values, a hierarchy of opinions, that penalized the female victim and not the culprit, and which, in cases where there was no indication of abuse (other than perhaps that of desertion by a lover once pregnant) it delegitimized female sexuality as wrong, although that was apparently not a trait that influenced a great deal of earlier Gaelic women’s song.

However, in scarcely any of the European regions where lament singing and distinctive formalized weeping were still important items of local culture in the 1970s and 1980s can these practices be expected to outlast the twentieth century without radical changes, if at all. For instance, Nenola-Kallio, in about 1982, wrote that the tradition of wedding and death laments was then thriving but that the closely related Ingrian one was expected to die within a decade (1982: 245). In the second half of the twentieth century the European centre of lamenting has lain very much in the east, from the Balkans to the Baltic countries (e.g. see Honko 1974: 11-14; c.f. Moldován 1986: e.g. 17).
Percussive noise features cross culturally in many rituals of transition, in rites of passage, the inception of new calendrical phases, in the attainment of religious ecstatic states, or in alterations such as that of a shaman preparing for a spirit journey. Needham has expressed pessimism about finding explanations for this, although percussion has an affinity with the heartbeat and marks time (Huntington and Metcalf 1995: 66-67). Striking one’s hand together and beating the coffin seem to have been intrinsic to Gaelic lament performances.

These are the ‘cry break’ which involves the pulsing in the flow of breath that punctuates normal speech or singing; the voiced inhalation; the creaky voice; and the falsetto vowel (Urban 1988: 389-91)

A general summary of anthropological explanations for the practice of singing death songs states: ‘The purpose of the singing is essentially the same everywhere, though varying explanations are advanced and details of the observance differ. The custom is protective for the living and sometimes also a comfort to the dead. It is a propitiation to the spirits of the departed, who are believed hostile to and envious of the living. The soul, who lingers near his [sic] body, must be flattered and reminded of his ties of affection with the survivors, so that his newly acquired supernatural influence will be for their good and his malice warded off. Demons hovering over the place of death must be frightened off with loud noises, and the journey of the deceased into the world of spirits must be eased by a bridge or wings of song and by gifts, payments, food, and sometimes transportation for the trip. . . . Failure to honor the dead with song and all due evidence of mourning is believed to invite the anger of the spirit, who will take revenge by sending sickness (Basuto), by reappearing as a vampire (Slavic), or by refusing to rest in the grave and walking the earth to haunt the survivors.’ (Brakeley 1950)
32 ‘Phenomenological comparison between a shaman and a lamentor is made possible by the fact that both of them act as psychopomp guiding the soul from here to the Beyond’ (Honko 1974: 58, n. 137).
34 Reports from other parts of the continent tell the same story. People gouge their faces, slash their thighs, burn their breasts, and attack their friends. Much of this activity is so ferocious that it is not uncommon for mourning to add to the death toll. But the violence is not as random as it appears; on the contrary, it is meted out according to definite rules. Women, in particular, are enjoined to considerable displays of suffering. They are reported to be the most prominent victims of some of the physically aggressive melees; they lead in much of the howling and lamenting, and, to highlight this, they are prohibited normal speech during mourning. Sometimes whole villages of women are under sentence of speechlessness for long periods. The habit of communicating by signs develops and grows as mourning rites follow mourning rites, and it is not uncommon for some women to cease speaking altogether for the remainder of their lives. All in all, the rites are marked by extreme displays of anguish, anger, and aggression tinged with sexual implications, and destructive tendencies’ (Huntington and Metcalf 1995: 49).
35 See Rosaldo 1993b. Bourke entitled her essay (1993) on the coded layers of meaning in keening performances and elegies ‘More in Anger than in Sorrow: Irish Women’s Lament Poetry’. Anger, madness and despair, as components in the experience of a death and how these are dealt with in the cultural management of loss, have been touched on in Chapter 6 (c.f. Bourke 1988b).
36 Referring to work in the ethnography of speaking, Sherzer, in analyzing lament and tuneful weeping amongst other genres, illustrates further how this model can be non-valid: ‘The Mediterranean pattern [e.g.] has been used as evidence for the claim that women’s communicative sphere is always domestic or private and men’s is always political and public. A truly cross-cultural and ethnographically contextualized survey does not support this claim’ (1987b: 98).
37 This brief treatment of terms is a superficial one merely intended to bring some terms together for the reader.
38 Cumha, (pl.) cumhachan (masc. n.). This is also the name of a metre and occurs for songs that are not strictly dirges or laments, e.g., ‘Cumha an Eich-Uisge’ (‘The Lamentation of the Water Horse’), where the kelpie in his lullaby for his son asks his mortal wife who has deserted them to return (for one version see Tolmie 1911: 162-3).
39 Caoidh, (gen.) caoidhe (fem. n.); caoidh, a’ caoidh (vb.).
40 Caoin, a’ caoineadh (vb.). Caoin could also be used simply for a ‘tune’ or an ‘air of a song’, in, at least, Barra (MacDonald 1966: 42).
41 Caoineadh, caoinidh (masc. n.).
42 ‘The keen is a more articulate expression of grief than the death wail, the ullagone (Irish uileacán) which consists of high-pitched exclamations of woe and moaning sounds’ (Leach 1950, vol. 2: 573).
43 Marbhrainn, (pl.) marbhrainn (masc. n.), derived from marbh, -airbh (masc. n.), ‘dead body’ and rann, -ainn, -an/ranntaichean (fem. n.), ‘verse, stanza, song poem’.
44 Tuireadh, (gen.) tuiridh, (pl.) tuireadhan/tuibreannan (masc. n.). Tuiream (masc. n.), ‘mourning for the dead’. Tuir, a’ tuireadh/a ’tursadh a’ tuireamh (vb.), ‘chant with a mournful cadence’, mourn, lament, weep; rehearse, relate’ (Dwelly 1988 s.v. tuir). Tuirse, sadness,
melancholy, mourning, dirge, elegy (fem. n. indeclinable) (used poetically also). Dean tuireadh, ‘make lament’.

45 If one goes by Thomson’s lexicon (1986 [1981]) and observation of current usage, cunna, caoidh and tuireadh, in that order, mean ‘a lament’, while caoidh and dèan tuireadh are the verbs given; marbhram and then tuireadh mean ‘elegy’, while caoidh and caoin are given for ‘mourn’, bròin, caoidh and tuireadh for the noun ‘mourning’; and, as examples of related ideas, ‘weep’ is guil, caoin or dèan gal or dèan caoineadh, the last being Thomson’s recommendation for ‘wail’.

46 While caoineadh was still being used in Ireland for ‘keening’ and professional mourning, that practice, had, according to the evidence used by Carmichael, been referred to in Scotland as simply gul or gal, the Gaelic for sobbing (1900b: 292, or 1928: 309; 1954: 339), but the terminology varied over time and area. As well as tuiream (‘mourning’), he refers to the term sèis or sèisig or sèisig-bhàis, ‘a dirge’, the distinction being that the sèis was the mourning in the house after the death while tuiream denoted lamentation in the open at the grave (1954: 339).

47 Caointeach, caointich (masc. n.), a mourner; but as a feminine noun it means ‘female fairy or water-kelpie, whose particular province was to warn the members of her favourite clans of the approach of death, by weeping and wailing opposite the kitchen door’ (Dwelly 1988 s.v.). The variations of this term include caoineach and caointeach, ‘Náid who foretells the death of, and weeps for those slain in battle’ (Dwelly s.v.). See, e.g., Maclagan 1914 for oral traditions about supernatural keeners. For an extensive study of banshee manifestations throughout Ireland, including some comparative reference to Scottish tradition, see Lysaght 1986 (see Lysaght 1978: 62-3 and 65-6 for English quoted descriptions of the banshee in an Irish language article).

Bean-sith is literally ‘fairy woman’, instancing the identification of the fairies with the world of the dead. In the islands, this supernatural role was often assumed by an entity in the form of the ‘washer woman’, or bean nighe, seen and/or heard as she washed the shirts of those who were going to die.

48 Corranach, (gen.) corranach (fem. n.), ‘Crying, loud weeping, the funeral cry of the Gael, mournful ejaculation, singing at funerals. . . . The corranach of the Gael is a panegyric on the deceased, with a recital of the bravery or worth of his (sic) ancestors’ (Dwelly). The spelling coronach is a frequent alternative.

49 Present participle ag ëigheach; variant form ëibh, ag ëibheach.

50 Èigh, -e (gen.), -ealn-eachan (pl.), (fem. n.).

51 ‘The death-watch, a tingling noise in the ear, supposed to portend news of a death’ (Dwelly s.v. ëigh).

52 He quotes here from McAlpine’s dictionary (as does Macintosh 1947: 25) which primarily relates to the area around Islay.

53 Iorram, -aim (gen.), (masc. n.).

54 Literally ‘a rhythmic song of misery’.

55 In Classical literature, Greek and Roman, elegy referred to any poem written in elegiae metre (alternating hexameter and pentameter lines) and such poetry’s subjects and moods, often love, and it was only in the seventeenth century that the term began to be restricted to present usage: ‘a formal and sustained lament (and usually consolation) for the death of a particular person. . . . The dirge also expresses grief on the occasion of someone’s death, but differs from the elegy in that it is short, is less formal, and is usually represented as a text to be sung. . . . Threnody is now used mainly as an equivalent for “dirge,” and monody for an elegy or dirge which is
represented as the utterance of a single person’ (Abrams 1988: 47, s.v. ‘elegy’, italics in original).

56 Holst-Warhaft offers some interesting perspectives on the elegy in one of the many fine published studies of Greek lament. For instance: ‘In the literature of the western world the funeral elegy is, according to Celeste Schenck, “from its inception in the poetry of Theocritus and his followers, Bion and Moschus, a resolutely patriarchal genre” that “women poets... refuse to work or rework”. Schenck sees the elegy as being “modelled on archaic initiation rituals of a younger man by an elder”. By singing the praises of a forebear, the young poet displays his own proficiency in the genre and announces his succession to the master’s throne’ (1992: 125). She continues by discussing a Freudian interpretation of elegy that is based upon this view.

57 There was a convention of Gaelic elegy whereby the male poet might compose for his chief and patron in a voice like that of a bereaved wife (Simms 1989).

58 The well known ‘Chisholm’s Lament’ (or ‘Mo rùn géal òg’) was composed by the subject’s widow. The song is an elegy ‘in the completest sense of the word’ (Ross 1957: 116), according to established convention, being largely descriptive of the man who fell at Culloden in encomiastic tones, deploying formal articulations of grief, although it also manages to achieve an expressiveness that is more typical of the lament. This work reflects the contemporary trend of lament techniques falling into desuetude and being replaced by ‘the more elevated style of the elegy’ (117), ‘only one instance of the general decay of the specifically sub-literary tradition in song poetry, and the gradual disuse of its peculiar metrical forms’ (119).

59 The impressive studies of recent and contemporary Greek practice provide excellent examples of this.
CHAPTER 8
KEENING PERFORMANCES AND LAMENT THEMES

Introduction

Having outlined relevant aspects of the wider tradition of oral verse in Gaelic communities in the past, and having discussed the global phenomenon of ritualized singing and weeping at mortuary and mourning events, in the previous chapter, this one focuses more directly on Gaelic lamenting. Lamenting and waulking singing are compared as events, performance modes and poetic genres, and I highlight the potential intrinsic to each for ambiguous, polysemous communication by women, deliberately or not, using strategies of coding. Descriptions of Scottish lamenting and keening cited or quoted here date from the late seventeenth century onwards and are supplemented by Irish accounts of specific performances. Information derived from interviews in the School’s Archives was found by searching the catalogue for material on wakes, funerals, lamenting and keening women. Certain textual characteristics of Scottish Gaelic laments are discussed. This is done with examples which drawn from songs which are well established, with singers and as poems which have been widely accessible in published sources, because of their popularity and their representativeness in that they exhibit features which are considered typical of traditional lament. Poetry quotations in the main text are translations, with the Gaelic provided in the notes and taken from the published versions to which I refer. Versions of these published songs which are held in the School were also consulted. Aspects that are considered are the paganistic tone, the preoccupation with the physical realm, and the frequent apparent lack of concern for the spiritual found in many of these songs. After briefly reviewing some of the factors involved in the demise of this female creative tradition, the chapter closes with some comments about the performance and performative construction of gendered identity through acts of participation in this tradition grounded in prevailing cultural discourses of (and about) gender.
Lamenting and waulking - similarities and differences

The practice of lamenting, ‘crying with the voice’ and the delivery of the corronach and other death songs, at deaths, wakes and funerals, ceased as regular obsequial custom in many areas of the Gaidhealtachd in the late eighteenth century, and in almost all of even the most peripheral and conservative areas by the mid-nineteenth century. It lasted vestigially into the twentieth century in some of the Western Isles. The lament material in òrain luaidh can be in the form of more or less whole poems adapted for the purpose of the labour; or even (one must assume) lines assembled into verses simply as a creative exercise on a theme of grief or in response to some other crisis, never intended to be used around mortuary events, but using the form’s stereotypes and themes.

While Ireland does not share the òrain luaidh tradition, lamenting and keening survived for longer there. Descriptions of later Irish performances can be used to corroborate and expand upon what is known of the Scottish tradition which disappeared shortly before. Bourke (1988) bases a comparison of women’s poetry and song in the Irish Gaeltacht and Scottish Gaidhealtachd on laments from the former and waulking songs from the latter, indicating the analogous importance of these forms, categorically and in performance terms, within the respective cultures and as a record of female creativity in specific contexts. The affinities and parallels between òrain luaidh and lamenting are more significantly ostensive when they are delineated in terms of being performance modes rather than creative genres in a literary sense which might be principally compared in terms of theme and form. The content of each is often close (and sometimes identical) but still has to be treated differently because of the separate compositional and performance modes.

Both Irish and Scottish evidence shows that lamenting and keening, like the luadh, involved the interaction of a soloist, or a series of soloists, and a responsive chorus. The form of call and refrain, found in most group work-songs, contributes to structural similarities and the ease with which death songs could be adapted for other performance modes, for example, a lament which also survives discretely without a refrain could be
adopted for luadh with the development of a choral element. Both lamenting and waulking traditionally involved almost exclusively adult females who possessed the skill and experience of the form to participate in the responsive group or to assume the role of a leading singer. These practices relied on the transmission and sharing of formal expertise and of remembered texts and accounts of performances, for the survival of ‘texts’, and of the genre and performance tradition themselves.\(^2\)

These genres share their manifestation of, and a dependence on, emotional, physical and ritual labour; they were part of events which were necessary, female performances which were valued components of the totality of traditions in the community. The ritualistic, religious meanings of lamenting are quite obvious, but there were also ritual elements to òrain luaidh. The òrain basaidh,\(^3\) match-making songs and blessing of the cloth at the end of the waulking are all part of the event’s concerns with fertility, material security and comfort. The exclusion of men might be thought to have symbolic importance in connection with the emphasis on production besides the waulking’s status as having a particular place in the social life of the participant women: love magic and fertility charms tend to be feminine concerns.\(^4\) The choice of songs and the customs associated with waulkings indicate that human and community reproduction, which were, of course, intertwined and interdependent with the material production proceeding, were pertinent issues.

From its own (pre-)history, lamenting is clearly ritualistic, occurring at certain transitional junctures in the life course, a mode of performance associated with gatherings and actions taken between a death and during and after the interment. An act of communication across existential realms, the lament is religious, magical. Its praise of the dead, like other obsequial honours and mourning observances, placates the deceased, diminishing the risk of a revenant or of the dead harming survivors, while the lamenter also acts as a shaman-like mediator between worlds. This performance helps to clear the way for a later reinstatement of social harmony, impossible while the dead still has a presence in the mortal world which is potentially disruptive and must be guarded

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against; the lamenter leads the others into and through deep grief, enabling them to enter a state where emotions can be channelled so her work has a therapeutic and, in its eventual consequences, stabilizing effect.

Like transition rites, lamenting consolidates the effects of separation: although it might express contrary wishes, it does not deny, but rather confirms ostensibly (by the fact that the performance happens and in the content of the song) that the deceased is apart from the world of the living; it employs the past tense to describe the deceased’s relations with the living and the present tense in talking of the funerary customs being performed, in the descriptions of the dead, and in the address to the dead by the singer. Clerical, outsider and eventually local opposition to the tradition acknowledged the ritual, non-Christian religious dimensions of the tradition. By the time it was disappearing, however, the full meaningfulness of lamenting would only have been verbalized in a diluted, removed version of the custom, the belief system in which it existed gradually dimming as discernible in folklore, or rendered into innocuous habit or weakly suspected ‘superstition’, without the past relevance and potency of such ideas, and relegated to an alternative or subcultural status in relation to the dominant Christian orthodoxy.

Waulking labour had social as well as material results as an opportunity for increased bonding, the reaffirmation of relations of friendship, reciprocity and mutual dependence. The deliberate or the incidental and unconscious employment of coding strategies, in the leader’s choice of songs and of fragments to create new combinations, contributed to this. The sharing of songs which dealt with topics of concern for members of the banal and the audience of non-waulkers present (and, beyond that one performance, for women in the community) constituted an opportunity for the offering of emotional support and the communication of empathy between people; òrain luaidh preserved stories of women’s lives, including their grief, and aired experiences in the present that might have found no other legitimate outlet; a singer could claim a particular voice, of the ‘quoted’ or impersonated composer, an articulacy of feelings and ideas that might otherwise never be broached in company. A particular issue, of group or individual concern, which was
unacceptable for open discussion at a *luadh* (which generally appears, however serious were many of the songs that were sung, to have often been light-hearted and convivial), because the mood was not suited to it or it was regarded as ‘taboo’, could, perhaps be sung about. While not always reflecting or verbalizing real situations, songs often powerfully comment on or communicate about normative ideals within a culture. Song is a potential, effective tool of censure, criticism and resistance, of rebellion even, when outspoken words are not deemed fit or wise, a central issue for women’s self-expression in many cultural contexts (e.g. Sherzer 1987: 114). This might constitute merely a scant, weak challenge to general suppression, or little in the way of an actively engaged-in communicative space. The effects which ensued, however, from various women’s interpretations of coded levels of meaning in the *luadh* performance, and the consequences afterwards, when women continued to think about or remembered a particular subject, which may have only been obliquely referred to in a lyric, could have been substantially repercussive. Sympathy possibly implied in an act of singing could be significant, if the relations between different parties involved would suggest such, or there were other indicators of this inclination on the singer’s part that might not be conveyed in other interpersonal communications. The coded voicings of concerns and issues were both subtracted from and confirmed by the experience of the physical labour and the effort shared by the women.

*Luadh* singing and lamenting also exhibit some specific dissimilarities. The particular purpose and the mood of the generative groupings are obviously entirely different: especially after the task was completed, a waulking was normally a chance for convivial group congratulation, the productive process often closing with a larger social gathering, where younger people were teased about the opposite sex, an event where non-platonic inter-gender relations were focal topics of the songs sung and the conversation. Although laments and other songs of sadness and loss were integrated into waulking performances, and indeed often found their final refuge in the individual and group repertoires mobilized at these gatherings, the energy expended and the enjoyment experienced are strongly conveyed in accounts of waulkings.
In obvious, stark contrast, threnodic songs, created and performed before the phase in which mourners are gradually reintegrated into a 'normal' stable status, or before the deceased has conclusively passed through the incorporation phase, deal with endings, breaks and losses, the impossibility of marriage, rejuvenation, reproduction, with a situation where the cultural and human cannot override the facts of material decay. Gaelic laments speak of other 'deaths' experienced by survivors, their social half-deaths, especially that of the widow, and images of age and illness contrast with the main preoccupations of those performing songs and customs about love at a luadh. Unlike other particular points in the biological and social life course, death is a transition irreversibly severing bonds upon which the community depends, such as those very bonds mobilized and restated by group activities like waulkings; death dismantles ordinary barriers to the realm of the spiritual and intangible, whereas cultural routines around other life crises focus more on new social and material conditions in quite different ways; death songs are poems of confusion, attempts to cope with the uncertainty and ignorance regarding the metaphysical, the irreversible, and they realize that ontological theorizing is no succour at this particular crisis.

Structurally and formally, a luadh performance had to be more regulated on the practical level of meeting the demands of the activity, the need for regularity and for a creation in which the others could participate. In contrast to this, in a lament performance, even at the level of group involvement, the cataracts of grief, the unpredictability of individual expression, meant a less stable geometry, both within the solo parts and in terms of the relations between solo sung stanzas, lines and expressive weeping and non-verbal vocalized responses from the other weepers and lamenters. With repetition, a song could become more structured, although an accomplished keener, 'professional' or otherwise, might be able to extemporize an ordered, intelligible piece, observing conventions of the tradition learnt from performances by others and through practice.
Waulking participants shared a role, moving to rhythms dictated by the physical capacities of the workers and the stage of the process; leaders would have a special position based on skills, experience and perhaps seniority, eligibility depending on basic competence; the labour decided the performance duration; and the togetherness of the group was fostered by co-operative effort and job-satisfaction as well as sociability. Leading the keening was often the task of one or more hired mourners who were recognized locally as skilled and desirable wailers and singers, or itinerants could be hired for their talents, or it was done by the bereaved themselves. Eligibility for general participation in lamenting and keening was probably judged on criteria other than just talent, however, such as relational proximity to the deceased according to how relations were defined in the community. Shared emotions and understandings of the experience would arise in spontaneous reaction to the death or as generated in and through the performance, individual and group experience shaping and modulating the participants' vocalizations and physical behaviour - for example, in the regularity of movement, either in the individual or as spreading through the group, which was intimately connected with expression and not determined by any technical routine, with others perhaps answering and following the swaying, the rocking to and fro, the clapping and gesticulating of the leading lamenter.

Bourke's (1993) ground-breaking analysis demonstrates the operation of coding strategies (principally distraction and indirection), as defined by Radner and Lanser (1993) and the other contributors to Feminist Messages. Coding in Women's Folk Culture (Radner 1993), in Irish and Scottish lament performances. The circumstances of laments, the unusually intense emotions experienced and expressed in a more public and uninhibited way than normal, the possibilities for exaggeration in this, the sense of climax and ritual significance, and the expectations of the audience, made keening occasions exceptional events where extremes were allowed that were seldom approached in other performance contexts. With the rules for normal conduct suspended, and with the lament functioning to reinforce the sense of the liminality and transition of this phase for survivors and the deceased, the tradition offered a powerful vehicle for the
articulation of thoughts and the external display of sentiments that ordinarily were minimized or untenable in other communal occasions. The drama of the event, the wailing, sobbing, the gesticulation of mourners, the hypnotic effect of rhythmic sound and movement, and other simultaneous activity would have been sufficiently obscuring and diverting to allow a lamenter to voice words that were bluntly or mutedly critical of survivors and perhaps of the deceased. She could air complaints about women’s status, or rebelliously object to masculinist priorities and values, while the possible impact of her outspokenness was tempered and buffered by what could be attributed to the performer as exploitation of the potential use of distraction as coding intrinsic to the context. The conventional, ostensible, principal purposes of the songs, the acceptable behaviours of performers, and the obvious meanings of the words sung and emotions expressed, all obscured other strata of signification intended to be only accessible to certain kinds of interpreters. Much of the value of coding inhere in the possibility for a user to deny any intention to employ it and even her awareness of signifying effects, ensuring that, at least, stability can be maintained in social relations, although carefully managed communication of opposition, dissension, alternative opinions or negative comment (criticism of the treatment by men of wives, for example) is effected.

When a lament or waulking song is repeated in other contexts by a soloist or several singers, its function and meaning are contextually redetermined; it becomes a ‘quotation’ of an original or other version of the lament or waulking song and therefore possesses intrinsically different opportunities in the types of coding deployable; the song attains new meaning and purpose for singers and audience, subjected to alternative interpretations and descriptions. In the repetitions after a first performance (which is possibly the compositional event too), the substance of the song is subjected to aural and oral decontextualizations and various recontextualizations, each version being a new ‘text’, as it were, while staying within the non-literate realm. From a perspective in the present, the researcher has to acknowledge her (or his) remove from originary and original creative events for both performance forms.
At the level of composing within a particular genre, or of the (re-)creative repetition of a song by a later performer, the idiosyncratic adaptation of the form or of existing poetry, and the way it is presented by the singer are suspended between expressive restrictions and freedoms; intermeshed are possibilities for a performer to alter the form or individual work, to provoke new receptions and make possible new interpretations, and the constraining implicit demands of tradition requiring that the performance be a recognizable exemplar of the genre or a version of the pre-existing song. The opportunities that exist for mobilizing additional or alternative interpretative strata by the use of encoding, or for foregrounding particular levels already available and ‘legible’ in the song, constitute a considerable creative and expressive freedom. Any possible use of coding strategies is tempered, nevertheless, by the need to satisfy requirements such as that of coherence, a certain generic fidelity, accessibility (even if this is multifarious and variable in respect of different audience members) and suitability in regard to the identities of performers and audience and the context. Repetition of established conventions of composition and presentation reiterates norms, learnt practices, values and standards, which have been validated historically through the notion of tradition and their repetition in individual usages, accumulating a defining power for that particular creative form. Tradition, what is canonical and customary, only retains status and authority because of individual repetitions of and conformity to its components, but utter stagnation is only avoided because within even the most rigid and conservative tradition there have to be spaces for new creation, for individuality and creative subversion of the rules. Tradition or culture, however it may be popularly idealized, is discursive and only partially determining. The possibilities for negotiation of meaning and polysemous signification challenge assumptions about the determining authority of traditional rules, and undermine the idea that all participants interpret and create culture in the same ways.

Individuals live within and reproduce both gender discourse and culture, where tradition may be a central, historical structuring: ‘normal’ gender roles and behaviours are defined as ‘traditional’, rules for adherence to such conventions are often justified by people on the grounds of custom, and whenever a woman creates within a particular tradition,
medium, or genre, this occurs simultaneously with her ongoing maintenance of a sense of self, of a gendered identity. A woman is expected or allowed to lament, weep passionately, sing a waulking song because traditionally these are female activities; taking part in these confirms the rightness of historically established cultural notions connecting certain ways of acting within these with notions about femininity which are more general. Her singing has meaning as a performance in and of ‘tradition’ and as one of gender because it recalls and is lisible through reference to past performances, another enactment in the process through which, by accumulation, she maintains a coherent, consistent identity conforming to understandings of what it means to be female.

Understandings of behaviours which were considered to be characteristic of keening women and the almost invariable identification of the psychopomp-like figure of the lamenter as female were partly grounded in a discourse which connected certain emotions, and the ways in which these were expressed, with one or other of the genders, despite people’s conduct demonstrating that the assumed, ostensible logic and inevitability of these connections are fictive and can be overturned or ambiguously manipulated. To lament, even to identify oneself as a potential lamenter, is evidence of identifying with a cultural version of the feminine. Singing a lament or a waulking song is a cultural performance consisting of signifying acts which not only indicate gender, but which function like linguistic performatives as actions and modes. They do not merely stand for or represent norms of gender but also contribute to the singer’s ongoing creation of identity, working to create what they describe. The more usual conformity to gender conventions is part of ongoing experience, but the fact that this whole process is not immune to ambiguities, contradictions (and is often, in fact, countered by other conventional, supposedly true gender ideals, either in another time or coexistent) or to being rebelled against, reveals its very dependency upon conformity to retain its validity and meaning, and upon the repetition of appropriate acts which achieve the desired effect through performative force. Singing a song or showing feelings in ways acceptable for a woman exemplify, like the wearing of gendered clothing, episodes not only of her signifying, but also of her creating, an identity dependent on such acts performed
through the negotiation of intersecting discourses on gender. The signifying and maintenance of gender undertaken in the context of complex audiences, such as that at a wake or funeral, are multiple and open to interpretations.

Descriptions of lament performances
Keening performances and the figure of the keening woman deserve lengthy description and discussion, and can be seen as another facet of women’s responsibilities for the dead. As mentioned above, earlier ritualistic, religious functions of lamenting lay partly in it being the exhibition of proper mourning by the bereaved; a final communication with the dead who was still in transition to the next world; a verbal and musical confirmation of his or her separation and difference from the living realm which would also encourage the soul’s departure; and reinforcement of the temporary marginality of the deceased and the bereaved. Much of this resonates with ideas about caring, of women’s duties to attend to the spiritual and emotional, as well as the physical, needs of others. Symbolic and customary actions show that care of the dead implied more than the protection and preparation of the corpse, and involved labour for the good of the spirit. Lamenting and keening contributed to this, but the singing and weeping were also an emotionally therapeutic and psychological service to other mourners, creating a context for revealing and acting on their feelings, and potential vicarious relief for onlookers onto the heightened emotions and catharsis undergone by performers.

It is important to note the specific femininity of the supernatural keener, a dreaded harbinger of death. Many descriptions of the banshee, similar figures and related aural phenomena echo descriptions of mortal lamenters. Evidence of people’s encounters of, and belief in, the banshee (and there is more abundant, richer recorded evidence from Ireland than from Scotland (see Lysaght 1986)) could have furnished opponents of the keening tradition with extra weaponry and justification, or, conversely, could have persuaded others to leave the practice well alone. The supernatural tradition could undoubtedly have endowed keening women, especially ones of noted talent and
reputation, with an aura of unusual potential power and mysteriousness besides any uncanniness stemming from the ritualistic role of keeners in earlier times.

I include here several accounts from Ireland as sufficient comparative evidence exists of the closeness of Scottish and Irish keening traditions.10 Ó Súilleabháin’s chapter ‘The Keening of the Dead’ in his Irish Wake Amusements (1967: 130-145) is a good source for references and Lysaght’s recent article (1997a) on the Irish lament tradition is a valuable addition to existing studies and analysis (e.g. Bourke 1988, 1993; Bromwich 1948; Kimpton 1993; Marren 1993; Partridge 1980). Lysaght gives a brief survey of evidence, including texts, from various periods and sources, and discusses the attitudes of different social sectors towards the custom and its practitioners and reasons for its decline; while taking the role of the lamenter as pivotal, Lysaght considers the meaning of the lament to the individual and community as part of mortuary ritual and as performance. Singing for the dead has a long documented history11 but its antiquity was often held against it by those campaigning to ‘civilize’ and ‘reform’ backward Celtic areas (see Lysaght 1997a: 66).

Commentators in the past (in now Presbyterian areas before that doctrine took hold) often stressed a general love of music and verbal expression amongst Gaels.12 Many of the writers from the seventeenth century who observed wakes and funerals included accounts of keening with a variety of subjective evaluations implicit and explicit in their descriptions of the actual circumstances of the ‘performance’.13 Gordon points out, that from the variety of evaluations, what the corronach supposedly sounded like depended on idiosyncratic opinion but that there probably was significant geographical variation (1984: 63; c.f. Bourke 1993: 167). As is so often the case with cultural phenomena that belong to a unfamiliar language area, there is much imprecision in explanations by outsiders of what they are referring to and the same word can be used by different writers to denote distinguishable activities.
Travellers often give little more than tantalizing references in passing, such as Martin’s comment on St Kilda around 1695: ‘They put the faces of their dead towards the east when they bury them, and bewail the deaths of their relatives exceedingly, and upon these occasions make doleful songs which they call laments’ (MacLeod 1994 [1698]: 456), and the Skyeman writes elsewhere: ‘These poor people do sometimes fall down as they climb the rocks, and perish: Their wives on such occasions make doleful songs, which they call lamentations. The chief topicks are their courage, their dexterity in climbing, and their great affection which they shewed to their wives and children’ (1981 [1716]: 294; and MacLeod 1994 [1703]: 316). Pennant’s relatively lengthy and important commentary on lamenting, in his Scottish travelogue of 1769, depends largely on observations made in Ireland, implying that he appreciated the similarities of the two traditions. Unlike many other outsiders - for example, Burt who considered the ‘corranach’ he heard around the 1730s as ‘a hideous howl or Ho-bo-bo-bo-boo’ (1815, vol. 2: 190) 14 - Pennant regarded the tradition somewhat more positively, drawing comparison with ancient classical practice (the funeral of a local woman he attended in Kerry ‘seemed conducted in the purest classical form’ (1771: 93) 15) and he connects *ululatus* 16 with the rather onomatopoeic Irish ‘*Ulologhne*’ and ‘*Hullulu*’ he claims was used to refer to this lamenting (92). According to him, there was a sequence consisting of an initial wailing; an address to the dead indoors and an intensified outcry as the corpse left the house; and then a chorus to accompany the cortège, including women who had not been inside, who eulogized the dead, physically displayed their emotions and, thus, fulfilled a role as hired mourners (92-94). 17 The first two stages belonged to mourners close to the dead, but he felt that the scattered, hired leaders accompanying the funeral, ‘a mercenary tribe, . . . over-did their parts’ (94). 18

From the available evidence, chief mourners wept, cried out and spoke at wakes and other points of emotional intensity between the death and burial, such as the kisting and when the coffin lid was being secured. Their articulations could be wordless vocalizations or direct addresses to the dead and rhetorically to those around; keening need not have had any conventional ‘musical’ quality, and there could be a problem of
dividing it from more straightforward violent crying and sobbing or from a mourner talking in a rhythmic way, perhaps only quietly, to the dead. Although keening occurred at wakes and funerals, many accounts only describe the latter, more public, out-of-doors context and there would be expected differences in the lamenting and weeping at each occasion (it was at the funeral that one would be more likely to find hired mourners).

The wake scene might be dominated for a time by one woman or a small group, or the entire female company could be involved at points, a particular, talented individual possibly taking over episodically, or leading the vocalization, whether as a paid participant or not. A particularly good Irish description from around 1843 includes reference to the separation by gender of the participants in the wake and funeral:

The women of the household range themselves at either side, and the keen at once commences. They rise with one accord, and moving their bodies with a slow motion to and fro, their arms apart, they continue to keep up a heart-rending cry. The cry is interrupted for a while to give the ban caointhe (the leading keener), an opportunity of commencing. At the close of every stanza of the dirge, the cry is repeated, to fill up, as it were, the pause, and then dropped; the woman then again proceeds with the dirge, and so on to the close.

The only interruption which this manner of conducting a wake suffers, is from the entrance of some relative of the deceased, who, living remote, or from some other cause, may not have been in at the commencement. In this case, the ban caointhe ceases, all the women rise and begin the cry, which is continued until the new-comer has cried enough. During the pauses of the women’s wailing, the men, seated in groups by the fire, or in the corners of the room, are indulging in jokes, exchanging repartees, and bantering each other, some about their sweethearts, and some about their wives, or talking about the affairs of the day - prices and politics, priests and parsons, the all-engrossing subjects of Irish conversation.

The keener is usually paid for her services - the charge varying from a crown to a pound, according to the circumstances of the employer.

It often happens, however, that the family has some friend or relation, rich in the gift of poetry; and who will for love of her kind give the unbought eulogy to the memory of the deceased. (From Hall’s Ireland [1843] quoted in Ó Muirithe 1978: 26-7)

Another description from Finland, which mirrors Irish descriptions, depicts a chorus led by one particular keener. It conveys the affective power of lamenting as feelings spread
and were intensified for those who were present but who might not be initially actively responsive or involved.

The old woman pressed her apron over her eyes and was ready. At the beginning she was a bit constrained, but soon she got going and the lamenter gave free rein to the lament and the tears ran plaintively. In the meantime the others became still, and a silent funeral atmosphere filled the room. Its effects did not remain without results among the group of old women. One after another of the women sitting along the walls had to resort to her headdress or apron, and after a while there was nobody who was not crying or at least sobbing quietly. In the meantime the song of the main lamenter had risen enormously both in the strength of the voice and in its pitch. I found this exactly as it should be: the accompanying chorus along the walls giving the basis of feeling for the wilder outbursts of emotion of one weeper. But then the excitement to intensify the lament moved to the accompaniers as well. Many of them probably did not remember any longer what occasion it was. Before long everybody was crying and lamenting at the top of her voice. It was absolutely impossible to write any tunes down in that kind of company, where there was a noise fit for Bedlam. I snapped at the woman nearest me, that she should keep quiet, because she hadn’t been given any part in this scene. ‘Who can really understand?’ howled the woman at me in tears, and immediately burst out into the most heart-rending sobs. By this she probably meant that only someone who really has taken part in the lamenting can fully understand what it means, and that when one laments again, the memory of the former sorrow comes back into one’s mind. (Quoted in Honko 1974: 25; and in Ó Catháin 1978: 15-16)

Undoubtedly, the intensity of the sadness, despair and desolation felt by participants and audience for different kinds of mortuary events partly depends on the way in which previous bereavements can be resurrected from one’s memory, and the way in which there are other kinds of sadness, loneliness and anger, not in response to the death, but about life, which are experienced and expressed differently in the context of mourning than in other times and places. Weeping and lamentation were an intensification and a catharsis for a whole range of feelings, opinions, understandings and even social tensions that lay far beyond the sequence of experience connected with one death.

Perhaps the most impressive description from firsthand experience of keening in Irish in the late nineteenth century is that by J. M. Synge (1968 [1907]) from his observations on
the island of Inishmaan, in the Aran Islands. This is an extraordinary passage worthy of lengthy quotation:

After Mass this morning an old woman was buried. She lived in the cottage next to mine, and more than once before noon I heard a faint echo of the keen. I did not go to the wake for fear my presence might jar upon the mourners, but all last evening I could hear the strokes of a hammer in the yard, where, in the middle of a little crowd of idlers, the next of kin laboured slowly at the coffin. Today, before the hour for the funeral, poteen was served to a number of men who stood upon the road, and a portion was brought to me in my room. Then the coffin was carried out, sewn loosely in sailcloth, and held near the ground by three cross-poles lashed upon the top. As we moved down to the low eastern portion of the island, nearly all the men, and all the oldest women, wearing petticoats over their heads, came out and joined in the procession.

While the grave was being opened the women sat down among the flat tombstones, bordered with a pale fringe of early bracken, and began the wild keen, or crying for the dead. Each old woman, as she took her turn in the leading recitative, seemed possessed for the moment with a profound ecstasy of grief, swaying to and fro, and bending her forehead to the stone before her, while she called out to the dead with a perpetually recurring chant of sobs.

All round the graveyard other wrinkled women, looked out from under the deep red petticoats that cloaked them, rocked themselves with the same rhythm, and intoned the inarticulate chant that is sustained by all as an accompaniment.

The morning had been beautifully fine, but as they lowered the coffin into the grave, thunder rumbled overhead and hailstones hissed among the bracken.

In Inishmaan one is forced to believe in a sympathy between man and nature, and at this moment, when the thunder sounded a death-peal of extraordinary grandeur above the voices of the women, I could see the faces near me stiff and drawn with emotion.

When the coffin was in the grave, and the thunder had rolled away across the hills of Clare, the keen broke out again more passionately than before.

The grief of the keen is no personal complaint for the death of one woman over eighty years, but seems to contain the whole passionate rage that lurks somewhere in every native of the island. In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant,
and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas. They are usually silent, but in the presence of death all outward show of indifference or patience is forgotten, and they shriek with pitiable despair before the horror of the fate to which they are all doomed.

Before they covered the coffin an old man kneeled down by the grave and repeated a simple prayer for the dead.

There was an irony in these words of atonement and Catholic belief spoken by voices that were still hoarse with the cries of pagan desperation.

A little beyond the grave I saw a line of old women who had recited the keen sitting in the shadow of a wall beside the roofless shell of the church. They were still sobbing and shaken with grief, yet they were beginning to talk of the daily trifles that veil them from the terrors of the world.

When we had all come out of the graveyard, and two men had rebuilt the hole in the wall through which the coffin had been carried in, we walked back to the village, talking of anything, and joking of anything, as if merely coming from the boat-slip, or the pier.

One man told me of the poteen-drinking that takes place at some funerals. (Synge 1968: 42-43)

Synge also described the funeral of a young man whose body had been washed ashore, ‘one of the strangest scenes’ where the men were involved also:

People had been going down to his house from early in the day, yet when I went there with the old man about the middle of the afternoon, the coffin was still lying in front of the door, with the men and women of the family standing round beating it, and keening over it, in a great crowd of people. A little later everyone knelt down and a last prayer was said. Then the cousins of the dead man got ready two oars and some pieces of rope - the men of his own family seemed too broken with grief to know what they were doing - the coffin was tied up, and the procession began. The old women walked close behind the coffin, and I happened to take a place just after them, among the first of the men. The rough lane to the graveyard slopes away towards the east, and the crowd of women going down before me in their red dresses, cloaked with red petticoats, with the waistband that is held round the head just seen from behind, had a strange effect, to which the white coffin and the unity of colour gave a nearly cloistral quietness.
For this reason [the dead being a young man] the keen lost a part of its formal nature, and was recited as the expression of intense personal grief by the young men and women of the man’s own family.

[Describing measuring and digging of the grave.] When a number of blackened boards and pieces of bone had been thrown up with the clay, a skull was lifted out and places [sic] upon a gravestone. Immediately the old woman, the mother of the dead man, took it up in her hands, and carried it away by herself. Then she sat down and put it in her lap - it was the skull of her own mother - and began keening and shrieking over it with the wildest lamentation.

When it [the hole] was nearly deep enough the old woman got up and came back to the coffin, and began to beat on it, holding the skull in her left hand. This last moment of grief was the most terrible of all. The young women were nearly lying among the stones, worn out with their passion of grief, yet raising themselves every few moments to beat with magnificent gestures on the boards of the coffin. The young men were worn out also, and their voices cracked continually in the wail of the keen.

When everything was ready the sheet was unpinned from the coffin, and it was lowered into its place. Then an old man took a vessel with holy water in it, and a wisp of bracken, and the people crowded round him while he splashed the water over them. (ibid.: 139-40)

Carmichael describes what happened when he persuaded a Barra woman to demonstrate the tuiream in 1870, ‘as she had heard it when young’, suggesting that it was now rare (1900b vol. 2: 292; 1954: 338-339). She performed ‘this lost and almost forgotten art’ against the backdrop of Castlebay at the actual funeral of a young man. His description also suggests the content of the lamentation:

The ‘bean-tuirim,’ rehearsing- or lamenting-woman, was tall and handsome, though somewhat gaunt and bony, with long features and long arms. At first she was reluctant to sing, but by degrees she came to use her magnificent voice to the full and the result was striking in the extreme. She and I followed the body as it was carried in simple fashion on three staves by a man at either end of each. The woman rehearsed the grief, the bitter grief, of the winsome young widow, the cries, the bitter cries, of the helpless young children, asking, plaintively asking, who would now bring them corn from the breird [sic], the meal from the
mill, the fish from the sea and the birds from the rocks? Who indeed? No one now, since he was laid low. She then rehearsed the sorrows of the poor and the needy, the friendless and the aged whom he had been wont to help. Who would help them now? Who indeed? No one now, since he was laid low. (1954: 339)

The survival of keening in Scotland was greatly variable over different areas and what people described in the later years of its survival, for example, may have differed significantly from performances of two centuries before in the same locality. Evidence recorded in the early twentieth century comes from orally recorded memories in the 1960s and 1970s from people who were usually then very elderly; some had not witnessed public lamenting themselves but had learnt of it being practised during their parents’ lifetimes. Oral testimonies in the School of Scottish Studies indicate that keening occurred in the twentieth century. In Tiree, for example, women were remembered weeping and speaking, sometimes in poetic language with their hands placed on the coffin. Tiree tradition must have been weakening for a long time, however, as Carmichael has a tale about apparently ‘the last mourning-woman’ there in the middle of the nineteenth century (1954: 338).

In Islay a dozen or so selected women bewailed and eulogized the dead when the burial procession left the house; exceptionally good lamenting at the local midwife’s funeral was recalled and Cnoc nam mnathan tuirdh, ‘the hill of the keening women’ commemorated the practice in the landscape. In Eriskay an informant had heard it in the 1920s; and in Lewis an informant in the mid-1960s could remember keening in one east coast district of the island, but said that it had died out two generations before that in his home area on the west. Nan MacKinnon was able to provide information about the custom: although it had died out before the time of her mother in Mingulay, her father, who was from Barra, could recall it. According to her, when the clan structure had been in place, women had been paid to keen, wail, and deliver eulogies, as they beat and threw themselves to the ground, following the funerals of chiefs and their families to the graveside; in Barra the ‘professional’ tradition became redundant when the MacNeills sold their land, although, as elsewhere, the composition of relevant and important
laments continued in some form. Donald Alasdair Johnson reported that keening and piping had been part of both Roman Catholic and Protestant South Uist funerals in the early decades of the century. However, although Marion Campbell was similarly able to tell about keening there she said that it had stopped before she could have an opportunity to experience it; she confirmed that women would keen for money and relates a tradition of one being paid five pounds for this, presumably when the practice was very much declining. Gordon writes of a reduced lamenting by close relatives being maintained in Mull and Skye in the late nineteenth century, and of how, according to a BBC radio programme in 1982, a corronach had been performed in the Western Isles in 1965 (1984: 63-4), but this would have been an exceptional, isolated incidence and perhaps not a valid basis for inference as to what the lament and keening would have sounded like when the tradition was thriving. Evidence from many areas shows how bagpipe playing at the grave and to accompany the funeral procession replaced lamenting and keening, or sometimes coexisted with it for a while.

The entire oral and literary tradition in Gaelic Scotland was unavoidably and irrevocably radically affected by the extensive social and religious upheavals caused by the collapse of the clan-based social structure, the Reformation and other events even before nineteenth century evangelism destroyed much of what remained of indigenous Gaelic expressive culture, so, surviving descriptions for Scotland are fewer and less elaborate than those for Ireland. Other factors, localized and general, also worked against the continuance of customary keening. It is clear that recurring common features characterize lament performances and the ways keeners convey their anguish to others across a range of cultures. Descriptions of modern lamenters in Greek or Finnish villages in the 1970s and 1980s have much in common with the past Scottish and Irish situation. Although wider social changes would have inevitably led to Gaelic lamenting's disappearance, deliberate endeavours to dismantle the tradition stemmed partly from a perception of it by the religious, especially evangelical campaigners and believers, as non-Christian, paganistic. Traditional lamenting seems to support and stem from a belief system inimical to such religious doctrines as those which were being newly and quickly
accepted in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Gaidhealtachd in regard to death and the afterlife. Bruford (1996) throws some light on reasons for, and the effects of, active opposition to lamenting, considering the ways in which performers could be perceived as having similarities to witch figures and as, therefore, deserving of censure, condemnation, even punishment. Keeners in different cultures shared certain signals of control-loss and the physical realization of emotion in, for example, dishevellment and the loosening of hair, and gesticulation such beating as one’s palms together, or one’s breast, or the coffin or grave. The appearance of the Gaelic lamenter is very unlike the sedate, sober appearance that came to be the ideal for the Christian woman (Chapter 3).

Partridge (1980) has examined the many comparisons between eye-witness and traditional descriptions of keening women and literary descriptions of the wildman or geilt, both being categories of people driven beyond reason and self-control by grief. The whole issue of the lamenting woman’s frenzied madness is further addressed by Bourke (1993: especially 165-6; c.f. Holst-Warhaft 1992: passim, especially 27-29), who argues that the apparent temporary madness was not only a fundamental element involved in the keening performance to represent, express, and be part of the experience of the sorrow of the women and the community as a whole, but that this ‘insanity’ could be exploited by a keener as a source of licence to express opinions, broach subjects and exhibit emotions that were not usually touched on or revealed in public. Madness was part of the liminality which permitted the transgression of norms and ordinary social structures. The lamenter was beyond censure during the event and much of what she had to say which was subversive would only be perceptible by those who could decipher the codes being used; her performance would be remembered and could be spoken about long afterwards, although she could deny any responsibility by recourse to an ‘insanity plea’ for the time of the performance, possibly because she employed coding.

Those who campaigned to suppress, or who were, at least, outwardly condemnatory of, lamenting in these countries often voiced especial disapproval of those aspects of the tradition which allowed relatively untrammelled, uncontrolled emotion. Hysteria and
ostentatious self-expression were not appropriate for women who should instead have aimed at behaving with greater restraint despite their nature, as far as middle-class outsiders were concerned, for, even within a discourse which naturalizes hysteria and chaos as characteristic of 'femininity' these are attributes which should be suppressed and controlled; they are given a physical aetiology, regarded as pathological and used to validate the inferior position of women as 'unbalanced' or 'unwell'. It may have been in women's 'nature' to keen, weep, wail and lose physical self-control, but for critics this had to be subordinated to a more acceptable ideal of femininity.\(^{30}\) Keening did not, therefore, even have to be regarded as a pagan, heathenish activity by staunch Christians for its suppression to be sought. Performances spread and intensified feelings of loss and hopelessness amongst those caught up in the event, a grief which would not accord with a Christian acceptance of divinely-ordained fate, a mind-set that should have found consolation in religious belief and practice; the words and noises articulated and the concomitant behaviours conveyed no joy that the deceased had escaped to perhaps a better place, but focused on loss and on the grief of those left behind, only one of several elements in which the behaviour of the keener, or caointeach, might be condemned.

In contrast to the image of the wild, heathen wailing woman there is a strong Irish folk tradition that depicts the Virgin Mary lamenting her son and claims that this was the origin of the practice (Ó Madagain 1989: 34; Ni Riain 1980; Partridge 1978). Mary is even described as acting without 'shame or sense' in her own maternal anguish (Bourke 1993: 166). This folk aetiology, as well as actual practice, affirms the tradition as very much female-identified. Extant examples of this Irish genre of religious song usually have caoineadh in the title and share some textual elements with the non-Marian laments, although the shortage of musical documentation for the latter makes it difficult to compare the forms musically (Ni Riain 1980: 122-124).\(^{31}\) The legend and songs are all the more interesting because of the general scarcity in traditional Scottish Gaelic and Irish laments generally of references to spiritual matters, particularly Christian doctrine.\(^{32}\) The Virgin Mary provides an archetype and precursor for keeners and those who would take care of the body of the dead. Subsequent lamenters could regard
themselves as, and claim to be, reiterating and copying the Virgin's act of devotion, imitating a particular type of femininity, holiness and maternal dedication, while also strengthening the aetiology. By claiming sacredness for the tradition, lamenting was endowed with a more acceptable religious, ritual significance, validated and elevated by a Christian association besides whatever pagan background it actually had. This may have been important in Ireland in the face of later indifference and outright opposition to the practice as it was weakening.

Some aspects of the content of laments
Although this research cannot include a widespread survey of Gaelic songs of death and mourning composed by, or sustained primarily through performance by, women, there are a few aspects of this oral literature that I highlight here and relate to wider concerns relevant to the lives of women in Gaelic communities in the past. I focus on a few specific features of the rhetoric of the genre, the poetic discourse in which it was formed, giving illustrations from texts at certain points. Because of the thorough pervasiveness of the panegyric rhetoric and entire praise-oriented perspective in so much vernacular as well as classical Gaelic literature, for much of their histories, encomiastic features are often focused on by writers. Important also are the folk narrative traditions that accompanied many lyrics, so although Gaelic folk-song is said to be short on songs that are narrative in the sense of the ballad as conventionally defined, it does include many poems that have been passed on with oral narratives that complementarily fill in story-gaps in the verse. It is not enough to say that there are hardly any Gaelic narrative songs without taking into account that verse existed alongside prose legends and history; and, although their structure and way of telling a story are very different, many songs that are certainly not ballads are not entirely lyric creations either, in content and effect.

Traditional lament poetry indicates a cosmological orientation which generated earlier verse, an outlook accommodating no Christian anticipation of an afterlife or final resurrection, and this is true of the lament traditions of some other cultures. By way of
contrast, there is the religious perspective encapsulated by the, often incantatory, threnodic verse Carmichael published (see, e.g. 1940: 369-95) which is functionally closer to prayers of the Christian folk religion represented in the *Carmina Gadelica* than to traditional lament (although Carmichael included actual praise laments too) and there is the Irish tradition of Marian laments. Some of the poems by Sileas na Ceapaich, Sileas MacDonald (c.1660-c.1729) of Keppoch, also contrast with more ‘pagan’ lament poetry. An aristocrat who was deeply religious and composed hymns, Sileas writes of surrendering her family members to the Christian God and a better afterlife, despite her feelings of loss, composing lines such as ‘I gave up my husband to the Son of God... I gave up my love to be among the angels and the saints, who received him kindly in Heaven’\(^{35}\) (trans. from Gaelic). The sentiments expressed in the poem, ‘Alasdair a Gleanna Garadh’ (‘Alasdair of Glengarry’), differ radically from those most commonly found in vernacular lament poetry lacking this religious influence; her Catholicism makes bereavement a different experience from the one which motivated and is articulated in other Gaelic lament and elegiac verse, her faith a consolatory source of a way to accept events.\(^{36}\) She addresses the deceased in a very different tone from, and with different purposes to, those of the composers of most of the laments to which I refer below:

> I pray that your soul may be saved, now that you have been buried in the clay. I pray for happiness for those you have left, in your home and in your lands.\(^{37}\)

Many recent writers single out the pagan element of Celtic laments as a salient, distinctive indication of an ancient provenance of keening and lamenting, both functionally and in terms of form and, of course, some observers of the tradition had highlighted this in condemnatory terms. What strikes me as even more surprising perhaps is that, given this ‘pagan’ perspective, and its implied ontology, an otherworld or afterlife are scarcely described at all when other cultural phenomena, such as supernatural and eschatological legends, clearly express a belief in the realm of the dead; the laments, perhaps because they are produced at times of extreme and intense personal stress and are an individual’s grief-expressions, depict the deceased as alone, not
amongst the host of supernatural legend; there is real fear expressed in narrative traditions of revenants but this is not verbally articulated in laments, the loss and crisis are all that matter; although the dead person is directly addressed, there is little sense of faith in an immortal soul, of any continuing existence offering the bereaved solace or hope for a future post-mortem reunion. Not only, therefore, are the influences of Christian doctrine absent, but even articulations of certain pagan beliefs, which one might expect to find, are missing.

Reasons for this may lie with emotions, as suggested above, that the lamenter seeks to voice the loss of herself and others, the immediate consequences, the worldly, mortal loss overriding in importance other levels at which these critical changes have occurred. There may be other reasons (perhaps many laments articulate the experiences of mourners who belonged to a world where traditional ideas about the soul had become attenuated, shaky, and a discontinuity then existed) but suggestions as to what these might be would be highly speculative. One explanatory factor that I would, however, propose is that laments, as women’s work and voicing, were sites, like other creative female works, where opposition to dominant, male-determined values and ideas of the culture could be articulated. Laments such as these do not simply seem to exhibit little trust in consolatory ideas of an afterlife, a better place after death, but they significantly focus on the physical to a striking degree, with exceptional intensity and very naturally. This could represent, at a time of crisis (and deaths were often more radically and chronically disruptive events at the personal level for close females than for male mourners), when restraint and emotional continence were cast aside to an extent, a rejection of religious ideas very often formulated and largely promoted by men; laments could counterpoint male-enacted ceremony and ritual, and insist on the legitimacy, the primacy, of the needs of the living, that the material, the social, cultural world really mattered, and life was more important than speculation about what succeeded it or agonizing over the fate of the eternal soul. Laments could be rebellions against a system where much of the significance of life is invested in a concern with one’s post-mortem fate, asserting and demanding priority for humanistic engagement in the secular world.

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over the transcendent, the ethereal, for worldly values and human emotions over the divine. It is possible to infer from this that embedded within the lament tradition is a ‘facility’ for coding: not merely codes employable with deliberate and conscious determination in ways that would render the genre a far less spontaneous and improvisatory one, but multivocality seems to lie intrinsically at the heart of the form, mobilized almost automatically by engagement in it.

'A Mhic Dhùghaill 'ic Ruairi' ('Son of Dugal, son of Ruairi'), is a widely recorded and still well known lament, dating from the eighteenth century, with a theme found in several other Gaelic songs: the violent killing of a lover often committed by family members (especially brothers) because of parental disapproval, because the lover is either of lower social status or a supernatural.38

A thousand curses on the cow-herd, who was watching the cattle, who brought word to my brothers to go the shieling of the branches.
You got your first fall in the cattle mire; and your streaming red, noble blood, was spurring among the rushes; and the young men were tearing the lovely dear body.39

'Griogal/Griogar Cridhe' ('Dear Gregor'), another of the most enduring, variable and still popular songs of lament, is most frequently adapted to lullaby form; longer published versions not adapted to a lullaby function form may contain an address to the child in the refrain (e.g. Watson 1959: 244; Thomson 1990: 108-9).40 'Griogal Cridhe' was composed in syllabic metre by the widow of Gregor MacGregor of Glenstrae, a relative to the clan chief. Her husband was decapitated by her brothers, in 1570 or 1571. The song represents an important cross-over between the vernacular and classical (Thomson 1990: 108-9). Some versions barely refer to the death at all and stand then as primarily cradle songs of praise,41 but from evidence of oral tradition it would seem that most singers would be aware of the historical background. Many versions convey pride in a past of remembered happiness, and vary in the extent to which the composer's condition is mentioned; some include very little reference, but the version given in the Tolmie Collection (1911), for example, closes with 'When other women lie tonight, in peaceful still slumber, I shall lie there on your grave, smiting both my hands.'42 Songs
like ‘A Mhic Dhúghaill ’ic Ruairi’ and ‘Griogal Cridhe’ aim to make an impact on the hearer: life ends violently, in betrayal and dishonour, in blood, violation, dismemberment, animal ordure.

In some versions of ‘Griogal Cridhe’, while wanting revenge, the composer acknowledges what retribution for her loss would mean to other women and children, possibly a muted, coded indictment, that cannot be fully verbalized, of the ways things are run according to ‘heroic’ rules of bloodshed in a society based on the principles of honour and shame. In traditional Mediterranean communities where the vendetta has continued until recently, as part of a system where males live according to a pervasive code of honour in parallel to a modesty code by which women should ideally conduct themselves, laments by women have carried an historical power to incite revenge, retaliation, and maintenance of the honour code of the culture when there are grounds to implicate another party culpably in a death (Alexiou 1974: 22; Danforth 1982; Holst-Warhaft 1992). Holst-Warhaft writes that women’s ‘dangerous voices’ could not often overtly demand revenge but could openly mock men who were failing to prosecute it (1992: 88). During times of, frequently internecine, feuding between families in an area where murders were being committed, laments in Gaelic may well have had similar effects. Like tàmailtean and other songs about situations of injustice and maltreatment, laments can include explicit criticism of the perpetrators of a crime and expressions of defiance against what they stand for, but poems such as those mentioned here tend to be economical in delineation of the narrative events, select in their choice of, predominantly visual, detail, and would have derived extra meaning in underlying encoded layers of significance mobilized in performance.

Outlining in words supposedly addressed to the deceased the circumstances of their murder could be an indirect way of spreading information about the crime which might not be available to, or acknowledged by, everyone else, and also perhaps let the perpetrators know, either directly there and then or through reports of the lamenting, that the lamentor is aware of what happened and prepared to tell others about it, however
obliquely she may do this. Her narration could counter other accounts of the death. To create lines as stark as those quoted above from ‘A Mhic Dhùghail ‘ic Ruairi’ would require, I would expect, a certain detachment, which strengthens their impact all the more for the hearer or the reader. In other contexts, well known songs about murders could be performed with other encoded intentions, perhaps in connection with another unnatural death or crime or to let the singer express certain feelings and thoughts towards those who have mistreated her in some way, using the indirection coding strategy of impersonation, amongst others, to verbalize these with impunity. Descriptions of keening after a death and at wakes and funerals make it clear that the emotional experience and the potential noise and activity served as partial diversions and distractions from the words of those who wished to articulate what would perhaps not be entirely expressible in more overt ways, a parallel to the distraction potential in waulking performances. Singers of laments in original and other contexts could have used the other main coding strategies also: women in physical proximity to the centre of the performance would be able to perceive words unintelligible to others outside of their circle amidst the activity of the wake or funeral, so this basic event feature meant there were different strata of audience. Bourke, as I mention above, has analyzed the mobilization of coding strategies by Irish lament singers using indirection and distraction, too (1993).

Whatever might explain its importance and purpose as a central feature of laments, the emphasis on the physical realm is one found in much Gaelic poetry, particularly in the preponderance of visual and concrete, over abstract, imagery. In threnodic verse, the lamenter describes or imagines the corpse in sometimes brutally graphic terms, at the time of a violent death, bereft of life and starting to decompose, or while it is being laid-out or buried.

What seems an excessive preoccupation with the death of the hero and the imagery of the grave functions as a harsh reminder of the loss to the clan. But it also serves to remind us of the social importance of the rites of death in a society where ceremonial occasions were associated with elemental issues. This is, superficially at least, a Christian society and Christian burial was important. But one senses also in Gaelic tradition
(and in Gaelic society to the present day) an enduring pagan concern with the body as almost a sentient thing. Failure to recover the body makes the loss even greater, e.g. *Thu bhith an innis nan rôn is nach faighear thu.* There is a concentration on the act of sealing the coffin. Sometimes the finality of that act is emphasised so that the carpenters’ preparation becomes an isolated and almost sinister image of it. From one point of view the preoccupation with death expresses the negative aspect of the intensity and vividness of life as the bards express it. But because this is altogether a celebratory [in encomiastic terms] tradition death also is due its proper formalities - in poetry as in the society which the poetry reflects - and through such celebrations the solidarity of the group is reaffirmed. (MacInnes 1978: 457)\(^{44}\)

The most distinctive and impressive texts of ‘*Griogal Cridhe*’ share stark description of the crime committed against the dead and his family with no accommodation for modern ideas of lullaby subject matter: ‘They put your head on an oaken stake, a little away from your body’;\(^{45}\) or, ‘They asked me to a wedding, a wedding that never was. They had your head on the point of yonder post.’\(^{46}\) This grim, plain description of the treatment of the composer’s husband in life and death contrasts particularly with the usage and structure of the poem when it takes the form of a cradle song; because most versions exist as *tàlaidhean*, they include an equivalent refrain to those in Scots and English lullabies that aim to quieten the baby. Directness and sharpness of imagery characterize many women’s songs in Gaelic and counteract certain recent cultural expectations regarding the emotions, expressions and conduct of mothers, wives and others in mourning. On a purely subjective, personal level there is something compelling about such imagery, its starkness and its refusal to let the hearer/reader ignore what is, after all, the actual reason for the song in the first place. Occasionally women’s poetry exhibits some of an awful bitterness, sheer insensitivity most strongly associated with the work of *Iain Lom* (John MacDonald, c. 1625-post 1707), tremendous, powerful poetry much of the time, but sometimes so vehemently revelling in its own gory and brutal descriptions of human beings, who have suffered and died, that it can alienate a reader. In her lament for those lost at the Battle of Sheriffmuir, ‘*Latha Sliabh an t-Stòrraim*’, even *Sileas na Ceapaich* can praise the battle skills of the dead men with imagery suggesting the lamenter’s distance from the losses of others in a situation such as this of political warfare.
intensified by clan rivalry; the other side were the winners and the vanquished can afford no pity for women of the former who would lament their own losses: 'the hardihood of your hands wielding your blades, chopping off heads to the ground, lopping off ears and splitting skulls, and sending the pursuit after them.'

Lament composers often focus on their own and others' bereavement by concentrating on how it affects the mourner's physical constitution; grief and loss are experienced and expressed through the body as weakness, illness, and lethargy. Many mourning songs tell of how the mourner cannot sleep, while death itself is likened to sleep. Sometimes the loss of hair is, presumably through stress and illness precipitated by this crisis, and the hair of the survivors is indirectly contrasted with the hair of the deceased, itself compared when he or she was alive and now when dead.

It is not because of mourning for my lover, though he were to stay away, but lamenting for my brothers, who are lying dead in the sea. Grieving for Hector and Lachlan has thinned my hair. The state of your locks being waulked in the sea-ware, distresses me sore... and no boat appears in the sound without my colour changing.

Hair is involved in the expressions and performance of sorrow, the loosening and tearing of hair a mourning behaviour accompanying lamentation in many cultures, including Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. Sileas na Ceapaich reports of news of the Jacobite defeat at Sheriffmuir that: 'This has left women wailing and tearing their hair, and there was not one who heard the battle whose hue did not alter', and addresses particular individuals amongst the dead, 'Alas for your children and noble wives who are letting down their hair', indicating that the loosening of one's hair was a conventional and perhaps expected mourning reflex for women, along with the beating together of one's hands mentioned in many poems. A verse of an Clàrsair Dall's (the Blind Harper, Roderick Morrison) Creach na Ciadaoin (‘Wednesday’s Bereavement’) of 1693 also internally furnishes evidence of mourning behaviour:

Hidden (in the grave) all alone, he will ever be in solitude; the thought of it makes men moan, while weeping women, beating their palms together without rest, seek to outdo one another - it is unjoyful music, sevenfold misery. My heart bursts in fragments to hear the sound of the funeral march.
The descriptive treatment of the deceased by women composers must stem partly from women’s close involvement with the remains; the emotive effect of descriptions of the body intensifies grieving in both the singer, as she concentrates on stark corporeal detail, and in those listening. The deceased person is addressed as they lie in the coffin or grave, or stretched out for the wake. The present state of the body is metaphoric for the new social condition of those who are most profoundly bereaved. Nothing that the lamenter can do now for the dead can bring them back. The preparation of the body is often referred to\(^56\) and attending to the corpse is implicitly opposed to nursing, caring, giving birth, making love.

One act by lamenters and other mourners with some apparent efficacy, some value for the deceased, is the drinking of their blood, or sometimes just the collecting of it (e.g. Bourke 1993: 166). In numerous versions of the above-mentioned ‘A Mhic Dhúghaill ’ic Ruairí’, while other details may vary, the blood-drinking motif is always included,\(^57\) and even in songs about drownings the idea arises as something the singer claims she would do, if she could, to prove her love and sorrow: ‘on whatever reef or sunken rock you were stranded, or on whatever beach the full tide left you, I would drink, though displeasing to my kindred, not of fresh water or of brine, but of the blood of your body after having been drowned’;\(^58\) or ‘I’d drink a drink though all abhor it, not of the sea, or of fresh water, nor of the red Spanish claret, but of the blood of thy body, after your drowning.’\(^59\) This custom and the implied belief in the soul’s essential residence in that fluid is potently redolent of pre-Christian ideas and one indication of some notion of the spirit’s endurance after death in songs that very often offer no other or scant evidence of spiritual beliefs.\(^60\) The widespread sanctity of certain kinds of blood, and the polluting qualities of others, and the idea in particular of it as a carrier of the person’s essence, appear in many ballads and folktales, in various cultures. Drinking the blood of the deceased seems to have been an action particularly associated with close female mourners, especially the principal lamenter, and the madness of intense grief could be understood as precipitating and as part of this behaviour. Obviously, the drama and
extremity of this ‘Gothic’ act of devotion by the mourner account to some extent for the motif’s survival in texts sung long after this kind of gesture would have been generally meaningful and countenanced; once the belief in any ritual efficacy had faded, the idea of this action persists as a metaphor for one’s dedication and respect for the deceased in songs which women continued to repeat because of its impact on the senses and sensibilities and possibly its evocation of past spiritual ideas and values.

Being unable to retrieve the body for the proper performance of obsequies and offices is a particular concern voiced in laments. Very many poems are for drownings and imagine the fate of the body: ‘You are floating on a wavetop, while sea monsters (whales) rend your body and are tearing you asunder’,61 ‘your bed is in the seaweed, the seals are your wake-folk, and the high stars your white candles, and the cry of the sea your fiddle-music’.62 In a literature which had esteemed long, flowing, abundant hair, many laments, as mentioned above, refer to the hair of the dead. One song for a drowned brother, has the hair subjected to a milling by the waves: ‘The long hair that is of my beloved, is waulked amidst the seaweed; the fine hair of my loved one is ripped by the waves; your pillow is the seawrack, cold and wet is your bed.’63 Another, also for a drowned brother, turns around love and praise song conventions focusing on the dress of the subject (an important theme in eulogistic songs) by implied contrast to life: ‘And his body needs no garment and his foot needs no shoe.’64 Of course some laments which have been popular in various contexts were composed by, or have been ascribed to, men.65 ‘Mo Nighean Donn à Chòrnaig/ Còrnaig’ (‘My Beautiful Girl from Cornaig’)66 is one that was very well known, although it was and is more usually sung by men. This example includes features expected of women’s laments such as the singer wishing they had been there at the murder to prevent it or care for wounds;67 first person address to the deceased in the second; description of the dead’s disarrayed hair and clothing and of the blood that was shed. However, there is in this lyric comparatively little treatment of the effects of grief upon the composer.68
The subjects of some laments are inevitably people who have perished accidentally when in pursuit of basic necessities, food and other material resources, for example, when engaged in fishing or in trapping seabirds. A lament by a young woman from Hirte (St. Kilda) for her husband, killed while seabird fowling on Soay, extols his skills, but also relates (for the dead man) the accident and of how she had heard the news:

Your blood was spilt on that rock, your wounding was after the leaping.
You were out on the summit of a rock-stack, and the sea loosened you from your spouse.
Your mother came to me, without fixing on her kertch, and your sister ran when she heard, but far from us is where you died. 69

Another striking Gaelic lament which also reflects the way in which many of these lyrics focus on the survivors, especially the singer, is ‘S daor a cheannaich mi ‘n t-iasgach’ (‘Dearly have I paid for the fishing’). It includes conventional imagery such as the clothing of the drowned man being ripped apart by crabs and seals on the sea-bed and reference to a fiddle, and captures, simply, the loss suffered by island communities dependent on the sea but often deprived of so much by the same, in some versions an idea encapsulated in one final sentence repeating the opening two lines:

Your sister is without a brother, and your mother without a son, your young wife without a husband, and I myself am left without a foster-son.
Dearly have I paid for the fishing, this is the year that has finished me. 70

The decline of the tradition
It is unfortunate that documentation of authentic Scottish Gaelic lament performances is nearly all from accounts by males from outside the community, often with very little or no knowledge of Gaelic, rather than insiders who could have furnished indigenous perceptions and possibly the perspective of participants in the tradition. It is probably easier to reach and understand the functions of the exemplars of the formal, classical elegy because of more abundant evidence available for the literate and upper social strata before and after the crumbling, and eventual exhaustion, of the classical sphere and the ‘ascendance’ of the vernacular. The formulist eulogizing of a patron’s virtues and the clan in terms of classical encomium had more easily lisible purposes than those of the
more individualistically relevant and voiced, emotionally and emotively charged, sometimes ambiguously inclined and opinioned, and often desperate lamenting of the women’s ‘folk’ tradition. Traditional keening is a more complex performance event, harder to understand, impossible to consider without taking into account the accompanying wailing, explosive outbursts, rhythmic physical movements, the frequent proximity of the corpse and funeral ritual activities, and the dynamics between the soloist, chorus and others present. It was in the distant past an intrinsic component of the way in which death was managed within this culture, not merely a song genre which had the dead and grief as its subjects.

The end of lamentation can be seen as simply part of the more general decline in the native culture of the Highlands and Islands and of social change, but opposition to keening by outsiders and indigenes, by clergy, lay people, other agents for the ‘civilizing’ of the Gaidhealtachd, and members of the mainstream of the society, would have been justified by and stemmed from several factors for different groups in the context of a changing culture and society. The panegyric tone of older laments would have seemed increasingly anachronistic, lacking immediate relevance to the lives of eighteenth and nineteenth century islanders, who, like Gaels generally, have been (and are) easily persuaded to accept negative evaluations by outsiders of their own culture, internalizing such attitudes, denying and turning against many aspects of their heritage and tradition. The increased encroachment upon the Gaidhealtachd by Anglo-Scots culture (for example, with the radical socio-cultural impact of formal education) intensified Gaelic communities’ negative evaluations of themselves. The sorts of behaviours involved in keening would be seen as primitive and inappropriate as the communities modernized. Opponents clearly found the element of payment in kind or money to skilled keeners as offensive, partly because of ideas about the authenticity and sincerity of feelings and their expression, although payment actually indicated the significance of ritual death singing and weeping and the esteem earned by performers.71
Lysaght (1997a: 67; 1997b: 112) makes the important point that whatever else may have been working to end the lament tradition in Ireland before then in the form of socio-religious pressures and linguistic change, such as numerous official orders by church authorities over several centuries (Bourke 1993: especially 161; Ó Súilleabháin 1967), the Great Famine of the 1840s meant keening petered out, never to recover, along with other customs, in areas where fatalities were so numerous that even the basic observances for proper burial went unfulfilled and corpses could be left to rot or be devoured by starving animals. In some households no-one was left to lament the dead. The situation in the Highlands and Islands never escalated to the chronic critical proportions of that in Ireland (although there were famine and shortage years in the 1840s and other decades72) and, as already mentioned, the radical cultural changes, and especially the impact of a number of evangelical revivals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were really what made inevitable the eventual demise of the practice of ritual weeping and singing, and the end of the importance of the tradition to public and private mourning processes.

The glorification of a mortal in the manner of an elegist or lamentor elevated the subject above his or her lowly natural state as a sinner and would be seen as vainly foolish, if not evil, even idolatrous, by religious evangelicals, particularly with the development of Gaelic hymnology in the early nineteenth century which appropriated certain aspects of panegyric convention for the purposes of religious praise. Crying out to and on behalf of the deceased in keening would have been regarded by evangelical Christians as inappropriate and heathen conduct, indicative of a refusal to accept ineluctable divine ordainment meekly and devoutly. The excessive behaviour of participants in view and hearing of other people, and the affective influence of this on others, male as well as female, was a way of acting quite contrary to the regulated, reserved bearing and emotional self-negation recommended by religious doctrine, especially that of St. Paul whose scriptures have been so influential on Highlands and Islands Presbyterianism.73
The composition and performance of certain types of verse were to Gaels in the past magical, and, therefore, potentially dangerous and feared. Belief in the pernicious potential of true satire directed against an enemy is well documented and faith was invested in the positive power of other genres.74 The lamenter, in a marginal, special position was, as many texts evidence, often prepared to condemn particular survivors and call upon higher forces to change circumstances, with a certain impunity, one assumes, or she would not have taken such a risk, and often communication was achieved through the mobilization of coding strategies. Whether regarded as uncanny wise women, midwives with special gifts, priestesses or witches, females engaged in activities with a possibly ritualistic, magical element would have been, as in other cultures, repressed throughout much of the history of the Gaidhealtachd. Opposition to the continuation of keening may also have stemmed from a fear, however latent or subconscious, of the potency of the word and of the act of the lamenting woman; or if not this, then the fear of other people's belief in such and the regard with which they treated the keener.75 The very subject matter of most of the laments which have survived - that is dead men - reflects the need women had to identify themselves in terms of relations with men. This is especially clear in laments by widows whose previous social identities were bound up with the exploits and status of the husband.

Although much of the song-poetry to which I have referred has retained popularity as items for entertainment (for example, ‘Griogal Cridhe’ often features at Mod competitions), the traditional contexts for this, largely oral, literature belongs to history. Women and men have, of course, continued to compose, more specifically to write, poetry (less often than before for singing) to articulate grief and commemorate individuals and groups of the dead long after the performance of laments during obsequies had ceased. The only permitted musical component of Free Church or Free Presbyterian-related wakes and funerals is the singing of the Psalms of David in English or Gaelic. Songs and poems are likely to be personal creations made some time after the crisis, and often not intended for public exposure. As one would expect, the First and Second World Wars prompted a great deal of elegiac verse, some of which has been
published in journals or anthologies or has become popular after being set to music. Deaths of well known figures and local crises, like the loss of a fishing crew, have provided other subjects, the most striking Lewis example being the loss of HMS Iolaire. Several poems were generated by the deaths of 181 homeward-bound World War One veterans who died within sight of shore in the early hours of 1 January 1919 (see Dòmhnallach 1978).

**Conclusion**
The collapse of the lamenting tradition meant an end to possibilities for particular kinds of mourning experience, especially in the expression of grief and its sharing with others. Lamentation provided an outlet for the ambiguous and contradictory emotions often aroused as a response to a death - anger as well as sadness, despair, hatred, revenge wishes as well as loneliness, love, pity and sympathy for the dead, different survivors and for oneself. It stimulated and intensified those emotions and related thoughts in others, whether they were participant in the keening or more passive spectators; and it appropriately displayed proper grief to pacify the deceased and satisfy the expectations of others. From other cultures too it is clear that lamentation, as part of the experience of mourning, is not a response to one death alone. Each loss reminds both principal mourners and others less touched by the death of past bereavements, reviving feelings which they engendered and precipitating new ones, and it provokes fears about future deaths, including one’s own, and eschatological speculation. One death allows a possibly peripheral mourner to express again usually suppressed or forgotten grief for previous losses. The fear of deaths yet to come can be made sharper, additionally illustrating how the mourning process is not easy to delimit and often involves engagement with the condition of bereavement before a death happens - and this is not just in obvious cases where people try to prepare for the death of someone who is terminally ill or very elderly attempting to imagine what the grief will be like and how they will adjust to life without that person.
Like other responses to crises, when these were different from, or amplified enactments of, everyday conduct, lamenting performances were also vents for emotions which usually would be contained or carefully challenged, for opinions normally voiced in much more limited company, if at all. Keening and lament possessed an intrinsic licence allowing unusual expressiveness which would have the effect of heightening feelings in performance and in spectating. This outlet for multi-layered, ambiguous, even conflicting feelings and reactions, was lost when keening and concomitant behaviour became culturally redundant and unacceptable.

At the level of identity-constitution, the ritual drama of keening was an arena in which gender was enacted, according to cultural discourse which typified expected female conduct for that context: the intense emotional expressiveness and behavioural extremes, the rupture of ordinary barriers between the personal and the public, the individual and the social, between nature and culture, all occurred in the context of cultural discourses relating ideas of femininity to ones of emotion and emotionality. These performances contributed to maintaining a feminine ideal: as the tradition was maintained, so too were certain notions about its practitioners and their gender. But lamenting also shows how individuals could refuse and refute ideals, and when understandings of emotions and spiritual ideas changed, the relevance and suitability of the keening tradition altered. The individual woman taking part acted according to her understanding of feminine behaviour and female nature, her negotiation of constructed narratives of gendered identity, with each such act being a further contribution in her everyday existence to the cumulative process of keeping up the appearance of her gender and at the same time making her gender. Men may have wept, openly shown feelings of grief, sadness and anger, and sometimes sung their sorrow, but the keener is a female figure, performing signifiers of her gender. The ritualistic and symbolic role of this 'psychopomp', who, as in many other cultures, would be credited with the capacity for extraordinary communication across human and supernatural realms, disappeared, making the supernatural tradition of the banshee and similar omen-bearers less meaningful and relevant. The disappearance of the keening woman in the islands meant the loss of an
important traditional character women could identify with, admire and aspire to resemble or be.

The whole sequence of experience tied to the life cycle was altered through such cultural change, and changes in the way emotions were managed and creatively expressed. The demise of lamentation as an institution also reflected the status of women within the para-religious and established religious life of islanders. The relative stillness prevailing after the wails, impassioned pleas to the dead, desperate voicing of personal loss, musical wailings, palm-striking and sobbing of the past is filled today in the average funeral with quiet crying, whispers, occasional outbursts that people try to quell, and with Bible-reading and psalm-singing led by men, a quite different formal and public performance of, and way of managing, individual and group reactions to a death and of conceptualizing relations between the deceased and the living. Differentiating the behaviour of men and women are discourses of gender which provide mourners with ways of presenting themselves in ways that are appropriate and consistent with their gender identity and, thus, contribute to its processual construction and maintenance.

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1 Other publications with alternative versions of a song sometimes have different orthographic practices, but I have retained the spelling in the texts first referred to.
2 However women taught and learned the techniques of structural composition, rhyming, of exploiting panegyric conventions and other commonplaces, of answering the demands of the genre, or texts and ritual protocols in more consciously deliberate and formal ways, we can assume that every performance was an educational opportunity, however passive that learning may have been for an onlooker or those actually involved, and that individuals would rehearse and practise techniques of composition and delivery in other contexts, solely or in groups. Bourke mentions that in Ireland young girls would, for instance, rehearse the keening cry to achieve the appropriately eerie, 'blood-curdling' effect (1993: 165).
3 The verses that accompanied the clapping and smacking of the finished tweed. Basaidh comes from bas, boîse/baise (gen.), -an/-a (pl.) (fem. n.), palm of the hand.
4 Other particular customary, and perhaps to some degree supernatural, observations around the fulling included work practices stemming from a belief that to repeat a song during the work session was bad luck, and the cloth was circulated around the waulking wattle or board deiseal, in a sunwise direction, in harmony with the order of nature.
5 The custom of bundling a youth in the textile and wishing well to its eventual wearer or user if it was to be a blanket, laid emphasis on fertility, and in the songs at the closing stages of the occasion there were references to futurity and marriage.
6 'It seems that every Highland community had an expert, a local mourning woman whom the township kept in food for her beasts, summer and winter and who, in turn, bewailed their dead...'

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for them' (Gordon 1984: 63). 'Catherine Pearson, Ceann Tangabhal, Barra (24th September 1872), said: There was a midwife and a mourning-woman in each townland in Barra. And it was an obligation on the people of each townland to find each woman of the sort in summer grass and winter fodder to the satisfaction of the bailiff on the sword's edge. And the people might not see one of these suffer loss or want more than her fellow, in order that each of them should be able to do her duty when it came to her, and alas for her who should not - she was the woman of the hard fate!' (Carmichael vol. 5, 1954: 345)

Hiring was undertaken more often by the upper classes might have become more necessary as lament skills became rarer.

Bourke (1993) has shown how Eileen O’Connell might be regarded as having used distraction in her poem for her husband Art O’ Leary, which is often held as a model of uxorial affection and the expression of grief yet includes, for example, references to him having beaten her. C.f. the studies of this elegy by Marren (1993), who is also aware of the subtexts present in the poem, and by Bromwich (1948).

Mvula’s article (1986) on the pounding songs of the Chewa women of central Malawi conveys how they are ‘a highly purposeful and powerful indirect mechanism for smoothly playing out and managing intra-family tensions in their matrilineal and matrilocal society. While rhythm and a sense of group solidarity and participation reduce the physical agony of pounding corn, the verbal messages in the songs highlight mental agonies and domestic quarrels that are safely manipulated and managed through the artistic conduits of sarcasm, ridicule, and direction.

‘The pounding song becomes a spokesperson or an intermediary between the singer and the other party involved in the dispute. The song as an institutionalized strategic protocol is part of the set controls over and cues about the aggressive intentions of the performer and the intended audience. As a powerful and versatile speech tool, the pounding song is employed by women in situations of contention to express their suspicions and aggressive intentions while at the same time not revealing these so openly as to provoke another situation of tension of disequilibrium’ (1986: 265).

The song text or recording that survives today comes from the process of a verbal creation becoming stabilized in the form of several versions, or perhaps into one (possibly even quite ossified) text, through repetition and transmission between singers and listeners, in the vernacular, orally-mediated process that produces variants. The entextualization which is the effect of the oral performance being transformed into the written text or the audio recording creates a decontextualized product separated from performance; and the efforts then made to piece together empirical information about the circumstances of the creation and life-course of a text, are processes of contextualization or recontextualization, of matching texts and supposed contexts, that facilitate analysis. See Bauman and Briggs 1990.

There are apparently some differences between the Irish and Scottish traditions as far as they were documented: for example, in the occasional performance of laments by men also in Ireland (e.g. Ó Súilleabháin 1967: 131, 136), while the Scottish evidence only depicts women lamenting, unless the Irish references are of a custom that had already died in Scotland, and perhaps might even also relate to developments from male bardic and official poets reciting eulogies at funerals.

According to Ó Súilleabháin, ‘there is evidence to show that female keeners were active in Ireland over a thousand years ago’ (1967: 144, n.11). He partly supports this by reference to such material as Dindshenchas texts. Extant comment on lamenting from outsiders dates from the twelfth century into the twentieth, with laments of oral provenance being published in the nineteenth century in English translation from the Irish (Lysaght 1997a: 65).
That indolence which has been remarked as a general concomitant of the Highland character, is probably a remnant of the old military life, which afforded long intervals of ease. That it did not proceed from a dulness of feeling is evident, from the impassioned strain of the ancient poetry, and music, still preserved. The Islanders, as they are inferior to their neighbours in every branch of modern improvement, so they excel them in these relics of former excellence.' (Stoddart 1801 vol. 2: 4-5)


E.g. a traveller in Ireland, around 1617, wrote that: ‘The near friends and all the company cry out to him [the dead or dying], ... reproaching him with unkindness in forsaking them.... When the sick person is dead they make a monstrous cry, with shrieking, howling and clamping of hands; and in like sort they follow the dead body at the burial, in which outcries the nurse, the daughters and the concubines are most vehement.’ (Fynes Moryson, An Itinerary, quoted in Ó Muirthe 1978: 20)

In short, the _con clamatio_ was set up by friends in the same manner as Virgil describes that consequential of Dido’s death’ (93). Latin _con clamatio, con clamationis_ (fem. n.), great shout.

Latin _ululatus, -us_ (masc. n.), wailing, shrieking, yells; _ululo, ululare_ (vb.), shriek, yell, howl, cry out.

‘The upper class hire women to moan and lament at the funeral of their nearest relatives’ (Burt 1815, vol. 2, re c.1720s or 1730s).

By even that time, implies Pennant, keening in Scotland may have been gradually falling into desuetude, perhaps explaining why he recalls his Irish observations at such length here: ‘The _coranich, or singing at funerals, is still in use in some places_’ (1815: 92 [my emphasis]). Buchanan, who travelled the Hebrides between 1782 and 1790, writes ‘Burials are preceded by the large bag-pipe, playing some mournful dirge. They continue playing until they arrive at the place of interment, while the women sing the praises of the dead, clasping the coffin in their arms, and lie on the graves of their departed friends’ (1793: 169-70).

Of a Kildare funeral in 1683 it was anonymously recorded that, ‘as soon as the bearers have taken up the body, they begin their shrill cries and hideous hootings... and if there be not enough to make out a good cry they hire the best and deepest mouthed in all the country and so they proceed towards the church; this now may be heard two miles or more. When they come at the church-yard on this occasion, (and other times also)... they repair to their graves, where they kneel over them, knocking and beating upon the grave and praising the party,... intreating that they [the dead] would attend and give ear to them, then in an odd tone sorrowing and lamenting their loss complain and tell them how they are misused.’ (From Edward MacLysaght, _Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century_ (Dublin 1939), quoted in Ó Súilleabháin 1967: 321-2)

Another Irish account describes the nature of the responsiveness between soloists and chorus, the, ‘manner of repetition or acknowledgement that runs around when the keener gives out a sentence, the deep, yet suppressed sobs of the nearer relatives, and the stormy, uncontrollable cry of the widow or bereaved husband when allusion is made to the domestic virtues of the deceased - all heighten the effect of the keen; but in the open air, winding round some mountain pass, when a priest or person greatly beloved and respected is carried to the grave, and the keen, swelled by a thousand voices, is borne upon the mountain echoes - it is then absolutely magnificent’ (Ó Muirthe 1978: 28, quoting from Hall’s _Ireland_ (1843)).

SA 1968/248/B3 and SA 1970/10/B4 and B7.
This record illustrates the unusual status of the keener, but is also an account of how her own abuse of the position contributed to the ultimate stages in the demise of the tradition (1954: 338).

SA 1968/85/A4-5.

SA 1967/21/B8.


SA 1958/26/B2; and SA 1968/153/A3-7 and B1.

Some wildmen, like Suibhne, are also credited with poetry composition.

When men also participated in lamenting, as they occasionally did, the response of outsider observers must have seemed all the more wildly foreign.

Despite this, Ní Riain claims that there was some minimal interaction between the two and that they are linked in their differences from the mass of secular song (1980: 123-4). Comparing the ‘Virgin’s’ laments and songs about this (most examples of which survive from the 18th century and after) with more formal compositions, she says, ‘it is obvious... that the figurehead of the Virgin existed far stronger in the folk mind’ than in that of the amhrán composers (124), and that many (perhaps most) folk religious ballads and carols were female compositions, because of the centrality in these of the impassioned dialogue between Mary, Christ and others present; a tendency in the language and imagery to dwell on, and for the singer to identify with, the Virgin’s hysterical maternal anguish (124); and the possibility that the singer places herself as a keener in relation to Christ at the Crucifixion (133).

The story exemplifies folk euhemerization which could assert Christian origins for pre-Christian traditions in order to defend and promote their continuation. Such a widely-used strategy also seems to have been employed in the ascription of folk lullabies to the Virgin Mary. O Madagáin (1989: 34) mentions a Connemara cradle song the tune for which mothers were said to revere as tradition claimed it had been sung by the Virgin, and the Hebridean Táladh Chriosta (‘Christ Child’s Lullaby’), which was said to have been sung by her also.

In 1817, one writer declared of an Irish lament of which he had been given a translation: ‘It is pathetic, I agree, and the more because there is none of the Christian consolation, none of the meeting again in some quiet country, though quiet is not the heaven of such heroes. But this is all unqualified grief, and certainly more deeply melancholy on that account’ (Ó Muirithe 1978: 24, quoting from Sainthill, Collected Letters, ed. James. London, 1850, letter dated May 13, 1817).

One, perhaps surprising, example is the lamenting still practised in certain strongly religious communities in present-day Hungary. ‘One of the most striking features of Hungarian laments is that they are generally entirely lacking in references to life after death. And this among a people who were converted to Christianity practically a thousand years ago! Neither the beauty of heaven nor the horrors of hell, neither purgatory nor the thought of being reunited in the otherworld arise in these laments. At the most, a few standard phrases at the end refer to religion. However, it is more common for the lamenters to use religious motifs as their means of expression.’ (Dömötor 1987: 125-26)

‘Thug mi liubhairt do Mhac Dé d’fhéar mo thighe uam./ Thug mi liubhairt dhe mo ghaol/ Measg nan aingeal is nan naomh,/ ’S iad a ghabh ris gu caomh ann am Flaitheanas.’

From ‘Cumha Bás a Fir agus a h-Ighne’ ('Lament on the Deaths of her Husband and Daughter') (MacDonald 1972: 54-7). A poem with stronger religious sentiments is her ‘Laoidh
Sileas acknowledges that the grief of Alasdair's widow is much greater than her own loss at his death, although profoundly affected nevertheless; her sympathy is enhanced and augmented for she too has known widowhood, but she recommends turning to God for succour and sustenance: 'Let every wife who is without a husband pray to have the Son of God in his place, for He it is who can aid her in her every sorrow which afflicts her.'

'S-uithe bean a bhlos gun cheile,/ Guidheadh i Mac Dè 'n a àite;/ O 's E 's urra bhith 'ga còmhnadh/ Anns gach bròin a chuir a' chuireas càs oír'. (MacDonald 1972: 70-75)

'Guidheam t-anam a bhith sàbhailt/ Ona chàradh anns an ùir thu;/ Guidheam sonas air na dh'fhàg thu/ Ann ad àros 's ann ad dhúthaich.' (ibid.)

C.f., for example, the Anglo-Scots ballad 'The Dowie Dens of Yarrow'.

'Mile mallachd do'n bhuaachall'/ A bha 'g uallach na sprèidhe,/ A thug fios do mo bràthreas,/ A dhoil go àirigh na gèige. . . 'S ann a fhuan thu 'n ceud leagail/ Anns a n'eabar 'na leumadh:/ 'S bha t' fhuil cràobhach dearg nasail/ Anns a' luachair 'na leumadh:/ 'S bha an corpan bhile/Aig na gillean 'ga reubadh.' (James Campbell, Wester Ross, SA 1952/88/B3, stanzas 1 and 4-6) C.f. in Ross 1957: 142.

It is performed to various tunes and all the versions surviving since the seventeenth century are in regular metre because of the effects of it being used as a lullaby.

E.g. SA 1964/23/B2 only alludes to this in its fourth stanza when the mother voices her fear that her son will not live to avenge his murdered father.

'Nuair a bhios mnàthan òg a' bhaile,/ 'Nochd nan cadal sèimh,/ 'S ann bhiós mis' air bruach do lice,/ 'Bualadh mo dhà làimh.' (Tolmie 1911: 196-7)

One example of this mentioned in connection with clothing is the use of garments or descriptions of what has happened to them as metaphors for the state of the composer and in the evocation of events.

For example, that point at which the body is made invisible and tactually inaccessible to the mourners is one that is often concentrated on as traumatic: 'My brown-haired hunter is buried in a narrow-headed coffin: a carpenter securing it, ready to put you down under the earth where I shall neither hear nor see you' ('Tha mo shealgair/ Donn, an tasgaidh,/ An ciste chinn, chaoil;/ Saor 'ga bannadh/ Air gos do chur/ Sios fo'n talamh./ Far nach cluinn mi/ Thu 's nach fhàite mi') (Mary Morrison, Barra, SA 1965/106/4). One of the best examples of the vividness of Gaelic lament arises in a song attributed to the fairy lover of a young mortal man whose mother and brother discover his secret love and have him killed; Ross quotes the following 'to reveal the beauty and pathos of its imagery' (1957: 135): 'I heard your scream on the hillside, but I did not heed it until I heard the voice of the raven. A thousand curses on the brothers, they have left before me a mirror, the blood of your chest, of your mouth and your throat, and you lying in the fields' ('Chuala mi do ghlaodh 'sa bhruathach/ ach na chuala cha do chuir umhail/ gus an caulas guth an fhithich./ Mile mallachd air na bràthreas/ dh'fhàg iad air mo bheulabh sgathan/fuail do chuid do bheul/ 's do bhàghaid/ 's tu nad shineadh air na blàrù') (quoted in Ross 1957: 135 taken from SA 1954/31 [RL 629A5]).

'S chuir iad do cheann air stob daraich/ Tacan beag bho d’ eòr.' (Tolmie 1911: 196-7)

'Dh’iarr iad mise chon na banais/ Banais nach robh ann/ Bha do cheann ac’ air an dealg/ Air a’ phost ùd thall.' (SA 1957/15/A3, Jessie MacKenzie, Lewis)

'Cruas ur làmh an ceann ur lann/ A’ gearradh cheann gu feur;/ A’ sgathadh chluas ‘s a’ sgoltadh chnuachd/ ‘S a’ cur na ruaig ‘n an déidh.' (MacDonald 1972: 26-31)
In ‘Cunha Mhicleòid’ (‘Lament for MacLeod’), which tradition reports was composed by Mòrì nighean Alasdair Ruaidh (Mary MacLeod, c.1660-c.1729; see MacInnes 1966; Matheson 1952) for her chief, MacLeod of Dunvegan, when he pretended to have died, the bard sings, ‘It is with thinking of you that my body has been in acute suffering, and the lashes worn away from my eyes’ [‘Sè bhi smaoineann ort, / So-chràidh mi ’m chorp, / ’Sa chnàmh na ruisg bho m’shùil.’ (Tolmie 1911: 198-99)], and, similarly, in a marbhhrann (dirge) for MacLeod of Bernera, she speaks of her sleeplessness and ‘a great heaviness... that has come upon me and left my veins without vigour’ [‘Is trom an cudthrom so dhùidh, / Dh’fhàg mo chuislean gun lùth.’ (MacLeod 1982: 88-9)].

Mòrì nighean Alasdair Ruaidh and Mairearad nighean Lachlaimn (see Mac Gill-Eain 1965) share the fame of folk legends which assert that they were buried face-down, like witches. It is generally taken that this was punishment for their deliberate composition of verse in traditionally male forms.

The text ‘Caoidh Màthar’ (‘A Mother’s Mourning’), collected from a Skye woman in 1896, is almost entirely taken up with this theme: ‘no cries will awaken you, nor calling aloud. The fiddle being tuned may not rouse you, nor the bagpipe with joyous chanter. The wail of your own mother cannot wake you. Mary, will you not reply at all? You will not reply; oh I am woeful! Last night I was sitting beside your grave, but I received no consolation there, for it was too easy to leave without you knowing it.’ [Chà dhùisg glaodhach thu no èigheach./ Chà dhùisg an fheidhead /’ga gleisadh, /’No piob-mhor nam feadan éibhinn, /’Chà dhùisg glaod do mhàthar thief thu./ Mòrì, nach freagar thu idir? / Cha fhreagar; mo thruaigh mise! / Bha mi ’n raoir aig bruach do lice./ Ma bha, cha b’fheairrde mo mhìsneach. /’S gu ’m b’fhurasd faibh gun fhios duit.’ (Tolmie 1911: 204-5)

[Cha b’è cumha mo leannain:/ Ged a dh’hanadh e buham.] / Ach a cumha mo bhràithrean:/ Tha cnàmh anns a’ chuan./ Cumha Eachainn is Lachlaimh:/ Dh’fhàg tana mo ghrugag./’S oil leam diol ’ur cùl clannach:/ ’S an fhèamainn ’ga luadh./ Cha’n eil bòt sa chaolais./ Nach choachail mo shnuadh.’ (‘Cumha Bhraithrean’ (‘Lament for the Brothers’), Tolmie 1911: 202)

There are accounts of hired mourning women wearing smallcloths, usually of green (interestingly a colour associated with the supernatural in folklore), on their heads, and tearing at their head-dresses and hair as they wailed, wept and struck their hands together (Allardyce 1888 [see Gordon 1984: 63]; Burt 1815: 190 [see Bennett 1992:255]).

[Dh’fhàg sud mnathan anns a’ bhasraich:/ Toirt am faity a nios./’S cha robh neach a chual a’ choannag/ Nach do choachail nial.’ (MacDonald 1972: 26-31)

Mo chreach ur clann ’s ur mnathan vaisle:/ Toirt a nua an gruaig.’

I have not offered any comparison between lament and elegy by women and by men, but should mention with reference to male bardic compositions in Scottish and Irish Gaelic an occasional apparent convention wherein the poet almost portrays himself in some ways in the role of his patron’s lover, a theme that has provoked considerable critical interest. For a consideration of this in regard to bardic elegies see Simms 1989.

‘An déidh fhialach ’na aonar:/ bids a daoan an uaingeas - / sgeul mun gearanach daoine/ mnài caoitreachd nan luathbhos,/ is taid ag combhrith ri chèile - / ceid gun éibhneas, seachd truaighe:/ leum mo chrhidhe /’na spealtadh/ mu’n chaismeachd ’n uair chualas.’ (Morrison 1970: 46-57)

‘Oh, a sorrowful woman am I, mourning alone in this glen; sorely afflicted, and in anguish, laying you out, darling of your mother.’ [‘S mise a’ bhean bhochd tha gu brònach/ ’S mi ’s a’ ghleannan so ’nam aòinar./’S mise a’ bhean bhochd tha gu cràidteach,/ ’S mi ’gad chàradh, laoigh do mhàthar.’ (Tolmie 1911: 197-8; lament for a mother whose daughter died in strange
circumstances while they were alone at a shieling, through, the tradition says, the work of the gruagach, the protective deity of the cattle; recorded 1861, Skye)

57. 'The blood of thy lovely body was seeping through your shirt, and though I drank some of it my love, your wounds did not heal' ['Gu robh fuil do chirp chubhradh/ ‘S i ri drùthadh roimh d’ lèinidh,/' 'S gad a dh’òil mi ghaoil pàirt dhi/ Cha do shlànach do cheurchoim.’ (Mary Morrison, Barra, SA 1965/100/A8)]. C.f., e.g., James C. Campbell's (of Wester Ross) version on SA 1952/88/B3; and Fanny MacIsaac's version, SA 1951/8/A8.

58. 'Ge b’e sgeir no/ Bodh an d’thràigh thu; Ge b’e tuìrr an/ Dh fhàg an lân thu./ Dh’òlainn deoch, ge/ B’oil le m’ chàirdean;/ Cha’n ann dhe’n bhùrn./ No dhe’n t-sàile,/ Ach fuil do chuim, ‘s tu ‘n/ Dèidh do bhàthadh.’ (Tolmie 1911: 224-5)

59. 'Dh’òlainn deoch, ge b’oil le càc e,/ Cha b’ann do bhùrn no do shàile,/ No do dh’hjion dearg na spàinte,/ Ach fuil do chuim ‘s tu ‘n dèidh bhàthadh.’ (‘Ailein Duinn’, Campbell and Collinson 1969: 44-9; c.f. versions in, e.g., Craig 1949: 2-3; Tocher 3, 22 (1976), 216-219 (from Margaret MacKay, SA 1952/115/8).

60. Carmichael refers to Shakespeare, who apparently mentions drinking the blood of a friend, but does not elaborate on this further, and to Spenser who had seen a woman in Limerick drink the blood of her foster-son after he had been executed, and includes some examples, from ‘Ailein Duinn’, ‘Griogal Cridhe’ and the song (not a lament but a praise song performed as she tends his wounds) composed by Nic Coiseam for her foster-son after the 1601 Battle of Carnish in North Uist, where the poet says, ‘The blood of thy fragrant body was soaking through thy linen, I myself was sucking it till my breath became hoarse’ ['Bha do leine na ballan, Bha an-t-saighead na spreòd/ Romh chorp seòlta na glaineadh/ Bha fuil do chuim chìubhradh/ A drùìddadh romh ‘n anart./ Bha fuil do chorp uasal/ Air wachdar gach fearainn. Bha mise ga sùgadh/ Go na thùch air m’ anail.’ (‘A Mhic Iain ‘ic Sheumais’, Carmichael 1900b: 282; c.f. Craig 1949: 2-3). In a footnote to a text of ‘Ailein Duinn’ in the Tolmie Collection, Lucy Broadwood quotes Marjory Kennedy Fraser’s note about a Trotternish poet who ‘drank “a mild intoxicating drink of the blood” of her lover, . . . so late as the early years of the nineteenth century’ (Tolmie 1911: 226).

61. . . tu bhith ‘m bùrr nan toon ag èirigh/ Mucan mara bhith ‘gad reubadh,/ Bhith ‘gad ghearradh as a chèile.’ (‘Ailein Duinn’, Campbell and Collinson 1969: 44-49)

62. ‘O gur mise th’a’ir mo sgaradh/ Gu bheil do leaba anns an fheamain/ Gur iad na ròin do luchd-taighe/ ‘S na reutild árd do choinnleán geala/ ‘S do cheò-lìdhile gaoir do mara.’ (Flora MacNeil, SA 1951/1/B6 in this and some other versions of ‘Ailein Duinn’ she loses her father and three brothers in the same boat accident. C.f. a Skye version of ‘Ailein Duinn’ in Tolmie 1911: 48, 204 (recorded, from Skye woman, 1899), and versions in Tocher 6, 41 (1988), 304-7 (from SA 1968/100/2), and Tocher 3, 22 (1976), 216-19, where there is a fuller account of the tradition attached to the song, composed for her Lewis suitor who had drowned by a Scalpay woman who died, according to versions of the account, just five days after him, having searched the shore for his body. When they were carrying her body to Rodel for burial, the boat ran became too heavy as the weather changed, and they had to push the coffin overboard three times because it was washed back on board; Ann Campbell’s coffined body and the remains of Alan Morrison were found together (Tocher 22). According to another tradition she sings that she has prayed that she be buried in neither linen nor earth (Tocher 41); see also Campbell and Collinson (1969: 44-47 and notes).

63. ‘S e mo ghrùdh do chùl clannach./ Anns an fheamain ‘ga luadh./ ‘S e mo ghrùdh do chùl ceutach/ Ga reubadh ‘san stùaidh./ ‘S e do chluasaig an fheamain./ ‘S flùich do leabha ‘s gur fuar.’ (Campbell and Collinson 1969: text XXVI, 120-25)
Other songs composed about death by men for wives or lovers that have been especially popular include the lullaby ‘Cha tig Mòr mo bhean dhachaighd’ (‘Marion my wife, will not come home’) which connects with a migratory legend that no doubt added to its survival: after the wife had apparently died and been coffinied, one or more thieves had tried to remove rings or a ring from her fingers; the pain of this roused the unconscious woman and when she returned home the ‘widower’ was singing this lullaby to one of their children. Many versions of the tìladh and the story have been recorded, such as those reproduced in Tocher 1, 4 1971-72: 120-23 (from SA 1970/309/11 [Benbecula], and MS sources [South Uist]) and in Tocher 3, 22 (1976: 222-3) (from SA 1952/106/8 [Harris, Margaret MacKay]).

Just three examples are SA 1951/8/A4 (Mrs Nicolson), SA 1954/153/1 (Hugh MacRae, Skye), and SA 1958/7/A6 (from Alasdair MacLeod, Skye, and printed in Tocher 7, 43 (1991), 62-3). There are Cornaigs in Tiree and Barra that have also been claimed to be the site of the event.

Like some other laments it contrasts the wake and funeral observances with other life crisis rites of passage that would have been much more desirable and would have possibly engaged the subject and the singer in quite different complementary roles. Versions of ‘Mo Nighean Donn à Chòrnoig’ exemplify the motif of reference to the alcohol that had been set aside for the subject’s wedding and betrothal being used instead for the wake and funeral: ‘It’s a pitiful evening’s work for me to be returning to your funeral, and the drink that was for your wedding feast was drunk at your wake, and the drink that was for your betrothal, my complete destruction! was drunk at your funeral.’ ‘S truagh an obair fhéasgair dhomh/ Bhith tilleadh farr do thorraidh/ ‘S an deoch a bha go d’ bhanais/ ‘S ann air t’ alairaidh a dh’ òladh/ ‘S an deoch a bha go d’ réiteach/ Mo chréich leir! as ciomn do thòrraidh.’ (SA 1951/8/A4) Also ‘It’s I who am distraught,/ A betrothal party tonight in your townland!/ If there is it’s not for your wedding,/ But to bury you in concealment,/ In a slender coffin closed by joiners’ (Campbell 1990: 123-25).


‘Dhòirteadh d’huil air a chloich ud./ Bha do lot an deigh lèumadh./ Bha thu muigh air bhàrr stuaidhe./ ‘S muir ga d’huasgladh do chèile.
Thànaig thugam do mhàthair;/ Gun i ‘charadh a brèid oirr’;/ ‘S ruith do phìuthair ’n uair ‘chual’ I;/ Ach b’hisd' uaimn far an d'èug thu.’ (D.R.M. 1876; my translation. Ten verses and a chorus are given in Gaelic.)

‘Tha do phìuthar gun bhràthair/ ‘S tha do mhàthair gun mhacan,/ Tha do bhean òg hun chèile/ 'S tha mi fhein dheth gun dalta./ 'S daor a cheannacht mi 'n t-làsgach - / Seo a' bhìladhna chuir as dhomh.’ (Tocher 3, 21 (1975-76): 200-203; from a woman in Benbecula, SA 1959/50/B2)

It is true, however, that payment could lead to abuse: for example, several keeners would compete to outdo each other in the hope of the best being paid the most, and the lamenter was also in a powerful position as exploiter, the unspoken threat of satire and criticism, or of simply not doing the job properly, pressuring the bereaved family to treat her as well as possible.
These did result in starvation deaths and which were often coincidental and contributory to disease epidemics and other crises, and these events would have had sometimes irreversible effects on the community life and culture of areas were worst hit.

It would be interesting to explore what part Pauline and other Biblical teachings that advise circumspection, quietness and modesty have played in the formation of a ‘Lewis personality’. Islanders, whether pious or not, are often portrayed as having typically a certain shyness, introvertedness and emotional reserve, and has sometimes been blamed in part for an apparent shortage of competitive drive and enterprise in the culture.

For example, lullabies may have been functionally and effectively very similar to charms or spells.

The late archivist of the School of Scottish Studies, Alan Bruford (1996) had begun to analyze this factor and its specific dimension of gender for the Scottish evidence in ways that had already been done for Ireland to some extent.
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

This final chapter does not indicate or effect closure on the research of which this thesis is a partial report and a component, but it primarily reiterates points of analysis that have been made in the discussion above. Many questions have been implicitly, if not patently, raised, and other exploratory directions and interpretive approaches could be followed for the materials, contexts and issues considered here. One of the outcomes of my research should be to open up topics and forms of data which would tend to be treated in ‘straightforward’ historical and ethnological ways to other kinds of analysis. This basically ethnological study has relevance outside of one discipline and may contribute to women’s studies in Scotland and elsewhere.

Performances embrace marked, dramatic, structured enactments where there is some separation from ‘ordinary’ behaviour and linguistic discourse (like keening and mortuary ceremonies); and quotidian, repetitious, habitual, but nevertheless patterned and semiotically loaded behaviours (tending to the bereaved, choosing and wearing an outfit, casual interactions with others). At both extremes of formalization, folklore constitutes a vernacular epistemology underlying the ideas and beliefs expressed in our performances, it is our ‘equipment for living’. This research shows that barely premeditated behaviours can be, as much as more theatrical and ritual behaviours, performances where actions with semiotic significance function as indicators of gender. It argues that such repetitious citations function like illocutionary performative speech acts that generate the gender attributes which they ostensibly and conventionally seem merely to express. Such iteration strengthens the authority of historical discourses to which users refer; it is how the individual maintains a sense of herself through identification with a construction of femaleness and femininity. That women and men transgress, refuse and manipulate gender signifiers that have had their meaning established in tradition, which itself cannot continue as a process without individual enactments and repetitions of phenomena which are taken to be its products, proves that the discourses within which gender constructions are produced are not fully, ineluctably determining. Gender is a variable, individual, negotiated identity comprehensible through the historicity of its signifiers, but an intrinsic element of gender discourse is resignification, redefinition, and
reinterpretation. Studies of coding illuminate particular ways in which a performer exercises such resignificatory power in ‘traditional’ and other cultural enactments generally. This is specifically relevant here in terms of gender as a cultural, discursive process, and of how her performances, which express and constitute who she is to others and herself, are multiple, complex, situated, and differently apprehensible to other subjectivities involved in an interaction.

This study of women and death demonstrates the value of forms of data and subjects that often are discounted or unrecorded, and asserts that existing materials need to be analyzed in fresh ways. For example, a great deal of space is devoted here to Gaelic women’s verse which is not necessarily relevant to death in order to suggest their song culture, and especially the sorts of concerns and voices that were available to female composers and which appealed to those who repeated the songs. I give this topic extended attention because, while I appreciate keenly that empirical research into the provenance of songs and variants and comparison of variants are essential, the frequent expression of serious community concerns in song, can offer novel insights into women’s place in the culture and their understandings of this, as can the existing corpus of oral narrative, tales, legends and personal experience stories, and the material challenges us to engage it in other ways (including with curiosity about encrypted strata of meaning). The textual material can be combined with contextual historical ethnographic data in new analytical trajectories. It would have been valuable to explore more closely vernacular theory and praxis, in the past especially, in comparison with data from other cultures, and to pick up eschatological themes, to examine elements of ‘islandness’ relevant to the material, but these are not done here. Similarly, more intensive and broad ethnographic documentation in the present day could be the basis for an entirely different project, less concerned with subjecting existing data to new interpretation.

Occasional instances of apparent incongruity (often generated by the extent of socio-cultural and religious change in the Gaidhealtachd in the period referred to) may arise because I look at both the past and present. This facet of the research reflects my own interests in the historical and the modern and, I hope, the illuminative potential of intertextual exploitation of diverse forms of information (although this is
a possibility which is not creatively pursued here). Not concentrating on one particular period is appropriate to those aspects of this study which are concerned with diachronic changes in ‘tradition’ and with the historical, situated specificity of cultural constructions of gender. The temporal framing of the thesis acknowledges the way in which gender signifiers and performative utterances or actions depend on their history to be effective; they are only comprehensible and meaning-generative if users and interpreters know of past usages and appropriate interpretations. It is to that very history which appeals are made which invoke the authority of tradition and the customary to justify prevailing normative conditions.

Different themes in this research offer instances of the temporality of gender ideals and roles in the sorts of involvement available to women and the discourses in which they can negotiate aspects of personal identity at particular sites. Some of the more obvious ones that materialize evidence of patent historical change in understandings of typical female behaviour could be reiterated here as they relate to separate topics in the research. The changing responsibilities of women in regard to the dying and the dead are part of the professionalization of medicine and undertaking, the hospitalization and commercialization of death, and the supercession of traditional domestic medicine and care by scientific methods. Women’s altered care-giving at and around the time of death is, however, still grounded in more general female roles based in culturally embedded assumptions about female nature as better suited to caring. ‘Nature’ has been redefined according to prevailing economic demands, and women still have to fulfil their domestic roles but are also ‘allowed’ outside of the home, are needed in the workplace.

The typical, customary participation of women in obsequial ceremonies on Lewis reflects tremendous social and religious changes which have been part of wider tendencies, while manifesting specific local features. It is impossible, as noted in Chapter 3, to guess how religious islanders were before evangelization. Certainly they were not great adherents of institutionalized religion, but what was important was the vernacular para-religion of traditional belief. Women often led these ceremonies, sharing ritual and spiritual knowledge and beliefs. Under Presbyterianism and other established Christianities the situation altered so much that
women were denied any formal role in the dominant faith and most of the ‘folk religion’ was condemned and gradually discarded by its former practitioners. The emotional support women may be expected to tender to others at wakes and funerals has perhaps changed little with time. It is difficult to say how mutually supportive people were in the past, but their reactions which differ so strikingly from modern ones suggest also other types and expressions of sympathy in interrelations. When weeping, wailing, and other explicit displays of grief were conventional, people fed off each others’ emotions (descriptions of keening show this very clearly) and helped in the outward performance of these. Nowadays it is the responsibility of those caring for the distressed mourner to calm her/him down, and even encouraging someone to express their loss is undertaken within certain limits so that grief never engulfs and overwhelms. Women’s responsibility for the management of hospitality at these events prevails and any other household labour created by the crisis is generally designated to females. Their visible public roles have changed dramatically over the centuries. In the past a keening woman wailed her grief, addressed the dead, and composed verse of extravagant praise, she desperately loosened her hair and clothing, and tore at these as she rocked her body, grasped the corpse, swallowed blood from the wounds of the deceased, pounded her palms on the coffin, picked up skulls unearthed as the grave was being dug, and shared certain actions with a group of others. In the present, the mourner should cry or somehow manifest signs of grief and sadness; she sits through solemn, sober services of prayers, readings and other words spoken by men; she sings psalms composed in Biblical times and accepts or gives whispered condolences and consolation passed between bowed heads and firm hands laid in sympathy on an arm or hand, assurances that ‘things will be all right’; she turns the body over to professionals, dresses in darker clothes; and if her behaviour becomes too grief stricken, others will try to control her and perhaps seek medical help. When the culmination of burial arrives, she must wait behind for the men to carry out this closing duty and farewell; and, if she is a Christian, she might believe that the death is ‘for the best’.

These contrasting roles are grounded similarly in idealized notions of femininity, whether or not this is always recognized, and one of the most important elements in discourses involved in the processes of either extreme version of feminine behaviour
is that of cultural understandings of emotions. Both the role of the keening woman and that of the mourner who must wait behind when the cortège leaves for the cemetery are based on ideas about gendered emotionality. There was an essentialism in the convention that it should be women who ritually displayed the grief of the group. However, the skills of keeners were valued and sometimes rewarded, and their labour exceeded emotional work in that it had ceremonial, religious, memorializing and creative significance. There may have been women who felt pressurized to participate and perform, but at least others presumably could fulfil this duty - and exploit the intrinsic licence and complexity of lamenting. With the denial of an outlet for intense, possibly, contradictory, conflictual responses, in the modern day, violent expression is aberrant and intolerable, and dangerous, not least because of how it may affect others, in ways similar to the impact of a keening performance on those initially not part of the central 'chorus'. Women are latterly regarded by some as too emotionally susceptible to be involved in burials. The changing relationship between the assumptions about a fundamentally emotionally-driven female nature and ensuing gendered behaviours testifies historically to alterations in the potential ways of negotiating discursive possibilities as part of the process of gender identity.

Many feminist and other attempts to explain how gender happens inevitably end up with a constructivism which makes the formation of particular conventional identities just as inevitable as in essentialist arguments that construction theories attempt to counter and deconstruct, with culture, society, tradition, or discourse, as the context for gender, becoming the agent of gendering. However, the ethnological/folkloristic orientation that conceptualizes tradition and culture as discursive resists a unitary, definable, singular status for these. Tradition is regarded as dependent on performance, on individual instances of enactments which are also productive of tradition. It depends on collective consent to use and interpret its signs appropriately in reference to the historically established meanings of these, but it also requires complexity, argument, nonconformity and inversion of its rules for change, its dynamic, which behind a facade of stability, even stasis, is necessary, and, indeed, inevitable, given that traditional performances are intersubjective events. Such a view of tradition or culture disallows it a fully deterministic authority over an event or the individuals who express and form identities within that event, and should avoid a
constructivism which collapses in the deterministic inevitability of the workings of a conceptualized monolithic culture.

Multivocality is intrinsic to the situated ethnographic encounter or the folklore performance, the ‘voices’ present generating and realizing the latent polysemy of the various communications proceeding. The making of meaning from an event, a text, an interaction, is never closed or complete, either synchronically, because of intersubjectivity, or diachronically, because of constant recontextualization. Attention to the limited forms of coding described in this thesis generates evidence, in texts and performances, of specific kinds of polysemy which refute assumptions that a finite range of uses and interpretations are available to more or less all subjects with similar traditionary competences and responsibilities in a specific cultural context. It particularly refuses views of women’s cultural communication as simple and non-contestive, an understanding based on notions of discursive operation, intersubjective negotiation and emergence. The making of meaning is concurrent with, and part of the process of, the subject creating and expressing a situated version of the self which is consistent with other versions and allows a sense of identity.

Performances of traditional roles around a death and the experiences of individual Lewis women reveal their own complexity in very clear or obscure, or even latent ways. Self-reflection in regard to gender identity alone testifies to it not being a simple, ‘natural’, inevitable process: conscious effort is sometimes required to behave in ways consistent with received notions of feminine behaviour; individuals can comment on the effects of action upon their sense of being a woman; normative notions and roles can be rejected, inverted, subverted, altered subtly or dramatically, appropriated in new ways, or made even more ambiguous. Butler’s deconstruction of the process of gender identity exposes its dependence on the historicity of discursively operant signifiers with accumulated performative effectivity. The transgressions and refusals of limited gender and sexual options are more explicit instances of individual engagement with the identity process than the ambivalences of performances that are ostensibly conventional, conformist, but resignification is the means and source of complexity in all cases.
A consuming dilemma for feminists is how to accept the situated, fractured, multiple subject of poststructuralism which, as an effect of discursive intersections, is accredited with no agency. While Butler adheres to the discursive constitution of the subject, she insists, that, as indicated by and in resignification, subjects are not entirely determined by discourse. And they cannot be if the process of gender is mediated through corollary discourses of culture and its traditions understood according to the ethnological or folkloristic performance perspective. Performativity, as explication of cultural tradition and gender, illustrated by polysemous communication and resignificatory performances, allows a new understanding of agency as something intrinsically involved in such discursive processes. Studies, like this research, of specific cultural loci, which are necessary for the exploration of identity as a situated effect, and which refuse ideas of achieved singular meanings and assume that identity is a cumulative process of negotiations in specific contexts, can offer, I argue, substantive support for Butler’s philosophy of gender. As mentioned in Chapter 2, researchers in various fields are taking up her ideas in their own investigations, validating her propositions, and the notion of performativity is clearly relevant to different kinds of identity apart from gender. The performativity thesis keeps the category of ‘women’ open as a site of productive struggle, and its political implications are clear. If the Hebridean woman, even when conforming to traditional roles, and Butler’s exemplars of dramatic transgression both agentially negotiate and express complex identities within the bounds of recognizable gender discourses, the performativity intrinsic to the processes involved can be used to the advantage of feminism to deny the inevitability of oppressive gender normatives, and to engage in subversive and liberatory resignifications.

1 That previously unrecorded meanings should emerge from accounts of keening, for example, a century after the real performance, shows this, that latent significance emerges anew or fresh from various interpretive positions.
2 Multiplicity contingent upon the specific circumstances of performative enactments is, of course, the condition of other group identities. The performance-performative perspective on identity could cast new light on the processes of having a Scottish national or specific regional identity which is neither stable nor simplex, while localized studies, synchronic and diachronic, of gender performances could help us address issues pertaining to the relations between women and men in our culture.
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Abbreviations
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JAF - Journal of American Folklore
JFR - Journal of Folklore Research
TGSI - Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness
CUP - Cambridge University Press
EUP - Edinburgh University Press
IUP - Indiana University Press
OUP - Oxford University Press
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

A. Request Letter


I am currently researching women’s experiences of family and community life in the islands, in particular of women who were born before the 1960s. I am interested in hearing from women who are willing to write to me, and/or talk with me, about their experiences in the past. I would like to hear from anyone who grew up in the islands and anyone who has raised a family there. It does not matter if they have spent part of their life living away from the islands, or may not live in the area now....Total confidentiality will be respected....

B. First Letter to Informants

Extract from a letter issued to women who contacted me in response to the requests above. This gave them more information about the research to help them decide whether they wished to be involved, and, indeed, one woman who would have been very happy to help with local history research decided not to participate in my project once she had this information.

My research is for a PhD looking at the life cycle of women in the Highlands and Islands. I am concentrating on their home lives and their experiences of growing up, getting married, having children and taking on the roles of adult women. I am interested in the ways in which we all take on certain roles that society expects of us but still remain individuals. I would like the women with whom I am in touch to talk about their own situations and those of other women, like female relatives and friends, as much as possible.

As well as writing and talking to individual women, I am also studying Gaelic folklore, proverbs, songs and other traditions. These provide some of the dominant images of women in the culture and they speak about women’s lives and experiences.

I will send you a long questionnaire which will take time to go through, but I am very grateful for your help. What you can tell me about the lives of other women and yourself will be invaluable for helping people understand women’s lives in the distant and recent past and in the present. A lot of what we do not know or understand about people’s lives comes from us not knowing about their everyday experiences, often because no-one thinks that they are important enough to ask about and record. In answering these questions you will be helping to fill many of the gaps in the recent history of women’s lives in the Highlands and Islands from a woman’s perspective. If the questionnaire seem very long and detailed that is because a project such as this is a major, long-term piece of work.
Too often histories and accounts of the present are written by men who have no access to the most basic aspects of women's lives and who do not think that these things are important, and because they seem so everyday and mundane that we all generally take them for granted. Very little of women's experiences in the Highlands and Islands is to be found recorded in the sources that are used to write history so we have to go to the women themselves to find out what happened and happens to them and what they think and feel about their own and others' experiences.
APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

This Questionnaire was sent to those women who contacted me after seeing the letter in the local press (Appendix 1A) and to others whom I knew already. The questions were printed in a continuous list and informants wrote their responses on separate sheets.

A. Basic Biographical Information

The answers to these questions will help me understand the information that you give me on more general matters about women’s lives. For example, someone who was an only child may have had quite different childhood experiences from someone from a large or extended family; or a woman who has had children may have different attitudes about certain things from a woman who has no children.

Name
Marital status
Date of birth
Place of birth
List all the places in which you have lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin
Parents’ occupations
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s.
How old were you when you left school?
What did you do directly after you left school?
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
Are you or have you ever been married? If you have been married more than once, please include details for this.
Age at marriage
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin
Husband’s occupation
Do you have any children?
Number of sons and their ages
Number of daughters and their ages
Total number of children you have ever borne
Are any of your children married now?
Do you have any grandchildren?
Religion: how would you describe yourself?
Parents’ religion
Husband’s religion
B. Introduction to Main Questionnaire

Many of the questions that follow refer to yourself as the informant, but please speak as much as you want about the experiences and situations of others as well. Give as much detail as possible and where you want to talk about the past or to compare the situation in the Highlands and Islands with that outside the area, please do so. Your thoughts and opinions are as important as information and facts. Some questions may not be particularly or at all applicable to yourself and you may then wish to talk only about other people. There may also be questions which you are not prepared to answer, perhaps because you feel they involve private subjects. It would be useful if you would let me know about this. Please remember that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and real names will not be used in the final writing up of my research. Do not worry about writing style, grammar or anything like that: what you have to say is much more important to me than how you say it.

I have enclosed lined A4 paper for you to write down your answers, but if you want to type or print them I can supply plain A4 paper for this. An envelope for returning the questionnaire is also enclosed.

The questions are listed in different sections under headings and are given numbers. When you are writing out your answers, it would be very helpful if you could please use its number to refer to the question, and start a new page when you start a new section of questions, giving its heading at the top.

I realise that there is a lot here. This is a long questionnaire which will take time to go through, but I am very grateful for your help. What you can tell me about the lives of other women and yourself will be invaluable for helping people to understand women’s lives in the distant and recent past and in the present. A lot of what we do not know or understand about people’s lives comes from us not knowing about their everyday experiences, often because no-one thinks that they are important enough to ask about and record. Your responses to this questionnaire will make an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of community life in the Highlands and Islands.

I would also appreciate enormously any comments that you would like to make about my questions, and any information or general observations you wish to include about subjects that are not tackled here. I hope that you will enjoy taking part in this project.

C. Main Questionnaire

1. Language

1. Are you a native Gaelic speaker?

2. Are you a Gaelic learner?

3. Did/do your parents and siblings have Gaelic?

4. Did/do your spouse and children have Gaelic?
2. Family and Household

1. When you were growing up, how many adults and children were there usually living in your home? For example, did any older relatives stay with you, or did you and your parents live in a house belonging to grandparents or other relatives?

2. What about during your marriage and when you were bringing up your children? Did anyone other than your partner and children live with you at any time? Who were they, why was this and when?

3. Were the situations that you have described in answers 1 and 2 typical or common in your community?

3. Growing Up

1. What are your strongest memories of childhood? Say as much or as little as you like about your general thoughts and feelings. For example, what people do you remember as being important to you? What sort of games did you play and with whom? What sort of work did you do around the home? What was school like? Some things which you might like to talk about are also referred to in other questions below.

2. Please describe your mother. What sort of relationship did you have with her, and how did this change over the years? Was your relationship a typical one at the time?

3. Please describe your relationship with your father.

4. How would you describe the kind of relationship which your parents and other couples that you knew had? How close would you say husbands and wives were?

5. Describe your family generally. Who were you closest to? How important were grandparents, cousins and other relations?

6. Who did and do you regard as having been the head of the household? Which of your parents had more of a say in important family decisions? Was this the case in other families?

7. Which of your parents was more responsible for discipline?

8. What sort of religious elements were there in your upbringing? Which one of your parents was more involved in your family’s religious welfare?

9. What would you say about the ways in which boys and girls were treated generally by parents and other adults? Were there differences? If so, describe some of these.

10. Would you say that parents in those days gave the same attention to sons and daughters? Was the education of one or the other treated as more important?
11. Did you have any role models when you were growing up? Who were these and why did you look up to them? What do you think of them now, looking back?

12. Did you ever consciously decide that you wanted your life to be different from your mother’s? If so, why was that?

13. What sort of expectations did you have when you were growing up? For instance, did you always expect to get married and have children, did you intend to leave home, did you ever think about what sort of work you might do? Were these typical of girls of your age at the time?

14. Did boys and girls play together? Was this different to just girls or just boys playing together, and, if so, how?

15. What differences do you think there were between the lives of your mother and her generation compared to your grandmothers’ generation?

16. What general comments would you make about the status of women and girls when you were growing up?

4. Early Adulthood

Again, you should refer to the experiences of yourself and of others, as much as possible.

1. What were your teenage years like, and did you enjoy them?

2. What sort of help were you and others of your age expected to give at home, and how did this change as you grew older?

3. How did your relationships with your parents change as you became a young adult? Was this typical?

4. What sort of social life did you have? How did you and other young adults spend spare time?

5. Did the amount of time you spent with members of the opposite sex change as you got older and how was this? Did you have any male platonic friends? Did other girls and was this approved of?

6. How much say did parents have in the way young people spent their time?

7. Was there much disagreement between young people and their elders about how they behaved?

8. About what sort of things do you remember disagreeing with your parents? Would you argue about these?
9. What sort of role do you think the church had in shaping the lives of young people and how did most young people react to this?

10. How old were you when you began to have an interest in the opposite sex as possible boyfriends or husbands?

11. At what age did people generally start to go out with people of the opposite sex? What did parents think of this?

12. Would you discuss boys with your female friends? Would you talk and tease each other about fancying people?

13. How open were people about courting relationships and how did older adults react to young couples going out together?

14. What Gaelic or English words were used to describe and refer to people who were going out with one another?

15. What can you remember about the social life of older women, say young unmarried relatives? Did you ever ask your mother or grandmother about their days of courting and adolescence?

16. Caithris na h-oidhche. Was caithris na h-oidhche practised in your day and what do you remember about it? What went on and how frequently did it occur? Were there young people in the area who would never be involved? How did older people deal with it? Why do you think that such a tradition developed in the first place? What do you think of caithris na h-oidhche now, in comparison to present day standards and norms? Did the older people speak about what it was like in their time? Have you ever heard of leabachas?

17. How would you compare courting practices today with those of your childhood and early adulthood that you can remember?

5. Engagement and Marriage

If you yourself have never been engaged or married, please answer these questions with reference to other people generally.

1. How long would people usually go before they became engaged?

2. Did you have a réiteach or can you remember being at anyone else’s réiteach?

3. In what other ways were engagements celebrated and marked?

4. Had you spoken to your parents about getting engaged and married before it happened?
5. When a couple became engaged did the way they behaved towards each other in public and private change at all and how? Did other people treat the couple differently?

6. How long did engagements usually last before a couple were married?

7. What sort of physical contact or shows of affection were allowed of courting couples in public and private?

8. What can you remember about the preparations for your or other people's weddings?

9. How much involvement did mothers and future mothers-in-law have in this?

10. What can you remember about weddings when you were a child and young adult?

11. Were you ever at a banais taighe and what was it like?

12. After a couple were married do you think that people treated them as individuals differently and, if so, how? How did and do you feel about this, if it happened to you?

13. How do you think that your attitudes to other people changed when they became married?

14. How did a person's social life and personal behaviour change with marriage?

15. How did your relationship with your partner change when you became married?

16. Where did you live when you were first married and what was this like? If this was not in your home, did you later move into a house belonging to your husband and yourself and when was this?

17. What do you think of the way that women were expected to give up working and to have children as soon as possible after they were married?

18. What do you think about working wives and mothers and have your opinions changed over the years?

19. When you were growing up did married couples make any displays of verbal or physical affection?
6. Before Childbearing

1. Before women of your age group were married, what did they usually know about ‘the facts of life’, sex and child-bearing? How did they learn about this?

2. Was it ever discussed amongst friends? Do you think that older married women ever talked together about such things?

3. How did you and your sisters and friends learn about the facts of life? Did a lot of ‘myths’ about these circulate amongst young people?

4. Do you know of any birth control methods that might have been used by people of your mother’s and of older generations? How do you think they learnt about this?

5. Did you and other women discuss family planning with your husbands? Who else would one talk to about it (for example a sister or the district nurse), and how easy was this?

6. How do you think things have changed in regard to this since your grandmother’s time through to the present generation?

7. Were you aware of people becoming pregnant outside of marriage in the past and in your own day? If so, how did you hear about it?

8. How did people talk about unmarried pregnancy? What English or Gaelic phrases were used and what were different people’s attitudes to such a thing?

9. Was one side blamed more than the other for pregnancies outside of wedlock?

10. Do you think that men were treated more lightly in connection with such things? Were women expected to be more moral? Do you think that this is still the case?

7. Childbirth and Pregnancy

1. What did women of your generation know about actual pregnancy and childbirth before it happened to them? Where did they learn about this and would they have talked about it together?

2. Were you given much advice and support, and who was this by? What do you wish you had known beforehand that you did not know?

3. Can you remember older women being pregnant when you were a child and what you thought about this?

4. What Gaelic and/or English phrases and words were used for ‘pregnant’ and ‘childbirth’?

5. Did you talk about your pregnancy and childbirth with your husband? Did you talk with other women?
6. Briefly, what were your pregnancies like?

7. At what stage before you gave birth did you give up your normal activities?

8. Did you have any home births? What were these like?

9. Did you have any hospital births? What were these like?

10. What was the time after having a baby like? How long did you stay in bed and how were you treated?

11. When did you return to your normal routine of work?

12. What was it like becoming a mother and adjusting to this new role? Who helped you and how?

13. Did older women ever express attitudes about the differences in childbirth and pregnancy in the past and present?

14. When you were expecting your children, did you ever want a boy or a girl especially? Did other people ever express a wish for boys or girls?

15. How supportive do you think husbands were during these times of birth?

16. How do you feel your own behaviour and attitudes changed when you became a mother? How did other people’s relationships with you change? How did you feel about these changes?

17. Do you remember any older women like your mother or women of your own age group having home births? Please describe what you know about these.

18. Have you heard of the ‘churching’ or ‘kirking’ of new mothers?

19. How was the arrival of a new baby celebrated?

20. How did you decide to name your children? Was this typical of parents then?

21. What do you remember about having your own children baptised and about other people’s baptisms?
APPENDIX 3

Informants’ Responses to Questionnaire (Appendix 2)

These are the transcribed written responses to the Questionnaire, received over a period of several months in 1996. The personal names given to informants are pseudonyms. Some of the further correspondence I received from several of these women is included in Appendices 4 and 5.

N.a. = No answer given.

3A. AGNES

[Agnes lives in my home village of North Tolsta and grew up with my parents. She volunteered to write to me, having heard about my research informally.]

Marital status Single
Date of birth 5.12.34
Birthplace North Tolsta
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there, and the jobs that you did.
Inverness, approx. 6 mths - maid in Caledonian Hotel; Stevenage, Herts., 3 years - assembly line worker for Electro Methods; Nairn, 9 years - receptionist, Windsor Hotel; Stornoway, 15 years - hotel receptionist.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 4.8.1888, N. Tolsta
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 2.12.1888, N. Tolsta
Parent’s occupations Fisherman; fishworker
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Mary - 3-.11.14; Donald - 8.5.20; Alexander - 29.11.24; Christina - 6.12.25; Kenneth (deceased) - 30.11.29.
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Worked in F. W. Woolworths for about 1 year
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant
Parents’ religion As above

I. Language
1 and 2. A native Gaelic speaker. 3 and 4. Family native speakers.

II. Family and Household
1. I grew up in a “Tigh Dubh” [a blackhouse] which was occupied by my brothers and sisters, my parents and myself. We had no other relatives staying with us, and, as far as I know, the house was built by my father.
2. Never married.
3. There were a few families who had grandparents or the odd relative but some did not. Perhaps half way to being typical.

III. Growing Up
1. I grew up during World War Two and one of my earliest memories is of my mother and the lady who lived beside us watching convoys going up and down the Minch. They used to cry for “our poor boys” every time. In the mornings when there was no school we used to have to take the household cattle out to the moor. I lives at
the end of the road, so I used to wait for the village children and join the “procession when they got to our house. Once the cows were grazing about two miles away we wandered the moors for a while and made our way home as slowly as possible. I cannot recall having to do very much work around the house as I had older brothers and sisters who had to go to the well and the peats and so on. School was all right. I used to manage to scrape through exams but looking back I don’t think I was very interested in lessons. teachers were quite strict and we were usually belted for our misdeeds.

2. My mother was small, plump and fair haired with rosy cheeks. She was a good sewer and did a lot of knitting as well as croft work. I think my relationship with her was a fairly typical one. We used to tell our parents as little as possible.

3. My father was very strict although looking back I would say also fair. I think I would have gone to him with any problems before I’d go to my mother.

4. I don’t know how close husbands and wives were really. Disagreements between couples were then, I think, kept to oneself. I think then it was more a case of “I have made my bed and I lie on it.” they were certainly faithful to one another.

5. I was the youngest of our family, having arrived after the rest were more or less grown up. Although they were always there to look after me and protect me I don’t think I was very close to any of them. I only ever saw one grandparent (Granny) and as she was 84 when I was born she was really past the stage of being interested in children. Cousins were all right but again much older than me so I didn’t have much of a relationship with them either.

6. I think in most households father was definitely head with mother doing out the discipline, but perhaps important matters were discussed between parents.

7. With my father being a fisherman and not at home for most of the week, I think my mother was responsible for discipline.

8. Again it was my mother who made us go to church and read our bibles.

9. I would say that boys and girls were treated differently. For instance boys never had to wash dishes or make beds and not much of any other work inside the house.

10. Although I suppose girls were given about the same amount of attention as boys, the boys were definitely more important. Very few families could afford to educate anybody then in peasant communities.

11. Most girls of my age did not have role models like they do now. There was no T.V. and radio was for listening to war news. I don’t think we had any local person we looked up to.

12. When I was in my early teens, say 13/14, I decided that not for me - peat cutting, cow milking and so on. I am now 61 and although I do not have a cow I love being out on the moor doing peats, but life is very different from my mothers. For instance electricity, T.V., telephone, central heating.

13. We did not have any great expectations when we were growing up. We always knew we had to leave home and I suppose we were young enough to be curious to see what the other side of the Minch was like. The only work or just about the only work was the “hotels”. I suppose we all though about getting married. This I think was typical of girls of my age.

14. Boys and girls did not play together. Boys played football or swam, went fishing and generally kept away from the girls who usually played houses (tigh beag) or played with dolls or ran around on the beach. My friend had a swing in her barn and the only boy I can ever recall being with us was her little brother (your father, Fiona).

15. Basically I do not think there was a great deal of difference between my mother’s generation and my grandmother’s. Perhaps the houses were a bit better but everyone
was still very poor and we lived mostly on fish and our own produce. there was very little money for anything else.
16. During my childhood, the women and girls did most of the croft and housework while the men were away fishing. I suppose the boys helped a bit as well but it was mostly the women who ran the crofts.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. My teenage years were very enjoyable. They were carefree happy days.
2. We were expected to do as much of the house work as we could manage, plus going to the well for all the household water. As long as we did not have a job this was expected of us.
3. I don’t think my relationship with my parents changed much as I grew older. Strict obedience was still expected of us.
4. By our early teens we had started to mix with the boys. Social life in summer was spent mostly on the beach and in the winter we had “Dansa a Rathad”.
5. As we got older we did mix more with the opposite sex. Most of the boys we grew up with were and some still are platonic friends. there was the odd romance but this was not the norm. The other girls were the same and by and large I think this was approved of.
6. Parents had quite a lot to say about how we spent our time but not a lot of notice was taken of them once we got outside.
7. There were some disagreements about behaviour; we usually did not take much notice.
8. I usually had disagreements with my parents, mostly my mother about dancing, wearing make up, and clothes. We often argued.
9. We had to go to church on Sundays, both morning and evening services. Most young people did not react to this, we just went because it was the done thing.
10 and 11. I would have been about eighteen when I had my first serious romance. I don’t know what my parents thought of this, if they knew about it.
12. My friend and I often discussed boys. We each knew who the other fancied but we were very serious about it and never teased each other.
13. We were never very open about courting relationships and I think the older people always took it for granted that this would be the case.
14. When a courting couple were going out together it was usually “Tha iad romancing” or something like “Tha iad engaged.”
15. The other thing that I can remember about the social life of older women is that they used to go and visit each other (ceitidh).
16. Caithris na h-oidhche had died out and was not practised in my day. I just cannot imagine how it started in the first place but I think the present day standards are better.
17. I think courting practices nowadays are better. Couples are more out in the open about it. I never heard the older people discussing it and I have never heard of leabachas.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Couples usually went out together for a number of years before marriage.
2. I remember being at a cousin’s reiteach.
3. They probably celebrated with a family party.
4. I have not been married so this was not discussed with parents.
5. When a couple got engaged I don’t think they were treated any differently by other people. I can not say how they treated each other.
6. Engagements sometimes lasted quite a number of years.
7. There was not usually any show of affection in public.
8. The day before the wedding friends and relations always gathered at the bride’s house to set tables, peel potatoes and pluck endless hens (everyone contributed a hen), by the end of the evening everyone and everything was ready for the big day.
9. Mothers and mothers in law were not all that involved except to be good hostesses.
10. As above.
11. I was at a number of banais taighe. They were all very enjoyable, the young ones spent the night usually till dawn dancing in the barn that was cleared as a dance floor for the occasion.
12 and 13. This did not happen to me, so no comment.
17. I do not think it was a good idea to give up work and bear children straight after marriage.
18. I think opinions about this have changed over the years. I think that nowadays most wives have to work after marriage.
19. When I was growing up married couples did not make any display of affection.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Women of my age group knew most things about the fact of life, sex and childbirth. We were country children and we all had pets and animals.
2. I suppose the older married women talked about this among themselves.
3. As question 1.
4. I don’t think my mother’s generation had any idea about birth control.
5. I don’t think family planning is discussed a lot now.
6. I think this has changed greatly, especially in the last 20 years.
7. I was aware of people getting pregnant outside of marriage. We usually heard it on the grapevine.
8. Everybody thought that this was a terrible sin.
9. It was nearly always the woman who was slandered.
10. Men got off very lightly. Women were expected to be more moral. This is not still the case. People are more sympathetic nowadays.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. I think women of my generation knew all about childbirth and pregnancy.
2. I have no children.
3. I can remember women being pregnant when I was young. I thought that this was just normal.
4. Pregnant - trom.
5 through 17, not applicable.
18. I have not heard of the kirking of young mothers.
19. Everyone who came into the house got a drink usually whisky called “the ursdan”.
20-21. Does not apply to me.
[Responded to letter I placed in the Stornoway Gazette. Annie wrote to me on a few other occasions.]

Marital status Wife
Date of birth 2.3.1925
Birthplace Sydenham, London
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of
time that you stayed there. Sydenham, 3 yrs; Brixton, 10 yrs; Lowestoft, 3 yrs; Isle of
Lewis, 29; Orkney, 27 yrs.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1890, London
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1901, London
Parents’ occupations Father, builder; mother, various jobs.
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Brothers born 1929 and 1934
Age at marriage 21
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1920, Lewis
Husband’s occupation Postmaster
No. of sons and their ages 3 sons, 45, 39, 30
No. of daughters and their ages 1 daughter, 48
Total number of children you have ever borne 4
Are any of your children married now? 2
Do you have any grandchildren? 4
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant
Parents’ religion Protestant
Husband’s religion Protestant

I. Language
[No answers.]

II. Family and Household
1. Parents and 3 children.
2. Yes. My mother and two brothers - brothers for about 9 years. My mother for 39
years. Father dying - lack of cash - shortage of housing. My mother stayed until she
decided to go it alone at 89.
3. Re q.1. - typical. Re q.2. - most unusual!

III. Growing Up
1. Strongest memories, lack of money due to pre-war depression although we were
well fed, well clothed, had plenty of toys - bikes, roller skates, swimming, played in
the street. London must have been a safer place in those days. School was quite easy-
going, concentrated on sport which I was good at. Paternal grandmother was
important. I hated housework but had to do dishes!
2. I liked my mother. Yes, it did change, especially as she lived with us. I assumed
all girls liked their mothers. She was a good role model when I was a child, always
there, she was good company and dressed well.
3. Gave us plenty of treats although he was often short of cash and was a sick man.
Short-tempered too, I suppose I was scared of offending him, but he did his best.
4. I think my parents loved each other - don’t know about other couples. Divorce was rare.  
5. I was closest to my mother. I always enjoyed being part of wider family, i.e. aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents.  
6. Father - don’t know about other families.  
7. Depends who was around at the time. Suppose mother was more easy-going.  
8. I went to a church school, but apart from being sent to Sunday school, religion had no part of my family life.  
9. I suppose I thought my brothers were spoilt but that was only because I was older.  
10. Yes. No.  
11. Mother and paternal grandmother. I enjoyed the way they were homemakers - baking, etc., just making time for kids - still like them.  
12. Well, I wanted to marry a man with a steady wage and no debts.  
13. Every girl wanted to get married in those days. The war cut short any ambitions I had.  
14. Yes, boys and girls did play together. I think maybe girls together were more gossipy but boys and girls had more boisterous games.  
15. Don’t know.  
16. If girls weren’t married by the time they were 25 they were despised - spinsters, left on the shelf. Too dreadful to contemplate.  

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Well, the war was on - life was interesting and on the whole enjoyable.  
2. Help with housework, dishes, bed-making.  
3. Father died - still liked my mother although she was too trusting. I certainly gave my children more discipline.  
4. Pictures, dancing, boyfriends, full employment. Yes, I enjoyed them.  
5. Yes, I got more interested in boys, especially the one I eventually married. Yes, I did have male platonic friends - I don’t know about other girls.  
6. I really don’t know.  
7. It was as ever - young people and elders disagreed.  
8. After my father died my mother was lax in discipline.  
9. In the Isle of Lewis, the Church, especially the Free Church, had a very hard attitude towards young people - always ‘thou shalt not’ - no pictures, no dancing.  
11. Don’t know about friends’ parents.  
12. Yes. Yes.  
13. I think youngsters were fairly open - they had no privacy in a small community, always gossip.  
14. ‘Courting’, ‘going with’.  
15. No, I wasn’t really interested.  
17. I really don’t know about caithris na h-oidhche, although I know what it means.  
18. I don’t know about courting practices today - certainly we had no drink and drugs and not much cash - I imagine parents are always last to know, it was always so.  

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. It surely varied - 1 or 2 years maybe.  
2. No.  
3. Engagement ring, not often a party.  
4. No.
5. Well, I suppose other people watched, especially if the couple were apart because of war service. We expected to be married for life so it was all very serious.
6. Depended on cash, housing.
7. Girls were scared of having illegitimate babies, so there was a brake. No condom machines in those days.
8. Trying to gather enough clothing coupons for clothes and enough food for reception and enough cash for a honeymoon.
9. Very helpful and interested, couldn't be better.
10. Nothing at all.
11. N.a.
12. After we married we were a couple and that suited us.
13. Our friends often married our individual friends and that was very good.
14. Obviously our social life was restricted in a way because we were trying to make a home - hopefully we became more responsible.
15. We became a couple - just us.
17. It was the way of life and we never regretted it, our first child was born 9 months after our marriage.
18. I don't know how women have the energy to have children and a full-time job. Something had to go - usually it's the peace in the house.
19. No, I don't think they did.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. They knew nothing, often had to learn by experience.
2. I've no idea.
3. I learnt the facts of life when the boy next door told me - impossible to believe that King George and Queen Mary or my parents behaved like that! I don't think it was talked about very much.
4. I believe there were always condoms.
5. Certainly my husband and I talked about family planning - none of our children were accidents. It was very difficult and it required a lot of courage to ask a doctor. Luckily mine was a friend.
6. I think today's children are far better informed. Nothing secret which is far better.
7. Yes, local gossip and can't hide a pregnancy.
8. Disparagingly - 'family way', 'bun in the oven'. People were inclined to think that an unmarried pregnancy was shameful.
9. The girl was usually blamed.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. Really not much, usually learnt by experience. Yes, but not much.
2. No, but then I never asked. Nothing, I had no wish to be scared and I wasn't.
3. No, I never noticed.
4. Don't know any.
5. Yes.
6. Very interesting and all different, but I've always been fit, although I remember the smell of fish and wet wool would make me sick.
7. The last second.
8. Three, the first labour about 12 hours, the others shorter, but the district nurse was always very much at hand.
9. One. Easier for those at home and I think more restful for the mother.
10. Great relief to have a healthy baby. I suppose on and off about a week. Wonderfully well.
11. As soon as possible.
12. Difficult, but experience teaches.
13. I suppose they did, I but don’t think I was very interested.
14. We only wanted healthy children although we were delighted to have both sexes.
15. My husband was very supportive and very interested in changing nappies and making feeds and looking after his family.
16. I certainly had more to do, got tired but pleased to have children. Older women were inclined to be nosy, always inclined to give unwanted advice - excluding friends and family.
17. All women had home births if the birth was expected to be normal.
18. Yes.
19. Flowers and pleasure and relief.
20. Names we liked. No.
21. I remember with pleasure our children’s baptisms. Hoping they wouldn’t yell - they did! - and we always had a celebration meal after.

3C. BELLA

[Responded to press letter]

Marital status Married Date of birth 5.12.41
Birthplace Bragar, Isle of Lewis
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of
time that you stayed there.
Bragar, 1941-58, 17 years; Glasgow, 1958-63, 5 years; London, 1963-65, 2 years;
Glasgow, 1963-73, 8 years; Nova Scotia, 1973-96, 23 years
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1915, Bragar
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1914, Bragar
Parents’ occupations Crofter/weaver and housewife
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s 4 brothers [one older than her] and 2 sisters,
younger
How old were you when you left school? 16 years, 8 mths
What did you do directly after you left school? Teacher training, Jordanhill Glasgow
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
Fruit canning factory, Blairgowrie, summer work, 1957, 58 and 59; teacher in
young offenders, canvassing for Arthritis Society, peer counselling with women.
Are you, or have you ever been, married? 1st marriage, age 22, divorced 1971, at age
30; 2nd marriage, aged 37.
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1942, Falkirk; 1946, Anna Co., Nova Scotia
Husband’s occupation 1st - marine engineer; 2nd - assistant manager Co-op grocery
store

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Do you have any children? 2 from first marriage
No. of sons and their ages Aged 30
No. of daughters and their ages Aged 31
Total number of children you have ever borne 2
Are any of your children married now? Both are married
Do you have any grandchildren? Daughter has 5; son has one and one on the way
Religion: how would you describe yourself? A spiritualist with Christian beliefs
Parents’ religion Free Presbyterian
Husband’s religion 1st - Catholic; 2nd - raised as a Baptist, does not attend church.

I. Language

II. Family and Household
1. For the first 8 years of my life we lived in a ‘blackhouse’ with my grandmother. In 1948 or 49 we moved further down the road to live with my father’s aunt and uncle, who were elderly and had no children. My father was given their ‘white house’ and croft in exchange for looking after them. They both passed away about 10 years later. My grandmother came to live with us about that time.
2. Generally no one lived with us. On a few occasions one of my brothers would live with us for two or three weeks while they looked for work in Glasgow, or waited to join a ship in the Merchant Navy. On one occasion my brother Malcolm John lived with us in our home on Sauchiehall Street for almost a year. He was working in Glasgow at that time and boarding with us. This practice was very much taken for granted.
3. Extremely typical.

III. Growing Up
1. These memories are up to age 12. Upon entering Secondary School, one was no longer considered a child. Strongest memories are as follows: a) all the kids and father would be sitting round the kitchen table eating our fish dinner - mother would be hovering around serving us; b) being in the loom shed filling spools for the loom; c) visitors - cousins, aunts, uncles, coming in and being given such a profuse welcome; d) swimming in at the seashore, also collecting periwinkles; e) making hay in by the seashore - eating food by a haystack; f) working in the fields on the croft; g) working in the peats - eating dinner in the peats; h) being at the fank - a very exciting event; i) being in the classroom, or the playground in school, walking home from school, being in a school play, concerts; j) going to Stornoway with mother - rare events, but wonderful, getting an ice cream cone from Capaldis; k) seeing my first Christmas tree in the school at a Christmas party. It is the only one I can remember because generally Christmas was not celebrated. The memory of the tree was that it was sparkling and glittering and magical. In reality it would not have had any lights on it, so it was probably much plainer than my vision of it; l) Christmas morning, waking up to stuffed stockings - apple, orange, coloring book, occasional doll - mother made sure we all got nice things in our stockings; m) playing Cowboys and Indians among old ruins of black houses near the seashore with other girls; n) hearing ghost stories when visiting neighbours and being terrified of the walk home in the dark; o) spending days living at my grandfather’s house where there were 2 uncles and 5 aunts and where I got lots of attention and played with kittens in the barn; p) hearing the clackity clack sound of the looms throughout the village weaving Harris
Walking the chickens; q) vaguely remember churning butter; r) did housework such as washing dishes, sweeping and washing the kitchen floor, shooed the living room rugs, fed the chickens, walked the cows out to the moor, went into the croft and fed the sheep; s) going around the houses in the village with a group of girls collecting money to have our Halloween party in October or November; t) playing records on the gramophone, listening to music (pop) on the radio; u) going to the shieling with my aunts; v) catching a large salmon (this one was actually large in reality) in a pool, on the river by the shieling, along with my older brother and a friend; w) American tourists coming to talk to us at the 'blackhouse'; x) playing with stones in front of the blackhouse, putting the stones edge to edge on the grass and making the outline of a house with partitions; y) watching people dressed in black walking up the village road to church; z) having to go to Sunday School, being intimidated by a particularly religious man; capturing rabbits and keeping them as pets; trying to capture seagulls.

2. Mother was the director of all the activity in our house. She was so busy looking after the children, making food, and doing field work that there was absolutely no time for individual attention. She told us what to do with absolutely no time for explanations. We depended on her a great deal and she made it clear she had high expectations, educationally and morally, of us. I recall that if I was sick she was very kind to me and she would give me tea in bed on a Saturday morning or if I was absent from school because of illness. When I was in the Nicolson Institute and home for the weekend she would make sure I got a very good breakfast on Monday morning before I left and also always gave me pocket money.

However, she was not approachable if I had a problem. Now, I believe, she simply did not have the energy to deal with problems. If I created a problem, I kept it quiet. As a teenager we argued a lot about where I was allowed to go and about boyfriends, who were not supposed to exist.

When I asked questions about life or spiritual things, she would not give me any discussion or answers, but merely refer to the Bible. After I got married I sensed she began to see me as an adult, but I did not feel I got the respect I deserved until I was at least 40 years of age. Finally at the age of 82 (Mother's age 1996), I am able to talk and discuss issues without the constant reference to the Bible. Recently I tried to explain that what she says is very important and what I say is very important. Neither one of us is right nor wrong. What we say is simply opinions. Our relationship was probably typical.

3. In the early years Father did not have strong opinions on issues. He was guided by Mother who felt he was sometimes irresponsible. To me Father was a silent figure who wove Harris Tweed and did croft work. He never shared feelings. From time to time, not often, he would go drinking with his friends and they would return to our house and be jolly. Often he would praise me for my schoolwork or singing ability. So I knew he was proud of me, but it did not show in our everyday relationship. Later in my 30s and 40s I could tell that he was well respected in the community and I felt proud of him. However there were times in my life when I resented how little he had participated in my upbringing. He passed away in May 1995 and I was in a position to go to Bragar in March 1995 and look after him at home while he was ill until he passed away. I was there to feed him, dress him, give him pills, kiss him goodnight and tuck him in each night.

4. This relates to how couples related to other couples. Their relationship was based on happenings in their daily lives and short visits to each others' houses during the day. No socializing was done as couples.
Parents’ relationship - Very little demonstration of affection. Very little sharing of feelings or discussion of ideas. There would be commands from Mother such as ‘Go and milk the cows’ or ‘Come in and have your tea.’ On a rare occasion Father would physically caress Mother around the breast area and Mother would shrug it off. Her role seemed to be to keep Father on task.
I can honestly say that I saw no interaction between other couples to indicate that they were a couple. People operated as individuals. I don’t feel that husbands and wives related well to each other emotionally. On the other hand, I think that each one depended on the other a great deal and they may not have known that. However, to counteract that statement, men sometimes went away to sea for long periods of time and the wives managed very well without them.
5. I think our family members felt very close to one another. After we all left home, we always loved to get back up there and be all together. We liked to talk, laugh and joke a lot and our parents loved to have all of us come home. The siblings got along well and whatever their differences were they could keep them hidden to avoid conflict. In recent years a couple of instances of conflict have occurred but they have been aired and then the good relationship has been resumed. I felt intimidated by my older brother for a long time on an unspoken level, but that feeling has gone now. I was closest to the three youngest brothers. Grandparents etc. were very very important. Cousins and relations are still very important.
6. Mother was head of the household and had the most say in family decisions. I have no idea what went on in other households. People were close-mouthed and did not share feelings, decisions, etc. One would not know what went on in other households.
7. Mother was more responsible for discipline but on occasion she would ask Father to tackle us, especially the three boys. Sometimes she would send Father upstairs to warn them to be quiet after they went to bed at night.
8. Sunday School. Frequent references to the Bible as I became a teenager and as Mother became a more committed Christian. Many of my probing questions about life were answered with references to the Bible or quotations from the Bible. There was references made to good and evil. As a teenager, I attended church every Sunday evening. I thoroughly enjoyed the singing but had little understanding of the points the minister was trying to get across. Most of it sounded threatening and gloomy. Mother was more involved in our religious welfare.
9. I felt we were treated similarly in many things. The expectation to work hard, behave well, be respectful, was the same. However, boys were not expected to do housework and girls were. Boys had more freedom as teenagers to be out later. I am not sure of how it was in other families.
10. In our household most definitely. Not in our household. I think Mother’s ambitions for us began to grow thin as each child grew older. She had high expectations for each of us, but I think she made it clearer to the older ones more so than the younger ones. At least that is my perception.
11. A couple of my aunts were probably role models because they were in their early 20s, dressed nicely and in their bedroom there was an array of high heeled shoes, lipsticks and magazines. Strangely enough I did not actually see them wear the make-up but I suppose they wore it to dances. Also my grandmother gave the impression that her girls were better than other girls in the village and I suppose I aspired to be like them.
As a student teacher I was in a classroom in Glasgow and the teacher was definitely a role model for me. She looked very smart and was very efficient, seemingly doing
the job with ease. I often in later years strove to achieve the same effect both in appearance and capability, with some success I think.

Looking back, my aunts were certainly no better than anyone else and some of them turned to be rather cold and somewhat arrogant but those faults lessened considerably with age. I never saw the teacher that influenced me again.

In my 20s, while in Glasgow, I had a friend who was older and I strove to achieve her wisdom as I got older.

12. No, no consciously, other than I decided not to have any more than 2 children because I felt my Mother had a formidable task raising 7 children. I think Mother made a conscious decision that my life would be different from hers.

13. Mother governed my expectations. I knew she wanted me to go to college. I wanted to join the Air Force at one time (age 15 or 16) because it seemed to offer excitement and the possibility of going overseas. I nagged Mother about it, but she stopped me in my tracks. One weekend when I came home from school, Mother told me that two women in the Air Force uniform had come to the door looking for me. Previously, I had filled in and sent away one of those little requests for information on the RAF. She said they were there to take me with them. To this day I don’t know if the story is true or not. Needless to say, that was the end of my nagging. I intended to leave home and find a job, but I finished up going to college. I did not really think of what I would do; I knew I did not want to work in the hotels where some of the other village girls had worked. I was reasonably happy about going to Glasgow to college, but I did not really want to be a teacher.

I think I expected to get married and have children sometime. I think it was typical for girls to expect to get married and have children. They would expect to work for a while, then marry.

14. I think that the majority of the time, girls would play with girls and boys with boys. Sometimes boys and girls would play chasing games and other playground games together, such as hide and seek or sliding on ice.

15. I think there was little difference between the lives of my mother’s generation and my grandmother’s generation. One difference would be that my mother’s generation would have higher educational expectations for their children - there were more possibilities for their children to make wider choices. Both my mother and my grandmother worked at gutting fish.

16. I feel that women were the mainstay of family life when I was growing up. Not only did they direct household affairs but they played an important part in the working of the croft. I think they played a dignified and respected role, but they had so much work to do that they may have felt downtrodden. Girls were being raised in the same vein, but if you demonstrated that you had the educational ability, girls were expected and given the opportunity by their parents to take advantage of it. Both parents took great pride in seeing both sons and daughters progress educationally.

IV. Early Adulthood

1. My teenage years consisted of my school life in Stornoway and my weekend life in the village of Bragar. In Stornoway, all my spare time was spent with girls, studying, walking downtown in groups or chattering in groups in our dormitory in the girls’ hostel. The Bragar weekend life was quite different. My time was spent in my home or with my girlfriend (next door neighbour who was not in the Nicolson Institute).
I did enjoy my teenage years, but on another level, I think I felt lonely and needed a sense of closeness that was not available to me.

2. I was expected to clean the house; floors, rugs, windows, dishes. Also, I did my share of seasonal craft work and filling the spools for the weaving of Harris Tweed. I was very conscientious about my work, but resented it at times. I really don't know what other girls did. We did not talk at all about that; certainly did not complain to friends about it because that would be disrespectful. I am sure they had to do much the same as I did.

As I grew older I continued to do the same work, except that a younger member of the family took over the Harris Tweed spools and taking the cattle out. Any job that could be done by a younger member of the family was passed on to them, but housework was always done by girls, so I continued to do that. I also began to take a pride in the house and would sew new drapes for all the windows and rearrange things to make them look nicer. It was wonderful to put up decorations at Christmas and New Year; maybe just for New Year's Eve.

3. As a young adult I was still very much under my parents' control. I recall arguments about my wanting to go out in the evening with my friends. I think this was typical. Parents did not seem to understand the need for a social life.

4. My girlfriends and I would walk up and down the road after dark and sometimes chat with other girls and with boys or we would stand in a crowd by a shed or a peatstack. Other times we would go to a house in the village where young people would gather, sit around, have tea and talk or listen to the chatter about village affairs or ghost stories. We might go to a village dance and maybe come home from the dance with a boy. Also you might go out with a boy in the village, but it would be after nightfall and you would keep the romance as well hidden as possible. Girlfriends would know about it but not parents. On Sunday afternoons there would be walks to the seashore.

5. Yes, as I got older the amount of time I spent with the opposite sex changed. If I had a boyfriend in the village or the next village, we would spend more time together at dances or late evening. By age 17, I was in Glasgow and spent most of the next 2 years with my girlfriend going to ceilidhs at the weekend or going to the cinema. I was so busy studying that I had no time for boyfriends except when I returned to the village for holidays. By age 19, I had complete freedom, started going to parties and developed some platonic male friends in Glasgow only. There was no question of approval in Glasgow because I felt I was completely independent. Neither boyfriends nor male platonic friends were approved of in the village. My memory of attitudes towards males when I was a young adult is that there was always sexual danger if one got too close to them. In the village no girls seemed to have platonic male friends. In fact, the girls who supposedly had nothing to do with boys were put on a pedestal.

6. Parents had a large say in how young people spent their time. I, as a young person, felt that if I did all the work that was expected of me, I then had a right to spend what remained of my time the way I wanted to spend it. My Mother did not seem to approve of my going out in the evenings even after I had done all my work.

7. I think there was a lot of disagreement about young people going out the dances. Young people were never seen to be behaving badly and I don’t think young people did behave badly. Nevertheless there seemed to be a lot of disagreement. I seem to remember elders making negative comments about young people going out. The elders must have had a tremendous fear of what young people were doing - a definite lack of trust.
8. I disagreed about how long or how often I had to spend doing work, spools, peats, etc., not being able to have time to go out at night, having to stay in school when some of my village friends could leave school, having to do things for my Granny, not being able to go to a dance. Arguments were always very brief because I knew my parents’ word always overruled my feelings and I felt guilty about arguing because it was disrespectful.
9. The teachings of the church definitely played a role in the lives of young people. Those teachings were used to control the actions and behaviours of young people. I can remember making sure I was following the 10 Commandments, each one of which I knew and understood. I think the church also made us feel very guilty because we felt feelings and thought ideas that were not compatible with the teachings of the church.
Reaction: I think some young people because of their nature did not question or react much. The majority, I think, dared to follow through on their feelings and actions, but tried to hide this from the adult community. I think this repression of individuals led to some very negative behaviours - drinking alcohol. I think that some young people, not many, turned to the church and became a part of the community of avid churchgoers.
10. Perhaps around 12. At least at the age of 12 or 13 I wanted to be with other teenagers, but it was possible that I was 14 before I really took a conscious interest in any particular boy. To begin with, I simply felt a feeling of admiration for a particular boy, but did not really want to spend time with him. I was really quite afraid to be alone with a boy.
11. All signs of romance were hidden from parents. This is quite different today on the island, I’m glad to say.
Probably boys and girls would flirt with each other first in groups. By age 15 or 16 girls and boys would go out together after dark or go home together from a dance. In daylight there would be no acknowledgement of a romance, nor even of a friendship. Parents seemed to frown on boy-girl relationships. There would even be disapproval from parents of a relationship between men and women in their late 20s.
12. You really would not discuss boys with anyone because you simply did not want anyone to know you liked a particular boy. You might talk about a boy fancying your friend, but you really would not be brazen enough to talk about who you fancied.
As younger kids (10-13) there was teasing about boys by sisters or brothers. I know I was teased mercilessly about one boy in the village. I really disliked that boy for no reason other than the teasing and had absolutely nothing to do with him all of my life. I finally got to know him as an adult at age 47 and found that he is a very nice person, had interesting ideas and a friendly, humorous wife.
13. There was no openness about courtship. Older adults reacted with criticism of some sort. Attitudes about social things involving males and females were so negative. I wish I knew why this kind of attitude was so prevalent in the culture.
Sometimes word leaked out that one person was going with someone else. I recall as a teenager hearing this and it would consist of the boy going to the girl’s house after parents are asleep. This could go on for years before they married.
14. The words that were used always referred to the man trying his luck with the woman or simply going to the woman to make a visit, and then it becoming a regular event.
One Gaelic word that was used was ‘tadhal’. ‘Tha Iain a Gobha tadhal Mairi Chalum Isbeal.’ I recall an older man who visited an older lady in the village for many years, but it was done in a very secretive manner.
15. Older women did not seem to have a social life apart from mixing with other women at the grocery van, visits in the evenings. Dances were out of the question once you got to be about age 25-30.

No, I did not ask about my grandmother's/mother's courting habits, but I gather it was all done through caithris na h-oidhche.

16. I think it was practised to some extent. I would say it became extinct during my youth. I recall sleeping with my aunt at my grandfather's house and waking up and there being a man, fully clothed, in the bed next to my aunt. I know now it was the man she married. At the time I was given no explanation, either in the night or in the morning. As a young teenager, I had the experience of caithris na h-oidhche when a boy came in through my bedroom window and sat on my bed and talked to my sister and I until I persuaded him to leave. The following story is even better. One evening, quite late, my sister went upstairs to bed - I still had not gone up. She came flying back down saying there was a man in the wardrobe. Mother went upstairs and returned with the same boy (he was from the southern end of the village). She asked him what he was doing and he said he wanted to see me. She was very nice to him, gave him a cup of tea and he left. Of course, he did not say two words to me because my parents were there. I got a bit of teasing over that one throughout the years. However I think it's so sad that this was the only way boys and girls could expect to interact with each other. It was impossible to make an arrangement to meet and spend time together because there was nowhere to go.

Caithris na h-oidhche was practised like this. A boy or group of boys would come to a girl's house after the parents went to bed. If the door was open, which it frequently was, they would enter and make their way to the girl's bedroom. The girl would then do her best to get the boy or the group to leave. I think if it was one boy coming to see a girl he probably stayed for part of the night. You can be sure he was gone by daylight. I am not really sure what role the parents played in all of this.

In my case, it occurred very infrequently. It would happen if I happened to be at home on holiday from college (I went to college at age 16). I think it may have been a weekly occurrence or more frequently if a boy was courting a girl seriously.

There may have been young people in the village who were never involved. Seems to me it happened amongst the fun-loving people. Also parents' attitudes towards the practice may have had something to do with who practised it.

My feeling is that older people accepted the practice or they allowed the practice of caithris na h-oidhche as long as it went on unbeknownst to them. On the other hand, our neighbour, a lady whose daughter was the subject of the practice, would be very watchful and prevent it at all costs and any young man or men who were caught by her would be severely admonished. Because of her reaction some young men in the village would deliberately attempt to get into the house at night in order to aggravate the lady.

I think it is easy to assess why this tradition developed: 1) croft work would continue (summer time) until dark; only then would boys be free to court girls; 2) the natural inclination to keep relationships secret would encourage meeting after dark; 3) there was no place to meet, besides girls would not be out of doors late at night; 4) it would be almost natural given those circumstances for the boy to go the girl's house at night. It is interesting that meeting in the bedroom would occur. Why not wait for him in the kitchen after the parents retired? Again, the denial that a relationship was in progress would necessitate that the girl go upstairs to bed. Perhaps even the girl would be in denial that a relationship was taking place until the boy appeared at her bedside.
Today, I feel that the practice is completely unacceptable. There are so many more healthy ways to conduct a relationship. I gather from my mother that the practice was very common when she was a girl. Also, my father and his friends would go to other villages by bicycle. Also, the boys the age of my older brother would travel to other villages by bicycle.

No, I have never heard of *leabachas*.

17. I think courting practices today are healthier. The openness of how it's done today is preferable. There is much more communication between couples and between families in general regarding the relationship.

**V. Engagement and Marriage**

1. Other people would go together for a number of years; at least 2 or 3 years, often more.

2. No, I didn’t have a *rêteach* and I cannot recall anyone else’s. I can’t recall if my aunts had a *rêteach*.

3. I had left the island by the time my older friends and relations got engaged, so I really don’t know what was done to mark the occasion.

4. I had not spoken to them about it in the form of a discussion, only that my plan was to get engaged.

5. I think it became acceptable for them to meet (boy goes to girl’s house more openly). I don’t really know if anything changed in private. I don’t think they really mixed as a couple even when engaged, probably even when married.

6. Perhaps an engagement would last 2 years or more (sometimes many more) years.

7. To my knowledge, physical contact or shows of affection were very limited in public. I’m not sure what happened in private. People simply did not talk about their private business.

8. I can remember the previous day’s preparations of preparing chickens and other food for the wedding day. I remember this happening for the weddings of my aunts and a few others in the village. By the time my generation were getting married they tended to do it at a hotel in town. The previous days’ preparations consisted of chickens being killed and plucked and cooked. I’m not sure if the vegetables were prepared on that day or not.

9. I know that many women from the village were involved. I do not know how much involvement mothers and future mothers-in-law had in this.

10 and 11. I remember the bride leaving her home, dressed in white. The veil is very prominent in my mind. I was a flower-girl at my aunt’s wedding in the late 40s. I recall the reception in my grandmother’s house where the sitting room was lined with tables with white tablecloths. I remember the various sittings that went on into the early hours. I recall there being a dance in the schoolhouse which was half a mile up the road. There may have been a keg of beer at the dance. I recall another wedding in the next village. The dance was in a blackhouse. I was a very young teenager. I recall walking home with a girlfriend in the early morning and the sun was up. That morning we saw a courting couple by a building, a shed. Definitely, weddings and dances gave courting couples an opportunity to be together, but even then they tried to hide it. I recall men being drunk at the wedding, but there was no danger of any kind to young girls. People always had a great deal of respect for each other.

A *banais taighe* was a most wonderful event. I recall sweets with writing on them being on the table. I believe they were called ‘conversations’. It was always a three-course meal - soup and bread, chicken and vegetables, and dessert. I can’t recall the dessert but there was always wedding cake which was passed around. Close family
and close relatives were at the first few sittings, then neighbours, friends of no relationship, were fed. When the young people had eaten they went to the dance where there would be accordion music. The celebrations would continue all night. What energy those people must have had.

When one of my aunts got married, my grandfather could not be found at one point during the evening or in the early hours. He was found in the barn. He had gone there to get away from the crowds as he was a very quiet man who did not mix well. My grandmother was of quite the opposite nature.

12. My feeling is that people acquired a certain status when they married. They were seen as a more important part of the community. It did not happen to me as I was married on the mainland but I think that when I returned to the island as a married woman, I felt different. I really think I felt as if I was a more important person, as if I was now an adult, and as if I was now an adult that would be taken seriously. As I think about this, I feel that people were not treated as serious, mature individuals until they married. When I think of 3 or 4 bachelors or spinsters who now live in the village, I tend to think that they are not taken as seriously even now as those who are married.

13. I am not sure that I can remember with any accuracy how my attitude towards other people changed when they became married.

14. People who got married no longer went to dances, in fact they stopped going to dances after an engagement, or even after they had established a special relationship. People seemed to act more mature after marriage. It was as if they suddenly knew how to behave in the way that married people in the village behaved. Women assumed the role of the house-bound person while the men still went to socialize (drink) if they chose. Men seemed to have more freedom than women after marriage.

15. My partner was a lowlander. I would say that I, following the island tradition, became a much more responsible and mature individual who took the art of marriage very seriously.

16. My husband was at sea and I took it upon myself to be the one who searched out homes for us. We first lived in a flat in London. I worked very hard on housework in that flat. Later, we moved to a large flat in Glasgow. We never lived on the island.

17. I was not really in touch with the idea of giving up work and having children. I had children, but I continued working except for two brief periods of time.

18. I was always of the opinion that I had the freedom to do as I wished. Today, I feel a woman can be a mother and work outside the home successfully if she has a very supportive husband who agrees to share equally in the care of the children whose development, in my opinion, is more important than the career of either the husband or the wife. I feel the development of the children is going to be only as healthy as the emotional maturity of the parents. Whether one or both work outside the home is irrelevant. Yes, my opinion has changed on many of those issues over the years. When I was young, I jumped blindly into situations and they did not work well because I had not learned to think things through critically before making a move.

Although I gave myself the freedom to do as I wished I did not have the skills to make good emotional decisions. My choice of marriage partner was disastrous. I know at least 5 other women from the island who made the same disastrous decision regarding a marriage partner.

19. Generally, no displays of affection were made by married couples. I have never heard a verbal display of affection. I saw my father occasionally put his hand around my mother’s breasts when he was in a good mood or when he had one or two drinks of alcohol.
Men, married or unmarried, were in the habit of putting their arms around women at gatherings in homes usually when drinking was present. I always felt this was an innocent habit and I still do. However, I really would like to know what thoughts were in the men’s minds at those times. Women were fairly accepting of this, but if men were persistent women would become quite vocal to them to stop the contact.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. I personally knew nothing about the facts of life, sex and childbearing. Although my mother had all her children at home and I came second of seven, I had no knowledge of childbearing because it was not discussed and I was never close to where Mother gave birth to the babies.

I believe that because Mother had more work to do than any woman can handle, she did not have the time, nor even the time to think about our needs such as telling us something about the facts of life. On the other hand, maybe she would not have brought up this subject even if she had the time. Certainly, no-one talked about these things and neither did girlfriends talk to each other about them. However, I did think about sex and wondered about it. The only subject I heard a little bit about from the older sister of a girlfriend was menstruation.

2. No, it was never discussed among friends. I don’t think older married women discussed these topics.

3. I did not learn about the facts of life properly until I read and learnt for myself. However, I did pick up bits of information randomly. I never talked to my sister about this. I do not recall any myths circulating. These things were simply not discussed.

4. My mother used a birth control device called a Dutch cap after her last child was born. Her doctor advised her and provided her with it. I don’t know of anything used by other generations.

5. I did not discuss family planning with my husband. After my second child I decided to seek out birth control and was given the Dutch cap. Later I used the birth control pill. Because I lived in Glasgow I was able to go to a clinic where I was advised.

I do not know what was done on the island when I was seeking birth control in the mid-sixties. Most of my married friends had only 2 children so they must have had access to birth control. I think women my age were determined not to have the large families their mothers had. I’m sure they would approach the doctor or the district nurse about birth control on the island. I have never discussed this with my sister who still lives in Lewis, nor have I discussed it with friends on the island.

6. I think there has been a complete change. In my grandmother’s day women had large families and no way of preventing becoming pregnant other than denying their husband’s sexual demands. I do not know if they did that or not. Today women are definitely more assertive and they have access to birth control so easily. There is simply no comparison between the two times regarding birth control. Women today are able to take complete control of how many children to have. I do not know how big a part husbands play in these decisions today.

7. Yes, I was aware of one or two women getting pregnant outside of marriage. I would only get to know this by putting two and two together when hearing conversations. These situations would not be out in the open scandals. Instead, negative comments would be made to indicate weakness or failure on the part of the woman who became pregnant. I am not really sure when I became aware that my grandmother on my mother’s side was not married. The subject of no grandfather on
that side was never discussed. It was not until my mother was around 80 that she brought up the subject of her father and she told me some information and later gave me a photograph of him. This photo had been given to her in her later years by a friend who was a cousin on her father’s side.

8. They talked about it in negative terms. I sensed no sympathy for the woman who had the child out of wedlock. The Gaelic phrase ‘Tha i trom’ would be used to say a woman was pregnant. The phrase ‘Tha i de diolain’ would be used to say a child was illegitimate. The phrase ‘illegitimate’ was used in Gaelic about this condition. The only attitude I heard or felt about this was negative. I think women who had a child while unmarried felt the need to hide themselves. The older sister of my friend from next door had an illegitimate (so-called) child and I felt as if she felt her life was over. I felt very sad for her and I don’t know if other people did or not. If so, it certainly was not shown to this lady in any form of support. Non-communication is a very hurtful way to deal with unfortunate situations and that was how this situation was dealt with. We must remember that people were not supposed to make mistakes and one could pay dearly if that mistake was made.

9. Yes, women were blamed completely for birth out of wedlock. The odd comment would be made about who the father of this or that child might be, but one could never be sure because things like that happened at night in the dark and who could possibly know except the lady who gave birth, so he would be gone like a phantom in the night and week by week the lady would show the signs of pregnancy. It would be speculation all along by the neighbours because she or her family would certainly not talk about it.

Women who became pregnant out of wedlock were rarely seen out of doors after it began to become obvious. Even married women who were pregnant tended to hide themselves indoors.

10. Yes, men seemed to elude all blame. It’s amazing that no blame was attached to them. However, I think a great deal of that was due to the way that relationships were conducted between males and females in secret. Men seemed not to have to take any responsibility for anything until marriage and then their sole responsibility became being a breadwinner.

Yes, women were expected to be totally moral. They had to be above such impulses. And, of course, sexual impulses in women were completely denied.

No, I think that today men would have to take on more responsibility if a girlfriend became pregnant. I’m not aware of the extent of this today, so I am unable to comment.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy

1. I don’t think women of my generation knew much about pregnancy before it happened to them. We simply did not talk about pregnancy. I think topics of this nature were not talked about among friends because we did not hear our elders discuss those topics. The extent of a conversation would be that someone was pregnant and was that her 5th child and they hoped it would be a girl/boy. No details were discussed.

2. I had my first child on the mainland and there were no family members nearby. I had no advice to speak of and I felt that I did not need support as I had been raised to be very independent. I now know I could have used a great deal more advice and support.

I would have liked to have known about the stages in labour, the possibility of false labour, forceps type delivery, information about breast feeding. My first baby was a
forceps delivery and then I was not allowed to hold her for two days. Today, I would be very assertive in what my wishes would be.
3. I can’t remember many older woman being pregnant. They tended not be outdoors as much or maybe they were and I did not know they were pregnant. Pregnancy was not a state that was celebrated. I cannot recall having any thoughts about pregnant women.
4. Gaelic phrase ‘Tha i trom’; ‘Rugadh i leanabh.’
5. I did not discuss my pregnancies with my husband other than to tell him that we were expecting a child. I talked with other women in generalities - how I was feeling, how far along, what to call the child.
6. Both my pregnancies were straightforward with few health problems. I retained fluid and was hospitalized early with my first pregnancy which was a forceps delivery and I finished up being in hospital for 2 weeks before the birth and 2 weeks after the birth. I returned to work 6 weeks after my first baby was born.
My second child was straightforward with absolutely no problems (home birth).
7. I finished working outside the home at 6 months each time, but continued doing normal household activities until each birth.
8. My second child was born at home in our flat in Glasgow. It was excellent in every way. There was a midwife present and my husband remained in the kitchen. Mainly I had my second baby at home because I did not want to leave my first child, who was 1 year 9 months old. I think I was up doing some housework the very next day. It was a far better experience than my hospital birth with my first child.
9. My first child was born in hospital. It was impersonal and lonely.
10. I did not have choices with my first baby, but with my second baby I did as I pleased and I was up and about very soon. I really enjoyed the times after my babies were born. They were challenging times and I had a lot to learn through trial and error. I think I was fairly lucky because both my children were fairly easy to get from one stage to the next. I was a very well organized person. Maybe that helped, but also maybe I was too organized. Friends and relatives came to see the babies and I certainly enjoyed that attention. People were kind and generous. This happened in Glasgow. I don’t know what the procedure would be on the island.
11. I returned to my normal routine very quickly after each birth and seemingly without any problems. I returned to work (teaching) 6 weeks after my daughter was born and 7 months after my son was born. After he was born I decided to give up work but the headmaster of my last school called me in October, 6 months after my son was born and asked me if I was interested in returning. I returned in November of that year.
12. I enjoyed the new role. I enjoyed learning how to care for babies. Often I was confused about procedures for feeding my first baby, but far less confused with my second baby. No one helped me. I was so accustomed to expecting myself to do what was right that it would not have occurred to me to ask for help. Besides, asking for help would appear to be a weakness. Nowadays, I do not see asking for help as a weakness. I would often visit my uncle and aunt and my brother and his wife, who all lived in Glasgow, and I felt this was a form of support. Fortunately, island women had a lot of common sense and that kept them on track when they had to attempt new things such as first babies. Also their strong sense of responsibility kicked in to enable them to do the job in hand.
13. I don’t recall older women expressing attitudes of this kind. If they did, that would be typical because expressing attitudes about the differences in the past and present was commonly done.
14. I was not concerned much about the sex of my first baby, but I think my preference was for a boy. I did want my second child to be a boy because I did not plan to have any more than 2 children. Other people did not seem to have a strong preference.
15. If by supportive you mean helping with household and family matters, I don’t think husbands were at all supportive. They continued to do no more of those duties than they had previously done. However, I do recall one or two husbands who seemed to do differently than others and they took a more active part in food preparation. Generally, husbands did not seem to know there were things they could do to help out. Definitely the women were the ones who were expected to take responsibility for children’s needs, food preparation and house-cleaning. I really can’t say how husbands on the island helped during those times. I suspect wives got up and resumed their daily routines quickly.
16. I became more responsible for every aspect of family life. I felt I had to move away from any activity solely for me and focus on my children’s needs. I took them with me everywhere I went.
17. I recall my mother having my youngest brother at home. I felt removed from the event. Mother was in her bedroom and we were in and out of the house. I was told she had a baby boy but I don’t recall being allowed to see him any time soon after he was born. Nor did I expect to see him. You expected nothing and you accepted that you would be allowed something once you were told you could by an adult. We were so accepting of whatever the circumstances were around us. I know that my mother had 7 trouble-free home births. She worked outdoors on the croft often up to the day she gave birth and she would take the babies to the croft to do work soon after they were born if they were born in the spring or summer. My earliest memory is of hearing a spade hitting against stones as my mother turned over the soil in a field on the croft in preparation for growing potatoes. I was lying wrapped up in a blanket by the side of the field. Having been born in November, it couldn’t possibly have been the following spring, but it would have been perhaps the following spring when I was aged 2.
18. I don’t have any knowledge of those terms.
19. I am not sure if it was celebrated or not. So many things were taken for granted. The fatalistic attitude that was so prevalent meant that events within family life came and went without a fuss. Birthdays were not celebrated and I’m sure births were seen as no big deal.
20. I named my first child after my grandmother, but I also liked the name. I called her Christine Elizabeth (the second name because I liked it). I named my second child using a name I liked and his second name was his father’s - Richard John. It was very typical of parents to name their children after some family member.
21. I did not have my children baptized as babies because I had an aversion to the rituals and teachings of the Free Church. I felt that it had never met my needs in any way and that it had served to magnify the negative attitudes that had a negative effect on my life. Unfortunately, I was not able to disentangle my concept of church as taught to me by the Free Church on Lewis, until much much later in life. I see now that organized religion can be viewed far differently from how I viewed it. One can certainly now find a church that will meet one’s needs. Also, I know that one can explore spirituality without being part of any organized religion.
Other people’s baptisms. I think parents had to be questioned by elders of the church to satisfy the requirements of gaining a baptism for their baby. There was another set
of rules for the baptism of an illegitimate child. I remember feeling that the elders of
the church sat in judgement of people and I was very much opposed to that.

3D. CAIRSTIONA

[Cairstiona has been a near neighbour of my parents’ since they returned to Lewis in
1979.]

Marital status Married                  Date of birth 30.11.39
Birthplace North Tolsta (home birth)
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of
time that you stayed there, and list the jobs you have had.
North Tolsta, 15 years; Oban, 10 years, hotel work, head waitress; North Tolsta since
then
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1903, North Tolsta
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 12.7.09, North Tolsta
Parents’ occupations Fisherman/crofter
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Omitted
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Commenced work in hotels in Oban
Age at marriage 25 years
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 18.9.36, North Tolsta
Husband’s occupation Fisherman
No. of sons and their ages 1 son, 31 years old
No. of daughters and their ages 30 years and 29 years
Total number of children you have ever borne 3
Are any of your children married now? Son
Do you have any grandchildren? One
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Free Church
Parents’ religion Free Presbyterian
Husband’s religion Free Church

I. Language
1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. Yes.

II. Family and Household
1. My parents, four brothers and five sisters
2. No.
3. Yes.

III. Growing Up
1. The love attention received from my parents and the hard work which was the way
of life then.
2. My mother a very hard working woman full of patience and love for her family;
very good relationship.
3. My father very easy to cope with and very kind; didn’t bother us much.

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4. It’s hard to say how other couples were but my parents didn’t show their affection towards each other as we do in our day.
5. We had a big family - 5 boys and five girls, large families were supposed to be much closer in those days. Not so close to grandparents as they are today. Cousins very close.
7. My mother.
8. Both my parents were involved. Family worship in morning and evening, the whole family had to be there.
9. There was differences, boys were boys, girls were girls. For example, boys would not be allowed to sleep in girls’ bedroom.
10. They didn’t have the means for education. There was hardly enough money to clothe and feed them, their food came first.
11. I always wanted to be helpful for neighbours and friends, and help anybody in need.
12. No, I thought my mother was a model in more ways than one.
13. Very much, I wanted to get married and have children; didn’t realize it was such hard work. There was not a lot of choice for work, hotels mostly, that’s what most girls did.
15. My grandparents’ generation worked even harder than my parents. They didn’t have much comforts in home or material things.
16. Women looked after the home and old parents or sick grandparents, etc., girls followed in older women’s footsteps; girls then respected older people more, it was expected of them.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. In general that time passed so quickly; we were very restricted to what we were allowed to do.
2. Me, being the oldest girl had to help my mother with the children and keeping the house tidy, be at her beck and call.
3. My relationship with my parents didn’t change until they were gone. I respected them both the same until their dying days.
4. We used to go and visit a special old lady in the village and took our knitting with us, and my mother put a mark on the knitting to make sure we were where we said we were supposed to be.
5. You could have a male friend, but we were very restricted in the time that was spent with them.
6. A lot of say, their word was law.
7. You could try and argue but you didn’t get very far.
8. Staying out after ten o’ clock at night. It was a must for all family to be home for family worship at 10.30 (a must).
10. 12-15 years old, I suppose we fancied boyfriends. I was 25 years when married.
11. Sixteen was the age you really started dating, too young.
12. Very much so.
13. They were all in favour as long as you did how they felt about it.
15. They had great tales about their courting days.
16. Yes. 3 nights a week. Yes. They accepted it as the done thing. It’s hard to say, I think I would rather caithris na h-oidhche.

17. We would not take our boyfriends to our home to meet our parents; they would not like it a bit.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. 2 years.
2. I never had a réiteach.
3. Meeting both sets of parents for the first time.
4. Yes, I had kept them up to date on our decisions.
5. No, they behaved very shy in public. No, not all, they would be pleased for them.
6. Eighteen months to two years.
7. Holding hands, maybe looking into one another’s eyes.
8. Going round houses, collecting dishes, chickens, chairs, table cloths, preparing tables.
9. Not as much we have nowadays.
10. Completely different to what we know today - went on for two or three days for some.
11. Seeing I was so young I only got to the children’s table, so there was not a lot left, but very enjoyable.
12. They were not half as well off as couples today, the older generation helped as much as possible.
13. You took your marriage vows more seriously and you made a go of it whether sweet or sour, no turning back.
14. We were expected to stay in the house more, no social life was expected unless you went to a friend’s wedding.
15. The woman so very much kept at home while he was away nearly all week at sea.
16. We stayed in a rented house without heating for a year, then moved to a council house for 13 years, then bought our own home.
17. I think it kept family together and made family life more loving for the family when the mother never went to work.
18. I would much rather the woman be at home; there would not be so much broken words as today.
19. They showed their affection in different ways from today.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Many did not know what to expect until they were in the labour ward.
2. Yes, but not as open as people do in this day and age.
3. You were lucky if you had an older sister, she might have been able to discuss it with you.
4. None, they would have been to feared to try anything.
5. It was not discussed, you just took it as it came.
6. A lot has changed. Childbirth is a lot safer in this day and age.
7. They would be well on in pregnancy before anyone found out.
8. It was a great shame for them.
9. The woman was blamed more I think.
10. Yes, men got off lightly in every way.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. Very little. They took every step as it came.
2. The doctor gave you support, I would rather have been the way I was.
3. I thought it was great.
4. Pregnant, air tuiris.
5. I talked to my husband.
8. No.
9. Three hospital births; kind nurses.
10. Ten days in bed reading, a good build up.
12. My mother was ready at hand, washing baby nappies and making food for us.
13. Very often, the differences were discussed.
14. No.
15. My husband was more in labour than me at times.
19. A dram of whisky.
20. Called after somebody in the family.
21. Pleased the baptism was over, it was a great ordeal.

3E. CAITRIONA (See 4B)

[Caitriona lives in North Tolsta. She expressed an interest in my work to one of my parents and we subsequently corresponded.]

Marital status Married Date of birth 5.9.23
Birthplace North Tolsta
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of
time that you stayed there, and list the jobs that you have had.
North Tolsta; Lewis Hospital, auxiliary nurse, 1 yr; Woodend Hospital, Aberdeen,
student nurse, 3 yrs; Rankin Memorial Hospital, Greenock, 1 yr; North Tolsta at
Lewis hospital 1 1/2 yrs, and County Hospital, 18 yrs.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1893
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1897
Parents’ occupations Fisherman and housewife
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s One older brother, one younger sister and brother
How old were you when you left school? 14 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Domestic service
Age at marriage 25 years
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1921, North Tolsta
Husband’s occupation General merchant
No. of sons and their ages Angus, 45, and Donald, 41
No. of daughters and their ages Maureen, 42
Total number of children you have ever borne 4. One only lived for 36 hours
Are any of your children married now? Yes
Do you have any grandchildren? Yes, 5
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant
Parents’ religion Protestant
Husband’s religion Protestant
I. *Language*
1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. Yes.

II. *Family and Household*
1. 3 adults and 4 children.
2. With in-laws until our own house was built.
3. Yes.

III. *Growing Up*
3. Very good.
4. Good, very close.
5. My father and mother were very happy. My mother. All relations were very important in our young days.
7. Mother.
8. Family worship, morning and evening, you had to attend. Both.
9. No difference.
10. Yes. No. 11. No.
12. Yes - different way of life.
13. You wanted to better yourself - always interested in nursing, but marriage was at the back of our mind. Yes, I intended to leave home. Yes. Yes, but the War prevented a lot from carrying that out.
15. My parents had better conditions than grandparents.
16. No comment.

IV. *Early Adulthood*
1. Very happy years. Yes.
2. No change.
3. I gave them every respect. Yes.
4. Happy social life - knitting and visiting one another.
5. I did not spend much time with the opposite sex - too busy studying and the war on.
6. Had a lot of say and you had to obey them
7. No, we respected our parents.
8. No disagreements.
9. Most young people went to church Sunday night. They knew they had to obey their parents.
10. 20 years or thereabouts.
11. 18 years - parents took it for granted.
12. Yes.
13. Courting was very personal and private.
14. ‘Courting’ or *suiridhe*.
15. Never discussed.
16. No. War was on and I was away all the war years. Very few girls and boys of my age was at home - they were involved in the war. I suppose it was the only way they could make contact with the opposite sex. Today’s standards are better in every way. No.
17. I don’t know what courting practices are today.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Three years. Depended on what part of the world you were in.
2. Yes. Yes.
3. Party, with near friends and relations.
4. No. 5. No.
6. Depended on the couple - 1 year or so.
7. You did not show any physical affection in public towards each other.
8. The preparation of the wedding. House decorated and painted. The day before the wedding all the hens were cleaned and cooked, also the sheep made ready for the dinner, the vegetables and potatoes, trifles and jellies and plenty of wine and whisky galore.
9. They were very much involved in the preparation, also the young ladies of the village.
10. We enjoyed the barn dancing and the Gaelic singing. Also the lovely pastries and cakes, the bride’s cake, and the lovely dresses of the bride and maids. We all got dressed in a new frock, especially if it was a relative.
11. Yes, in our young days everyone got married at home and I can say everyone enjoyed themselves. The old men and women really outshone the young with their stories. It was really great.
12. No, they treated us as a young married couple.
13. No change.
14. Depended on the couple themselves.
15. Became fonder of one another.
16. Lived with parents for 1 year. Happy. Moved into our own house 1951.
17. Well, it was the done thing - once you were married your employment was finished.
18. I think the mother should be with the family until the children are old enough to look after themselves.
19. No.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. My nursing experience taught all.
3. No.
6. Quite a lot.
7. Yes. Discussed by people.
8. It was frowned upon. ‘Tha i turus.’
9. No.
10. Yes. Yes.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. They would read about it. They would hear about it. Every home had big families then.
2. My nursing experience taught me all about it.
3. Yes, but nothing unusual about it.
5. Yes. Yes.
7. Worked until labour commenced.
8. No.
9. Yes. All right, normal.
10. 1 day, very well.
11. 10 days or 1 week.
12. Quite happy. My mother with all household duties.
13. Yes.
15. Very supportive.
17. No.
18. No.
19. Everybody enjoyed the birth with a drink and cake.
20. Decided between us - usually called them after a member of the family.
21. My children were very good during baptism. No cry. No other children were baptized with mine.

3F. CATHERINE (See 4C)

[Catherine wrote to me having seen my letter in the West Highland Press Press.]

Marital status: Widowed
Date of birth: 29.6.08
Birthplace: Colinton, Midlothian
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
Colinton, 2 yrs; Glasgow, 5 yrs; Edinburgh, 16 yrs; Skye, 66 yrs.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin: Skye, 1870
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin: Caithness, 1876
Parents’ occupations: Church of Scotland minister, housewife
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s: 3 sisters, all older
How old were you when you left school? 18 years old
What did you do directly after you left school? Went to Edinburgh University.
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
When I left university I married and worked in the house and on the croft.
Age at marriage: 21 years
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin: Skye 1886
Husband’s occupation: Crofter, drover
No. of sons and their ages: 7, born between 1931 and 1945
Total number of children you have ever borne: 7
Are any of your children married now? 6 of them
Do you have any grandchildren? 25
Religion: how would you describe yourself? No religion
Parents’ religion: Presbyterian
Husband’s religion: Seceder, Free Presbyterian
I. Language
1. No. 2. Yes. 3. My father was a Gaelic speaker. 4. Yes, my husband was a Gaelic speaker and the boys spoke Gaelic first.

II. Family and Household
1. Father, mother, 3 sisters. A cousin stayed with us 3 years to attend school. We had our own house.
2. The boy who helped on the farm stayed in the house and so did the girl who helped me.
3. The circumstances were typical enough then but not now.

III. Growing Up
1. I was happy playing mostly by myself. I had a doll’s house made from wooden boxes. We papered them and got scraps for carpet. I made furniture out of match boxes. This was a garden in Edinburgh with apple trees. I used to cycle round the paths and pretend to be a train. I had a muff which I played with endlessly. My sisters used to see that I went to bed in good time. I was rather afraid of Dileas who could be rather cross at times. When cousin Jeanie came to live with us she and Dileas went about together to rugger matches but we went together to a dancing class.

I did no work around the home. We had 2 maids and sometimes 3. School was all right but I was sorry when the small boys went off to a prep school of their own. Dileas was good at games. I wasn’t. Helen told bedtime stories. Jean was a medical student. They took turns of plaiting my hair which was long.

2. I was very fond of my mother. She was always a refuge when things went against me. I used to like to go shopping with her. The owners of the small shops used to be very polite to their established customers. Mother ran monthly accounts. There were messengers with bicycles and they used to deliver messages whistling some musical hit of the day.

As a teenager I grew away from my mother. I had a special schoolfriend and we passed time together making up stories.

Always towards the end of July when the Edinburgh schools closed the big basket trunk was brought out and filled with sheets, pillowcases and towels. Then we knew it was time for Skye and freedom.

3. My father was very fond of fishing, cod, haddock, flounder. Herring made good bait but when herring was not to be had, mussels were used. They grew on Raasay on the legs of the pier or we kept a bag of them in salted water. Jean was the best fisherwoman and could row as strongly as a man. . . . When I was young we had a good relationship. He became more and more entangled in church business and was fond of saying he had come from a congregation of seven to St. Cuthbert’s where there were 3,000 communicants.

4. Divorce was condemned and caused a great stir when it did occur, all the well-dressed ladies in mother’s drawing-room shaking their heads on the errant male. My parents had an occasional fallout over money. I think my father used money as an outlet for irritation. It used to upset me very much. Mother was a careful manager and there was no need for rows.

5. I thought of my father as being head of the family. It was, I think, generally accepted that middle class women did not earn and had no money of their own.
7. I can’t remember much about discipline, sometimes my sisters would take a hand. I was in awe of Jean.
8. We accepted religion as part of life. I don’t remember that it was much discussed.
9 and 10. Having no brothers I can’t say.
11. My sister Jean, eleven years older than myself, battling her way through medicine. There was still a lot of prejudice against women doctors.
13. Yes, I meant to marry and have 6 children, 3 boys and 3 girls.
16. There was change under way and the comfortable middle class way of life was ending. My father was anxious for us all to have the possibility of a career behind us. He wanted Dileas to be a doctor. Mother thought she would be happier being a nurse. Father had his way but Dileas had a hard time getting through the course. She hadn’t Jean’s brains.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Yes.
2. I did not help in the house.
3. I grew away from my mother.
4. We went to dances, formal affairs. Later we made up parties for the Palais and enjoyed them very much. For my older sisters there was a scarcity of men of their age group because of the 1914-1918 War.
5. I had boyfriends.
6. My parents did not interfere.
7. No.
8. My father was against my friendship with Duncan MacPherson. He refused to allow me to go to Skye when I was 16.

V. Engagement and Marriage
11. My father was very much opposed to my relationship with Duncan, so 1, 2, 3 do not apply. My father went to Australia to preach and mother went with him. She fell sick on the journey home. It turned to pernicious anaemia and she died in May, 3 months after reaching home. We never talked about Duncan but she liked him. My mother’s death while my father was moderator of the C. of S. made us put off our marriage for a year. Then Duncan intended to accost my father but a friend did it instead. It was agreed that I would finish my degree course. Duncan waited yet another year. All this is no use to you. It is atypical. I was never at a réiteach. Skye people considered caithris na h-oidheche a low custom, practised mainly by Harris people. It was never practised in Skye. I never heard of leabachas. My youngest sister-in-law would not allow the young man who was courting her to speak to her parents. She was prudish and regretted it very much in later years. Another sister-in-law wished to marry someone but her brother objected and she gave way and held a grudge against him afterwards.
16. We lived in a schoolhouse which the Education Authority did not use. It was all right but we were faced with falling prices and had to move after 3 years to a remote holding.
17. I accepted having children as the natural outcome of marriage. I feel mothers should stay home and look after the children at least till they go to school.
19. No display of affection.
VI. Before Childbearing
1. Very little. Marie Stopes enlightened my sisters and me about the facts of life. The subject was taboo and was not discussed.
5. My husband did not approve of birth control. I consulted my sister Jean.
6. Things have changed radically. Women who have children outside of marriage are not considered as abandoned. Couples often live together without marrying.
7. Gossip and pleasure in running down young women.
9. The women were always blamed more than the men.
10. Not so much nowadays. There is not so much righteous indignation floating around. Of course some people have not changed.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
4. Yes, my husband and I discussed pregnancy. It was necessary to find domestic help.
6. They were normal. I suffered from varicose veins as the child became heavy.
7. I did not give up normal activities but carried on.
8. I had five home births but the fifth alarmed the doctor. There was a haemorrhage. On the 6th I went to a brother-in-law’s house and the 7th took me to Uig Hospital.
10. I was ten days in bed.
11. After that I resumed my usual duties.
14. We wanted a girl when the second was on the way but as it proved to be a boy we gave up hope of a girl. Boys were usually more wanted than girls.
17. It was generally home births in the 30s and 40s.
19. Usually with a dram.
20. Boys were usually called after the husband’s father, girls after the mother’s mother. The first four were my husband’s choice, the last three mine.
21. They were baptized in the Free Presbyterian Church.

3G. CHRISSIE

[I have known Chrissie since she was my Sunday School teacher in the local Free Church. She expressed an interest in my work, having heard about it informally.]

Marital status Married
Date of birth 1937
Birthplace Stornoway
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there, and the jobs you have done.
Stornoway until the age of 18 years; Aberdeen, 3 yrs - nurse training; Edinburgh, 6 mths - maternity training; Glasgow, 6 mths - maternity; Edinburgh, 3 mths - district training; Breasclete, 2 yrs - district nurse; Edinburgh, 2 yrs - district nurse; Lochcarron, 8 yrs; North Tolsta, 23 yrs (Stornoway, 1 year Lewis Hospital staff nurse).
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin Not sure
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1908
Parents’ occupations Mother, a weaver
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Sister 1933
How old were you when you left school? 17 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Trained to be a nurse
Age at marriage 26 years
Husband's d.o.b. and place of origin 1931, Lewis
Husband's occupation Minister of religion
No. of daughters and their ages 3, 28 yrs, 27 yrs and 23 yrs
Total number of children you have ever borne 4, one stillborn son
Are any of your children married? No
Do you have any grandchildren? No
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Christian [Free Church member]
Parents' religion Protestant - Christian
Husband's religion Protestant - Christian [Free Church minister]

I. Language
1 and 2. Gaelic learner. Understood Gaelic as a child, worked in a Gaelic-speaking community and then married and living in a Gaelic speaking community - so one could say I was fluent now.
3. My parents had Gaelic and all their brothers and sisters.
4. My husband is a fluent Gaelic speaker and the children understand it though their speaking of it is not fluent.

II. Family and Household
1. One adult, my mother, and 2 daughters, my sister and I. We lived in our own home.
2. In my marriage only my husband and children lived in the home.
3. Not that typical at that time - my mother and father lived with grandparents until they were allocated a council house. At the time I married, 1963, people did stay with parents till they got their own place and buying property then for the ordinary person was unheard of.

III. Growing Up
1. My father died when I was three. My mother worked near our home. She was very industrious and tried to provide everything that other children had for us. I was born in 1937 and so when I was going to school no-one had fathers - I knew my father had died but seeing other children's fathers were in the war it didn’t affect me. I do remember when the war ended and all the fathers started coming home - all the excitement. Mine didn’t come, but I had two uncles who came back with presents for us.
I must say I had a happy childhood. My mother was important to me, my granny, grandpa and uncles, and the neighbours - everyone went in and out of each other’s houses. There was no televisions so visiting in houses was commonplace.
We played with a bike which I got from one of my uncles who had been in the war, skipping, pee wee, rounders, in the winter knocking on doors and running off. Went to the Braigh in the summer, spent all the day there on sand and in the sea.
From the time I was 12 yrs, I cleaned the house from top to toe. It was spotless. My mother was out at work, I was domesticated. My sister was an academic - she read and read, became a lawyer. In fact the first girl to go from the Nicolson Institute in 1953, to study law.
After I left home, I could not understand how our house was not so tidy - then I realized that was my work when I was at home.
School was good, I’ve happy memories. Some teachers were very wild. We had to learn our sums in those days.

2. My life revolved around my mother, as I had no father. Relationships were good and she was a Mother - family first till the very end of her life.

3. My father died when I was 3 yrs.

4. That question I can’t really answer, but my mother and sister and I were as one.

5. There was closeness in our home, but my grandparents and aunts were very good to us, probably because we had no father.

6. In my case, my mother.

7. My mother.

8. With my mother being left a young widow, she depended on God for her help and strength. She prayed.

9. Boys had to do a lot of hard work when I was young as fathers came back from the war and were catching up with lost years so sons helped them. Girls did a lot of housework.

10. As far as I’m aware all children were treated the same. People did not think of education as they do today. As long as people stayed in school till 14 yrs - they left and got work.

11. Teachers were my role models. I suppose they were well-dressed and posh - looked as if they had money. I think I still admire all my teachers, they seemed dedicated and respected by everyone in the community.

12. I always wanted to be a nurse because there was a lot of hardship in my young days felt by everyone. I wanted to do the best I could for myself.

13. No, I never thought of marriage. I wanted to be a nurse and become famous like Florence Nightingale helping the sick. I had to leave home to do my training.

14. Yes, girls and boys played together.

15. My mother had running water and electric light which my grandparents did not have.

16. Women stayed in the home when they married and brought up their families. I did feel when I was in my teens that my mother was the only mother out working - for a woman to work was very unusual.

**IV. Early Adulthood**

1. My teenage years were good and I enjoyed them.

2. We were expected to help in the house.

3. My mother and I got on fine. I never heard of the ‘teenage stage’ until I had a family of my own. People left school at 14 yrs, went to the hotels to work or mainland houses that employed domestic help so there was no time for teenage troubles. People grew up quick and took responsibility early.

4. Social life was good. We went to dances on the road about 12 yrs, at 16 yrs we went to village halls and some nights to the picture house. There was no drinking except a glass of sherry at New Year.

5. I had one boyfriend, 18-21 yrs, one from 22-26 yrs. I was working hard as a nurse so it was work and bed, no energy for play. Girls getting pregnant was rare and kept very quiet.

6. None.

7. Yes, life on the Island was very much influenced by the Church and Bible teachings - so dancing and the picture films were frowned upon.

8. I argued about getting out to go to a dance. I disagreed with my mother’s Christian beliefs. I did not like being restricted, like any young person.
9. The Church was a great influence on our lives. We tried to adhere to the ways we were taught while on the Island, but once away from the Island we did what we wanted. Everyone conformed till they left home.
10. That I can’t say as I was more career minded than marriage, but I suppose 21 yrs or later.
11. About 15 yrs or 16 yrs. Once one went to the dances.
12. Yes.
13. People never discussed their relationship with the opposite sex - that was private. Older people weren’t keen on younger people courting. They did not want people to marry young after all the hardship suffered post-war.
15. Most older people stayed in the house, knitting and looking after elderly relatives. Here, I’ll tell you a story related to my husband’s aunt. Courting - the men used to sneak into the girl’s house after the parents were asleep. They would lie together in the same bed (no heating then), but a man never put his hands past the woman’s breasts.
16. That wee story above relates to caithris na h-oidhche. It was practised in the villages outside the town. Older people turned a blind eye to it. It was accepted as part of courting. No transport then. It developed as there was no transport, no heating, no lighting but lamps. They wanted to save the oil etc. In most cases caithris na h-oidhche was practised by people who were going to marry.
Never heard of leabachas.
17. We never practised sexual intercourse till we married. Today people have the Pill. I don’t like to think of people not marrying as virgins but as I read magazines I see some horrifying stories.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. I was engaged 1 yr, 5 mths.
2. No, I did not. My husband wrote to my mother.
3. Out for a meal.
4. Yes.
5. No, their behaviour toward each other did not change. There were no public displays of affection in my day. People treated you as if you would get married. Today we don’t know - engagements are broken. That many seldom happened in my day.
6. 2 yrs.
8. My wedding was in a hotel but I remember house weddings, meals being served all night and dancing.
9. Mothers did not do so much as they do today.
10. As a young adult I remember house weddings. Hotels did not cater for weddings. Hens were killed by each home, cooked and that was the wedding meal. We only ate chicken at Xmas and weddings.
11. Yes. It went on all night. It was a happy affair. The bride and groom went to a room upstairs and locked the door. The party went on downstairs and outside in the barns.
12. People were then left to fend for themselves. There was no help from parents and it wouldn’t be expected.
13. When people married you knew they wouldn’t go out socializing with you so contact with them severed.

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14. There was no social life, they did not expect to have one. They were now married and expected to look after husband and home. Everyone or most had a child in a year.
15. Not much. I did my work, he did his.
16. We lived in a very small flat. After 2 yrs we moved to a very large manse.
17. It was accepted. No-one questioned it. It was a thrill for a woman to have children.
18. As I told you earlier, my mother worked. It was sad to come home to an empty house. That was the only sadness in my childhood. I advise mothers not to work but we live in an age where they all work. I don’t approve. They say they need the money but I don’t agree. I lived on a very low wage and brought up my family. Maybe the pain of an empty house made me determined that my family would not know that.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. None. I only knew about childbearing as I was a midwife.
2. Yes, among friends, yes, and older women.
3. We learned from the other girls at school.
4. I don’t know of any. But it was said if a baby was breast-fed that was a birth control - one would not become pregnant, but that is not so.
5. No, in my experience as a district nurse I was never asked the question (1961-65).
6. Very much so. Everyone knows about the Pill and will ask for it from doctors and get it and go on it.
7. Yes - but very few and it was kept very quiet. No-one said anything until the baby was born.
8. The Gaelic phrase was trom, ‘heavy’. The attitude of this Island was to frown upon it.
9. Yes, always the women.
10. Yes - women were blamed very much so. In a way yes - but not the same.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. We knew nothing - would learn from other women who had children. There were no ante-natal or post-natal clinics.
2. None. I was 70 miles away from a hospital so I was looked after by a very eccentric district nurse and doctor who told you nothing.
3. Yes - I thought it was terrible. I thought only young women were pregnant.
4. Heavy - for pregnancy.
5. Yes.
6. Very good and quick labours. Though I had one stillborn child - the heart failed at 8 mths - I had to take it to term and deliver when labour started - no inducing then.
7. I didn’t.
8. One home birth.
9. 3 hospital births - they were good.
10. We were up after 24 hours and that was it. In hospital five days. Then we went home and slowly got back into routine.
11. Immediately.
12. It was a wonderful experience. I adjusted myself. Only my husband did some help.
13. They always talked about how they were in bed for ten days and how the bed was not changed with home deliveries and the blankets - no sheets - sticking to their bottoms and the skin coming away when they did move.
14. I would have liked a boy for my husband but as long as the children had everything they should have I was happy.
15. Not very - it was not expected of them.
16. I now had someone to look after and bring up - I felt I dedicated myself to the task. Other people expected you to be a good wife and mother.
17. Yes. I remember there were no telephones and having to stay with a woman while her husband went on a bike to go to the doctor's house. I remember them washing all the stained sheets. The lovely big fire - the cry of a new baby and the lovely smell of Johnson's Baby Powder.
18. No - but kirking took place when a couple got married, when they came back from their honeymoon. Bride, groom, bestman and bridesmaid went to the church.
19. A glass of whisky or sherry.
20. I named them after people in the family and this was typical. Relatives would be very hurt if another name unknown to them was used. This was typical.
21. Baptism was always a solemn occasion. I enjoyed baptisms and still do. I pray for the children being baptized. I'm only sorry that I could never completely fulfil my baptismal vows.

3H. DOLINA (See 4D)

[Dolina returned to Lewis several years ago, after becoming a widow. Her family lived close to my father's household while they were growing-up. She is the elder sister of another informant, Ishbel (see 3K).]

Marital status Widowed
Birthplace North Tolsta
Date of birth 21.12.25
Birthplace North Tolsta
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there, and the jobs that you did.
Inverness, 18 mths - general domestic service; Sidmouth, South Devon, 6 mths, Weeton, Lancs., 3 1/2 years - war service; Strathearn, Brechin, 1 year; Dundee, 1 year; Belshill, 6 mths; Fifte, 6 years; Dundee, 18 years - as nursing orderly, in nursing training, as midwife, as nursing sister; North Tolsta.
Father's d.o.b. and place of origin 29.12.1895, North Tolsta
Mother's d.o.b. and place of origin 8.8.1889, North Tolsta
Parents' occupations Fisherworkers
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s See Agnes
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Domestic service; W.A.A.F.S.
Age at marriage 25 years old.
Husband's d.o.b. and place of origin 11.5.1917, Marykirk, Angus
Husband's occupation Principal Nursing Officer
Do you have any children? No.
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant
Parents' religion Protestant

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Husband's religion Protestant

I. Language
1 and 2. Native. 3. Family spoke Gaelic. 4. No.

II. Family and Household
1. Parents and family of five.
2. No one.
3. Most families had grandparents living with them and in some case unmarried aunts and uncles.

III. Growing Up
1. I grew up in a happy atmosphere. We were very close to our cousins, clannish really. Neighbours, especially the elderly whose family were grown up and away, played an important part in our lives and could be more censorious than our parents. We wandered in and out each others’ houses - locked doors were unheard of. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the village school, hated missing a day. On the whole, out teachers were dedicated to their task. The infants’ teachers were loved by us all. The infants were taught in a separate block that was heated by open fires and if we chanced to get caught in a shower the girls had to strip off their top jersey and sit round the fire in their ‘guernsey beag’ to dry off. Hopscotch and skipping were the main games played during the intervals - this in the school playground.

During the hols we played (girls only) rounders while we herded the cattle. We were also fond of playing house. This involved looking out a nice sheltered spot, collecting bits of broken crockery, making a dresser with bits of wood, balanced on stones to make shelves and arranging the crockery. All this was jealously guarded, especially if one had pretty pieces on their dresser. At home during Saturdays and holidays one was expected to help with the chores - washing up and fetching water, child-minding also if one’s parents were busy with outside work.

2. My mother was very reserved. She had an unhappy childhood with the proverbial wicked stepmother. Very rarely did she talk about her young life, but my uncle was not so reticent. I think that this had a bearing in her personality. She was warm and caring but I found it difficult to discuss anything with her. As she got older she became a different person, younger in her outlook, and with a great sense of humour. We were very close in the later years.

3. I was very close to my father. He was a kind, gentle man, but a strict disciplinarian when necessary. I could talk to him about anything and so could my friends. He was more like a big brother.

4. My parents and the other couples in the vicinity got on well and appeared happy from what I can remember. They shared a lot of the outside work and helped each other out when necessary. I was never aware of any strife between any of them.

5. We had four aunts with large families. A few cousins in each family were in our age group, so there was quite a bit of rivalry between us, especially regarding school attainments. We didn’t know our grandparents - they had passed away at a fairly young age. We looked upon a great uncle and aunt as grandparents and loved them dearly. Cousins were close to one another and visited frequently.

6. My father was head of the household in every way and I think that was the case in most households.
7. My mother checked us for minor things, but my father was the chief disciplinarian.
8. We attended Sunday school. Both parents were involved in our religious education. My father questioned us on Bible knowledge and we had to learn the catechism and psalms.
9. I don’t think there was any difference in the way boys and girls were treated by parents. Having said that, I do know of one family where the boys were always served first at mealtimes.
10. If a son and daughter were equal in scholastic achievements the boy was nearly always chosen to go forward to further his education.
11. The district nurse was my role model. Even as a young child I realized that the nurse was a comforting, caring person to have around in sickness and I wanted to be the same.
12. I wanted an easier lifestyle and the means to better oneself. Father didn’t keep good health so that mother had to take the largest share of the croft work.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Teenage years were happy times for most of us.
2. After school and Saturdays we were expected to do household chores.
3. More was expected of you if you were the eldest of a family. Younger members had an easier time.
4. We didn’t have much of a social life at home. Weddings were the highlight in our lives. We met most nights in some house where we would be joined by some boys. We would have a sing-song and always the knitting-pins going.
5. I would class some of the neighbours’ sons of my own age group as platonic friends as would most other girls. We continued to meet as a group, although one or two paired off.
6. Parents cautioned and chastised. Most were against road dances which were considered a great sin, but dancing at weddings was permissible.
7. There were minor disagreements.
8. Now and again there would be a concert party in the school and it caused a bit of a hassle getting permission to attend. Staying out too late was another crime. Family worship was eleven p.m. and one was expected to be in for that.
9. In our day the church played a great role in our lives. Young people attended church then and I’m sure that what was instilled into us has remained with us.
10. 14-15 years.
11. About 15 years, it was kept a secret.
12. This was the chief topic at our gatherings. Trying to get snippets of information about the lads we fancied from their sisters.
13. We tried to keep relationships a secret, which was silly as older folk took that for granted. They thought you odd if you didn’t have a boyfriend.
14. ‘Tha bramar aice’ [she has a boyfriend] was a favourite. I don’t know where the word came from. ‘Tha iad suirdhe’ [they are courting] was another.
15. I don’t think that their social life was any different to our own. There may have been more ceilidh houses where young people gathered together. My mother used to tell me that most evenings were spent knitting, singing and practising psalm tunes. If boys weren’t present they used to do up each other’s hair in fancy styles.
16. Caithris na h-oidhche was before my time. The War put an end to that. Relationships were more open, sweethearts were seen together as girls went to town to see their lads off after leave.

I suppose caithris na h-oidhche came about because there was nowhere else they could meet. Their moral standards were higher than now. I’ve heard tales from older folk of how some men walked miles over the moors from the likes of Barvas just to spend an hour with a girl they admired. If one too many came to visit father would see them off the premises. I’ve never heard the word leabachas.
17. Things are more open now. Boys and girls pair off at school and visit each other’s homes. They’re not embarrassed at being seen kissing and cuddling by parents. A complete change in attitudes!

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Long courtships were common in my parents’ generation. 1 year seems to be the norm nowadays.
2. I didn’t have a réiteach, but attended a few before the War and immediately after.
3. No celebrations in my day or gifts.
4. They were kept informed.
5. They were seen together in public more often. I remember reporting to my parents that I had seen one particular couple walking hand in hand! Close relatives on both sides invited them to their homes.
6. 1-2 years.
7. Walking hand in hand and sitting close together in company.
8. In my parents’ generation the man paid for everything, including the bride’s and bridesmaid’s dresses. The foursome (only 1 bridesmaid) went to town to order the provisions. Whisky, beer, sherry and conversation lozenges were the most important items, also small fancy cakes and biscuits. The meat was supplied by relatives and neighbours. Each household supplied a chicken which were boiled in the neighbouring houses. The parents supplied a sheep. The ‘waitresses’ who were cousins and friends of the couple cut up the cooked chickens for the table. The girls who were experienced waitresses had the job of making butter balls. The tables were beautifully laid out.
9. I don’t think that they were involved.
10 and 11. As a child I remember being taken to see the table and the wonder of it. There were usually around three lovely paraffin lamps down the centre. A lot of borrowing went on from lamps to cutlery. If the wedding was next door I was allowed to stay up to get a look at the bride’s party at the head of the table.
As a young adult, the dancing was what we looked forward to – most usually it was accordion music. The barn was cleared out for dancing. We kept a watchful eye on who were pairing off for the first time. Many’s a romance blossomed at a wedding.
12. I don’t think there was any change in people’s attitude towards them.
13. The fact that they were married made no difference.
14. They were more staid. They wouldn’t ever dance at weddings.
15. One learned to share a plan for the future and to respect each other’s wishes.
16. We lived in furnished rooms for three years, in a tied hospital house for 5 years. We then bought our own house.
17. Some women looked forward to not working and having children.
18. I do not approve of working mothers with children under school age.
19. I can think of a few couples who were obviously very happy together, teasing and calling each other endearments.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. They were well aware of the facts of life, often discussed with them by young married friends or cousins.
2. I’m sure that they did.
3. Lots of weird ideas were passed around at school. Hearing the true facts were a gradual process.
4. I never heard this topic being discussed.
5. For me the question didn’t arise, but I would expect family planning to be between husband and wife.
6. I am not able to give an opinion.
7. We learnt of this by eavesdropping on our elders’ conversations.
8. Listening to talk it would seem that it was always the girl’s fault. Phrases like ‘she should have known better’, or ‘she was asking for trouble’ were used. Others were more tolerant.
9. As I mentioned above the girl was more often blamed.
10. Women were expected to be more moral, then as now. Men could disappear back to sea or whatever until the dust settled and all was forgotten.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. I’ve no experience of this but I expect they would have heard by word of mouth. I am sure that it would have been a favourite topic of conversation.
3. It was a common occurrence that I took for granted.
4. Gaelic words - tha i trom or tha i air turas.
17. The knitting and sewing of baby clothes were the first indication. A doctor onlt attended in emergencies. A neighbour or relation used to assist the district nurse and for two nights would stay up to care for the mother. They stayed in bed for fourteen days or so. Often a young girl came to look after the family for a month.
18. No.
19. Women were offered sherry and men whisky. Even the most needy of families provided this.
20. In my day it was usual to name children after grandparents and close relatives. The father had to attend the church session prior to the baptism. This was looked on as an ordeal as they were expected to know the catechism. Before the war babies were baptized at a Thursday prayer meeting. Nowadays it’s on a Sunday. I can’t remember any special celebration afterwards. The babies were beautifully dressed.
31. DOLLAG (See 5F)

[Dollag is the elder sister of my father and has been long resident in Lanarkshire.]

Marital status Married
Birthplace North Tolsta
Date of birth 11.1.36

List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
North Tolsta, 27 years; Glasgow, 3 years, East Kilbride, 32 years
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin North Tolsta
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin Ness

Parents’ occupations Fisherman and domestic servant
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s One older sister, three brothers, 2 younger sisters

How old were you when you left school? 17 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Domestic service

Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Lewis Castle College - domestic worker; Lochearnhead Hotel - domestic worker; Philipshill Hospital, E. Kilbride - auxiliary nurse; Bruce Hotel, E. Kilbride - waitress.

Age at marriage 27 years
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 21.9.30, Glasgow
Husband’s occupation Disabled through stroke

No. of sons and their ages 31 and 25 years
No. of daughters and their ages 32 years
Total number of children you have ever borne 3
Are any of your children married now? Yes.
Do you have any grandchildren? 5

Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant [Free Church member]
Parents’ religion Protestant [Free Church members] Husband’s religion Protestant

I. Language
1-4. I am a Gaelic speaker. Parents both spoke fluent Gaelic. My husband understands it but does not speak it, neither do my children.

II. Family and Household
1. When I was growing up there were nine of us living in the house, my mother and father and three sisters and three brothers. I can remember my grandparents vaguely, they died when I was quite young.
2. During part of my early married life we had an elderly aunt of my husband’s living with us as she was very ill and had no-one to look after her. The children were young and it made life very uncomfortable.
3. Quite typical.

III. Growing Up
1. I had a fairly happy childhood but a very strict upbringing, in those day there were no toys, we provided our own, playing on the beach, among the peats, building ‘houses’ as we called them from the wood, broken crockery, glassware, stones, etc. We seem to have spent a large part in the house doing our chores, making beds, washing dishes, looking after the younger members of the family, everyone had such a lot of kids, we accepted that as part of our lives because everyone was the same, there wasn’t the same attention paid to possessions as there is today. I liked school. It
was very strict by today’s standards and we had a lot of respect for our teachers and headmaster, I would say that we were in awe of them.

2. My mother, she was just my mother, looking back I think it was typical of the time, they had no time to spend with the children they had so much work to do. I can’t be honest and say that it was a loving relationship, as I got older I became closer to her but not in the way that my children are to me, at least I hope not.

3. I had a lot of respect for my father and a lot of lovely memories.

4. I never noticed any of the couples as being very close or else they kept their emotions under control.

5. We were very close to our cousins, the ones in the village anyway, family were very important.

6. My father was definitely head of the household and it was the same in most households.

7. My mother shouted a lot but my father dealt with discipline.

8. Religion played a very important part in our upbringing by both my parents. We attended church regularly, twice a day on Sunday and Sunday school in the afternoons. We had family worship every morning before going to school and evenings before going to bed.

9. We were treated the same as far as I can remember.

10. I don’t think they were treated any differently but it was very difficult to send children to university then, nobody had any money, it was very rare for anyone to go on to higher education.

11. None that I can remember, except the odd film star, I used to collect pictures of Rita Hayworth, Gary Cooper, etc.

12. Yes. Her life was one of complete drudgery.

13. I was desperate to get away, I had a lot of dreams, hardly any were fulfilled. I envy today’s generation, they have so many opportunities if they want to. We seem to drift along and never seem to have the same drive, so many lost opportunities.

14. Yes, boys and girls played together and so we all accepted each other when we were young anyway.

15. Every generation are different, things change, outlooks change, every generation think their generation are more liberal.

16. Quite definitely the weaker sex according to the men, women’s place was in the home.

IV. Early Adulthood

1. I was like a bird released from a cage and I enjoyed those years.

2. We had to do a lot of work at home but we all left as soon as we left school because we had to work. There was no work locally, so we all went away.

3. We only came home on holidays which must have been hard on our parents. I think that’s how we were never all that close, they never really knew us.

4. No social life at home. There was none except the odd dance, or outdoor dances, a local lad with an accordion. Plenty of social life when we left home, everything we did we had to hide from our parents, social life was very much disapproved of. I think personally that’s how a lot of our generation went off the rails when they left home and could do what you liked, you had no-one to disapprove of you. You couldn’t discuss your social life with your parents the way [my children] could with me.

5. Yes, I had platonic male friends, we all did, and my life did change as I got boyfriends.
6, 7 and 8. Parents were very strict and disapproving. We never told them anything and everything we did was done secretly because there was no understanding.
9. The church was very dominant and we resented it, a reason why we rebelled when we left home.
10. 17 or thereabouts.
11. Early teens, we never told parents romances, sex, these things were never discussed.
12. Yes, we used to discuss boys with our friends.
13. Everything was very secret, actually courting couples were never seen together. There used to be a lot of whispering going on, very rarely you ever saw an engaged couple together.
14. Generally used to say that ‘tha e falbh le’ or ‘going together’.
15. I don’t think they ever had a social life, if they were unmarried at home it was because they had elderly parents to look after - that was their life.
16. Not very much in my day. If you were courting your boyfriend would come to the house after midnight, usually after your father and mother had gone to bed. Strange how such strict parents would condone such practises. That was the way the older generation did their courting, they never went out together - for a meal or for a drink - or visited each other. I think today’s practices are very immoral, today’s youngsters have gone too far whereas my grandparents and parents were too old fashioned - there was no way they could possibly have known anything about one another, the two extremes. I have never heard of leabachas.
17. Today’s courting couples are far too open for me anyway, there is no mystery today, but they are more open about their feelings.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. About a year.
2. No, but I remember rèiteachs and I’ve been to them, like a mini wedding.
3. They were never celebrated.
4. No, I hadn’t, just confronted them with the ring.
5. Not as far as I can remember.
6. About a year.
7. None that I can remember.
8. I had to do all the preparations.
9. None at all.
10. Used to love them, it was the only social life we had.
11. Yes, marvellous time, they lasted a couple of days, actually that was an occasion where couples met and started courting. As children that was our pass-time, seeing or spying to see who would pair off with who.
12. I think they did, you were part of the clan, settle down, stay at home, have kids, grow old.
13. I don’t think they changed much.
14. You certainly had to watch your behaviour in the islands; on the mainland life was different - we never had much of a social life, we couldn’t afford it.
15. The rose-coloured specs change quite quickly, one day you wake up and you realize that you just drift along. There is a lot you have to learn about living with someone, not all of it all that wonderful.
16. We lived for a few months in Lewis, a very nice house, we moved to the mainland, we’ve always been in our own home.
17. Barbaric.
18. I think it's good for women to work but I think it's wrong for a lot of mothers who work full-time and leave their babies with a minder. I have always worked but I have never left my kids to someone else, it's always been in the evenings when my husband was at home.

19. No, never.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Our mother never discussed sex with us, it was all learnt by hearsay. I was in my teens before I knew anything about periods - quite ignorant. It was always whispered about, it was awful to leave girls like that, you weren't even given a sanitary towel.
2. I suppose they must have but not in front of the children.
3. My sister told me, a cousin had told her. There was a lot of myths and horrifying stories.
4. No, I don't think they used any birth control, look at the size of their families.
5. Yes, in my day the Pill came into fashion and we had family planning clinics.
6. There's been a big change. In my mother's day life was cruel, they had an awful life, there was no clinics, no care through the pregnancy, you just saw the nurse when she came to make arrangements for the birth. Today they are well looked after with scans and plenty of care, a big improvement.
7. There were unmarried mothers but nothing like the amount today, every second birth today is an unmarried mother.
8. In corners whispering, the poor lassie was never seen, never came outdoors, she was hidden away. People were outraged and not very sympathetic.
9. The girl was blamed and thought of as a slut even if she eventually got married, she always carried this stigma with her.
10. Yes, definitely.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. I don't think it was ever talked about, it was just something that happened. Everyone just learnt by their own experiences, must have been quite horrendous. I suppose women would discuss it together.
2. No, I never did. You got married, you got pregnant, you just accepted these things, there was no planning in my early days of marriage.
3. Yes. My mother always seemed to be pregnant, I hated it, the boys used to tease me in school.
4. Trom.
5. Not very much, we were very ignorant.
7. Didn't give any up, carried on as normal as much as I was able to.
8. No.
10. A lot of adjustments to be made, responsible for a defenceless child, very scary. You were up a day after the birth and in hospital for 5 days, was treated very well.
11. Almost at once.
12. Very strange and frightening, never had much help.
13. Yes, older women were always giving advice about what they did and what you should and should not do. Made you feel inadequate.
14. No preference.
15. I never expected any or wanted any during the birth, men at that time never attended, I would have been horrified.
16. I became more caring I think, more responsible for a human being, less selfish.
17. Yes, my mother always had a home birth. I remember a couple of them. I remember the smell of powder and nappies. Women stayed in bed for almost two weeks I think.
18. No.
19. By the men wetting the baby’s head, getting drunk, being slapped on the back.
20. Normally after a relative, most parents did that. Thank goodness that died away.
21. Mine were all baptised, very simple ceremonies.

3J. FLORA

[Rseponded to letter in the local press.]

Marital status Married Date of birth 21.2.1927
Birthplace Stornoway
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there. Stornoway all my life except when I was a student in Glasgow
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1899, Helmsdale
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1902, Stornoway
Parents’ occupations Fisherman; net repairer
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s None
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Continued education at Skerry’s Secretarial College, Bath Street, Glasgow
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
Secretary, Harris Tweed Mill; secretary/cashier, legal firm; clerk/typist, Western Isles Council (Social Work Department); now retired.
Age at marriage 18 years
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1921, Peterhead
Husband’s occupation Net maker (now retired)
No. of sons and their ages 2 (one deceased; the other 43)
Total number of children you have ever borne 2
Are any of your children married now? Yes
Do you have any grandchildren? Yes
Religion: how would you describe yourself? A believer but not a regular church attender
Parents’ religion Church of Scotland
Husband’s religion Church of Scotland

I. Language
1. No. 2. No. 3. No. 4. No.

II. Family and Household
1. I was an only child. There were only my parents and myself in the home.
2. During my marriage we lived with my parents for the first five years plus our first child. We got married in 1945, the year the War ended. Housing was very scarce and we were on a waiting list for a house of our own.

3. The situation described above was very common (re q.2) mainly because it was at the end of the 1939-45 War, no houses had been built during the War.

III. Growing Up

1. I had a very happy childhood. The sun seemed to shine endlessly every day. Of course, it must have rained, but I can honestly say I can’t remember periods of endless days of rain and wind. The winters were cold with a lot of snow but again there didn’t seem so many gales as nowadays. I was always playing outside with my friends. We played all kinds of ball games and we had skipping ropes with which we used to play skipping a lot. In the house by myself I liked to play with my dolls. I made up an imaginary family of brothers and sisters. I suppose this was because I was an only child and very shy.

The people I remember as being important to me were my schoolteachers and my grandmother. Because they were teachers I thought they must know everything and because my granny was old she should know everything.

I helped around the house by setting the table and going for messages for both my mother and my grandmother (who lived alone). I did this after school and on Saturdays. I also loved to work in the garden at our own house and my granny’s house. I enjoyed school very much and was considered ‘clever’. The only subjects I hated were sewing and music lessons. The sewing teacher was an absolute horror - feared by all the class, and because I did not have an ear for music, and couldn’t tell one musical not from another, I got belted often by the male music teacher, but it hasn’t done me any lasting harm - and I am still tone deaf, although I love listening to music. Despite their mother being ‘a musical dunce’ my two sons were very musical and both played the piano very well. My elder son used to compose music.

My younger son plays the piano whenever he gets the chance, which isn’t as often as he would like because of his extremely busy lifestyle. My elder son was a well-known artist. Unfortunately he died as the result of an accident some 16 years ago. The grief still hurts very much and despite the years, it still hurts just as bad, time is not a healer, not to me. My younger son is... Professor of Human Molecular Genetics in the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne... .

2. My mother was a great reader. She had been Dux of the school but because she was the eldest of three children her widowed mother could not afford to let her stay on, to continue her education. I think my mother always resented this. I had an ordinary loving daughter/mother relationship which was typical of that time.

3. My father was my idol. I suppose it was because he worked away at sea a lot. I did not see so much of him as the daily contact with my mother. My father had a fishing boat and I was always messing around in it when it was in harbour. My mother often said that I should have been a boy.

4. My parents had a good relationship with another married couple of the same age. They played cards together every Saturday night in each other’s houses, on alternate Saturdays. They went out to weekly whist drives as a foursome.

5. My family was a happy one. I suppose I was really closest to my mother because of our daily contact and because I was a girl. I had no other grandparents but my maternal grandmother and we were very close. I know she spoiled me a lot but she could be firm too. I had no other relatives. I don’t have any aunts or uncles.
6. My father always jokingly referred to my mother as ‘the boss’. She always seemed to have the most say in important family decisions. I think this was typical of most other families I knew. I was always told that English husbands only gave their wives a housekeeping allowance to do or die on, whilst Scottish husbands handed over all their earnings, and happily accepted whatever they thought they needed for pocket money. This was the way of my parents.

7. My mother, because of my father’s frequent absences from home because of the nature of his work.

8. We went to church every Sunday evening and I attended Sunday school in the morning. My mother was more involved in the family religious welfare.

9. Boys were expected to be tougher than girls and not to appear to be cissy. They were not expected to do any housework chores. Girls on the other hand were definitely expected to help around the house, and even to ‘wait’ on their brothers because they were male.

10. The education of boys took top priority. Girls were expected to get married and their husbands provide for them, so it was felt there wasn’t the same need for girls to be educated, it was considered a waste of money!

11. The usual stuff - film stars, athletes, my cookery and P.E. teachers (now deceased).

12. No, I had never thought along those lines.

13. No, I had no other expectations other than that I would marry a rich man some time in the far future - instead I married a poor sailor! It was a war-time romance. Because of my parents’ disapproval (I was considered far too young) we eloped! On December 26 last year we celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary. 

I had never thought of leaving home when I returned from college. I was content to live on the island and loved my work as a secretary...

14. Boys and girls did not play together at all. Boys playing with girls was looked upon as cissy. Even in infant school boys played in one part of the playground whilst girls played together in the other part.

15. During my mother’s generation things were becoming a lot more modern. There was the introduction of electric light in town, so different from the oil-burning lamps used in the home of my grandmother. The introduction of inside water taps, inside toilets and gas cookers must have been marvellous ‘inventions’ to my granny, who cooked over a coal-burning fire. The tap and toilet were both outside. There was no running water system inside the house. Monday was wash-day - all day. Cleaning the house was back-breaking work, 6 days a week...

16. Women and girls were looked upon as the home-makers and once married, women did not go to work, they were expected to stay at home, do all the household chores inside and outside, attend to all of their husband and children’s needs.

IV. Early Adulthood

1. I thoroughly enjoyed my teenage years. I was rather a late developer physically and was still very young and naive even at 15 years old. I was entirely innocent of sexual matters apart from the whispering and giggling with my peer group. I went cycling a lot with my close friends. We would never give a thought to dances in the Town Hall considering ourselves too young. In retrospect I doubt very much if our parents would have approved if we had wanted to go to dances even at 16.

2. I helped a lot around the home. My mother wasn’t too well so I always did the fire in the morning and brought up tea and toast to my mother still in bed. I did a lot of
household chores and shopping and gardening but left the cooking for my mother to do.

3. I don’t think my relationship with my parents changed too much as I became a young adult. When the obvious signs of my budding womanhood started to appear for the first time I think I became increasingly shy. I didn’t want to grow up. I wanted to remain the same as I always was. I didn’t want to become a woman. I think I resented my mother’s insistence in saying that I was now a young woman.

4. My social life was out walking or cycling with my friends and going to the pictures. We didn’t have boyfriends although we liked talking to boys we knew and met when we were out walking. None of my peer group drank or smoked.

5. The amount of time I spent with members of the opposite sex changed dramatically when I met my future husband just before my 17th birthday. I spent a lot of time with him as our relationship developed. He was my first and only boyfriend. I did have a platonic friendship with a male. He was the son of my mother’s best friend. I knew him from boyhood and we started school on the same day. I looked upon him as the brother I never had.

6. Parents had a lot of say in the way young people spent their time and these young people respected their parents’ wishes.

7. I expect there were disagreement regarding behaviour but most young people appeared to be happy to be home at night by a certain time.

8. My parents did not approve of me having a boyfriend although they had nothing against him personally, they considered me far too young to be going out with anyone, so this led to many arguments.

9. Most young people attended church with their parents because it was expected of them and they regarded it as a duty. As to what sort of role the church had in the lives of young people depended on their own outlook on life after they left the parental home. Some continued to attend church regularly and became church members. Others became adherents. Others just stopped attending church but still believed. Some I suppose eventually became non-believers.

10. Seventeen years old.

11. Much older than seventeen. Parents did not approve of teenage romance.

12. We certainly did discuss boys and giggled about any of them we fancied, but hadn’t the nerve to approach any of them and would blush bright red if the one we fancied actually noticed us.

13. Courting relationships were very secretive initially, depending on the ages of the young couple. The younger they were, the more secretive, fearing adults’ disapproval of them going out together.

14. As I do not speak Gaelic, I can only think of the Stornoway slang of ‘blone’ and ‘click’.

15. As I was bereft of relatives, not even cousins to relate to, I am not in a position to answer this question. I had never questioned my mother and granny regarding their days of courting or adolescence.

16. I did hear vaguely of caithris na h-oidhche being practised in my day in the country villages. . . . I can only guess that the young people who would not be involved would be those who considered themselves to be Christians and above that sort of thing. I am afraid I have never heard of leabachas.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. About one year.
2. I have never been to a réiteach.
3. The engaged couple did not then receive gifts as is the norm nowadays. They received congratulations and best wishes from friends and relatives. The prospective groom’s parents would be invited to the bride’s parental home for tea and a get-to-know one another.

4. Yes, and received distinct disapproval. I was told I could get engaged when I was 30 years old and married when I was 33 years. As I was 18, 33 years was ancient!

5. They behaved a bit more openly in showing affection to each other, but in a shy manner. Older people treated the couple with much teasing and banter.

6. Engagement usually lasted long enough for the couple to have saved enough money to get married. The prospective bride would start a ‘bottom drawer’.

7. A discreet kiss or two in public, or a squeeze of the hand. In private I suppose they could do as they pleased!

8. All relatives and friends rallied round. The bride’s mother, by tradition, supplied the bed linen. Bride’s and bridesmaid’s dresses had to be made by a dressmaker...

9. Very involved, especially the bride’s mother.

10. An exciting event, seeing everyone dressed up in their new clothes, the beautiful dresses of the bride and bridesmaids, all the loads of food, the cake. A little bit awed at the sight of men drinking openly - and even some ladies drinking too!!

11. Never at a banais taighe.

12. People treated couples differently after they were married. They treated them as adults - as mature adults. On a personal basis, on reflection, I felt I was at last treated as grown up.

13. When I got married I felt I could now relate to adults as an adult myself.


15. My relationship with my partner continued as before. We were very much in love and it continues up to the present day and he is still the most important person in my life.

16. We lived initially with my parents because of the lack of suitable housing. We had our first child, a son, 14 months after our marriage. It was a very small house and things between mother and daughter became very tense at times, each of us needing our own space. Five years later we got a house of our own.

17. It was the norm, it was expected and we never even questioned. Wives who did go out to work were considered ‘poor souls, their husbands must be drinking all the money and they have to go out to work’.

18. Yes, my opinions have changed over the years. I became a working wife myself but only after my children had grown up and left home. I had led a very happy, full and satisfactory life as a wife and mother. When my younger son left home I felt ‘lost’, I felt that I was no longer required as a mother, I wept, indeed something else. I hadn’t worked for 28 years. I looked out my old college certificates, they were yellow with age and had my maiden name. I felt I couldn’t possibly show these to any prospective employer so I decided to do a SCOTBEC course by correspondence. I was lucky enough to pass all my subjects and I also sat Higher English, Typewriting, etc. and again was lucky enough to pass at the ripe old age of 46. I then started work and I enjoyed every minute of it and was reluctant to retire. I don’t entirely approve of working mothers and latch-key children but if adequate provision is made for the children’s welfare I see no harm in it.

19. Not really, in public, I can’t recall this, but possibly within the home, an affectionate squeeze or hug.
VI. Before Childbearing

1. Very little. There was no sex education in schools. You were lucky if you had an older sibling who could enlighten you. In my peer group mothers did not discuss the facts of life with their daughters. We learned from those friends who had been told all about it by their married sisters.

2. Yes, it was discussed among friends but older married women related to this more than younger unmarried women because they had the advantage of experience of marriage and possibly motherhood.

3. From each other - seldom from mothers. Yes, there were lots of myths based, I am sure on total ignorance of the true facts. Nowadays nothing is hidden, school, T.V., books, magazines, all are explicit on most sexual matters and why not, in these modern times.

4. We did hear of ‘French letters’ as being a method of birth control in years gone by. I suppose men spoke amongst themselves about methods of birth control practised and women expected the men to know all about it, whereas they preferred to feign ignorance.

5. I expect most couples decided when they wanted to start a family and when to increase it by discussing it together, otherwise the woman might want to discuss it with the district nurse. 6. N.a.

7. Pregnancy outside of marriage, in the past, was considered shameful and a disgrace to the family. The expectant mother would stay indoors rather than face people. The baby of an unmarried girl would usually be brought up by the grandmother as the girl would be considered too young for the responsibilities of motherhood. Nowadays girls who become single mothers are helped with housing by the local authority. Their name put on the top of the housing list and given priority in housing. This was considered unfair treatment by those married couples sometimes on the local authority housing waiting-list for years. This rule has recently been changed and single mothers will not now be given priority.

8. People talked about unmarried pregnancies usually with sneering remarks or pity for the unfortunate girl, but never such remarks as ‘isn’t she lucky to be expecting’.

9. The girl was always the one to be blamed for her plight. She was expected to say no, so it was her own fault she had got herself into the situation.

10. Yes, men were treated more lightly and possibly congratulated by other men on their prospective fatherhood, looked upon as proving their manhood. Women were expected to say no, always. Nowadays there is still some thought of this but not to the same extent.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy

1. I would imagine women of my generation would have known more about pregnancy and childbirth before it happened to them, because more babies were born at home, and neighbours/relatives helped the midwife at the birth. Not only would they have discussed it together but they would have seen it happening in their midst and perhaps even delivered relatives’ babies before the midwife got there.

2. I read a lot of books on pregnancy and childbirth. Being an only child I had no sisters or aunts to confide in and I was too shy to question my mother on these matters. I don’t think there was anything I wished I had known beforehand, and perhaps because childbirth was so natural and easy for me, I didn’t need any prior knowledge, or perhaps I was just lucky?

3. When I was a child anyone over 16 was old to me.

4. Sorry - I don’t know.
5. My husband and I were excited as we planned for the coming of our child. My husband came middle in a family of ten children so I thought he had a vast knowledge of babies, so unlike me. Yes, I talked of my pregnancy with other married women in the same situation.
6. Neither of my pregnancies caused any problems.
7. I carried on with my normal activities right up to the start of labour.
8. Both my babies were born at home. Perhaps because I was well and very active throughout my pregnancies both births were comparatively easy. I was only in labour for 2 hours in both instances and I had none of the modern aids used in childbirth nowadays.
9. No.
10. After the birth of my first baby in 1947 (pre-NHS days) I was made to stay in bed for 10 days, which was the norm then. When my second baby was born in 1952, the NHS guidelines dictated that mothers be up and about within hours of the birth and not to stay in bed.
After the birth of my first baby the nurse forced me to drink half a cup of castor oil. No matter how much I gagged the ghastly stuff she insisted it was ‘to clean me out after the birth’ and all new mothers had to take the horrid stuff. During labour with my second baby I kept dreading the thought of the half cup of castor oil. After the birth I wondered when the nurse was going to produce the castor oil. I was dreading it. Eventually I plucked up the courage to enquire so as to get it over and done with. I was told that under the new guidelines castor oil was no longer given. Oh what bliss - no castor oil!
11. I returned to my normal routine of work after about 10 days in the first instance and after about 7 in the second.
12. Becoming a mother was a wonderful experience. I felt so proud because I had the most beautiful baby in the world and adjusted without any problems. The babies were both very contented and slept right through the nights.
13. Older women spoke of the differences in medical attitudes to childbirth in the pre-NHS and post-NHS days.
14. When I was expecting my first baby I wanted a son and was thrilled to have my wish granted. The second time I was pregnant I looked forward to having a daughter. I was slightly disappointed initially but once I saw him I wouldn’t have changed him. My husband would have liked a daughter but like me was just as pleased with our second son.
15. My husband was extremely supportive and washed all the nappies during the week after the birth. Other new mothers who have lots of older female relatives would not need the same sort of support from their husbands as I needed.
16. When I became a mother I instantly felt very responsible for this helpless infant depending on me. He became the centre of my universe.
17. No.
18. I am afraid I have never heard of this.
19. The arrival was celebrated by ‘wetting the baby’s head’ which was another way of saying welcome to the new baby by having a drink of whisky with friends.
20. It was expected that we name the baby after a grandparent, which we did, we didn’t like to do otherwise though we would really have preferred our own choice. This was certainly typical of parents then.
21. Both our children were baptized in church, many were baptized in the home. I can’t think of anything to relate about this.
3K. ISHBEL (See 4E)

[Ishbel is the younger sister of Dolina (see 3H), and has written to me on several occasions. As a district nurse and a prominent member in the local Free Presbyterian congregation, she has been an important part of the community. Ishbel was very close to my paternal grandmother and has always been an acquaintance of mine. She married in 1996.]

**Marital status** Single  
**Date of birth** 2.12.1936

**Birthplace** North Tolsta

**List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there and the jobs that you have had.**

Tolsta, 16 years; Kenmore, Perthshire, 6 mths - hotel work; Glasgow, 3 years - sick children’s nurse training; Inverness, 2 1/2 years - general nurse training; Greenock, 10 mths - midwifery nurse training; Stornoway, 3 years staff midwife; Glasgow, 6 mths; Edinburgh, 3 mths - district nurse training; Wick, 1 yr, 10 mths - district nurse; Kirkhill, Inverness-shire, 6 mths - district nurse; living in Tolsta since c.1965, as midwifery night sister, then district nurse, Stornoway.

**Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin** 29.12.1895, N. Tolsta  
**Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin** 6.8.1898, N. Tolsta

**Parent’s occupations** Fishworkers

**Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s** Three sisters - 21.2.25; 13.11.28; 24.6.30; brother - 27.12.33.

**How old were you when you left school?** 15 years  
**What did you do directly after you left school?** Hotel work

**Religion: how would you describe yourself?** Protestant saved sinner [Free Presbyterian]

**Parents’ religion** Protestant Christian faith

**I. Language**

1-4. I am a native Gaelic speaker as were my parents and other members of the family.

**II. Family and Household**

1. There were two parents and five children in our home.

3. No, our situation was not typical, for in many homes there was either a granny or grandfather or both, also maybe a spinster aunt or bachelor uncle.

**III. Growing Up**

1. I don’t remember much about my childhood, but I do remember my sheer delight running down to the seashore, sometimes barefoot, especially at high tide, to get my own quota of crabs, whelks, dulse or anything else that was eatable. The time would be about noon and I still have the picture in my mind of the sun shimmering on the sea and the air so warm. Something else that stands out are the hours I had to spend during our summer holidays, keeping an eye on the cows, and preventing them from wandering onto the crops. Crofts were not fenced in those days and every bit was cultivated, so the cows had to be watched from mid-afternoon until we brought them...
home. Such sessions I did not like, as the sun did not always shine but we had to be there irrespective of the weather. During the summer holidays also was the time to gather the peats from the bogs. There were no tractors in those days and the peats were taken by barrow, creel or bags to a centre point and tidied up into a ‘cranach’ [peatstack] and from there taken home by horse and cart and later lorry. It was the bag or sack that was used by the youngsters and an uncomfortable business it was, with the peats digging into our young bodies. And of course we were bare-footed and very lively, we were running up Cragro. A hub of activity it was.

I suppose the people that were important to us then were my parents, my teachers, uncles and aunts, church elders. there were no ministers in the village then.

During the War years and post War there were not many playthings, yet boredom was unheard of. We made our own entertainment. I would spend hours playing at ‘houses’ either outside in the summer or in some byre. Pieces of broken crockery or china would be gathered from wherever and that went into our ‘dresser’. The ‘family’ were mad up from bits if stick clothed in pieces of varied material. And all duly named!

I had to do my own chores on the house. The homes then were very basic. The fire place was the focal pint and the cleaning of it took some time, whitening was used on either side of the actual fireplace, black lead used for the ‘cran’ and the fender around the hearth. Cardinal polish used on the hearth and polished up. On the mantleshelf were two brass shells (taken home from France) to be brassoed, a brass front to the mantle shelf, a brass rod and chain; there was always a sense of achievement when that was completed. Fetching the water was also the chore of the youngster, especially on Saturday when added supplies was required for the Sabbath day.

I liked school and was quite bright, although I don’t seem to remember much about schooldays.

2. My mother was a string hard working woman, often having to do what was considered a man’s job because my father was a semi-invalid. She did not have much time for housework but was happy working the croft and peats. Our relationship was typical, I would say. I don’t remember her ever hitting me.

3. As I mentioned, my father was ailing and he was the one that was always at home when I came from school. He died when I was yet young. He was a very gentle and loving father.

4. It is very difficult to say how close husbands and wives were. Most husbands were working away sometimes months at a time, the wives were hard working, bringing up large families. Money was not plentiful. people did not express their feelings of show their affection so openly then especially man and wife or engaged couples.

5. Being the youngest of five I don’t remember the time when we were all together. I was still young when the eldest left to attend school in Stornoway. My father was a disciplinarian but lovingly and his NO was NO. I suppose I was quite close to him. None of us knew our grandparents.

6. Father was the head of the household but that because he was always there. In other households it was the mother who was the head with the father so much away from home.

7. My father was definitely more responsible for discipline.

8. As in every household in my young days family worship was carried out morning and evening. My father did the reading but we were all involved, each one having to read his or her own verses of the chapter being read. On a Sabbath morning we
would gather round and be questioned from the shorter catechism and of course there
was Sabbath school, held then by the elders of the congregation.
9. Boys and girls made their own entertainment and would maybe gather together in
a certain house and the adults were left to do their own thing. The difference today is
that parents and children tend to spend their time together at whatever.
10. Work did not permit parents to give the same attention to their children. I don’t
think the education of one or the other was treated as more important. If any of them
showed more aptitude that was encouraged.
11. Yes, I suppose I had my eldest sister as role model. She was in the W.A.A.Fs
during the war and was very handsome in her uniform. Going on then to a nursing
career. I still admire her.
12. I did not want my life to be much different from my mother’s. I also wanted to be
a mother. Have my own home, do croft work, peats, etc.
13. Yes, I was definitely going to get married and have a large family! From an early
age I was also going to be a nurse, and for that I would have to leave home. Had I
known then the pain of homesickness things might have been different. My choice of
career was not typical - hotel work was.
14. Yes, girls and boys did play together. We often played football in the Gearraidh
[area of the village].
15. The homes had improved. Electricity had come, running water and later proper
sanitisation. The croft work and peat work, cows, sheep and lambing remained the
same.
16. The place of women especially was very important as they were the heads of
households with the men away from home. With so much outside work to be done
the girls, especially older ones, were responsible for younger members of the family.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. As I mentioned before my father died when I was entering into my early teenage
years and the next three years found me a bit of a rebel. Fortunately for me the
Gospel became alive to me and I sought thirst for my soul. I looked on life
differently now and it was during these years that I had to leave home and begin my
nursing career. Leaving home hurt.
2. With the rest of the family away apart from my brother, when my father died there
was much expected of me. With my mother working hard with outside work the
housework was left to me. I was the at the Nicolson Institute and there would be the
house to clean, shopping to do and I suppose a meal to prepare in readiness for my
mother coming home. I left home at sixteen and a half
3. The relationship with my mother did change when I became interested in the
gospel. We had more in common. This was not typical.
4. In my early teens road dances were a great attraction and I spent many an evening
‘kicking my heels’ at ‘tigh Alan’ [Alan’s house]. There was a tigh ceilidh [ceilidh
house] we gathered at and spent the evening just talking, and maybe singing.
5. There were four of us girls who went around with a few boys. We were very close
and that closeness remained as we grew older and went our separate ways. I was
never aware of any disapproval. We were trusted to take care of ourselves.
6. I suppose parents would caution their young people and advise where necessary.
7. Of course there would be disagreement. God-fearing parents would rather see their
families seek the Lord than seek vain pleasure.
8. As a very young teenager, my mother would disapprove of me having a boyfriend.
I remember disagreeing with her over a certain boy.
9. There were more God-fearing men and women around in those days and we had
great respect for them, indeed such respect that we [would] hide rather than come
face to face with them. Church attendance was important and we did go without any
pressure. It was expected of us. Parents took their baptismal vows very seriously and
that was one of them - to bring their children up in the fear and nurture of the Lord.
10. Very young, I am afraid, as young as 13!
11. I suppose at 16 upwards. I don’t think parents minded at all.
12. Yes, we would discuss boys with our friends. We went about together anyway as
mentioned earlier.
13. When courting became serious couples did not speak as openly about their
relationship. I suppose some older adults would disapprove of young couples.
14. There was a word in Gaelic that I cannot spell or find in the dictionary.
15. Most of us had to work away from home so that older adults only came home for
holiday and their time was spent visiting friends and relations.
16. Yes, caithris na h-oidhche was practised in my day. The boyfriend would go the
girlfriend’s house after the parents and the rest of the family had gone to bed. It was
usually when we’d Fridays. Only those who never got the opportunity would never
be included! This was the way romance was done then. Older people accepted it as
the norm, this is what they had done before them. I suppose it developed because
there was no other venue for them to meet. Houses were much smaller and this was
the only way they could meet and talk and get to know each other properly.
Things have gone to the other extreme now. I quite liked the idea of caithris na h-
oidhche. There was something very romantic and private about these encounters.
Yes, the older people would speak about their day. Of course, nothing had changed
from their day until about thirty years ago.
No, I have never heard of leabachas.
17. I thoroughly disapprove of courting practices today. Indeed young couples seem
to find it difficult today being together without having sex. It was not always so.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Most of the young men went to sea in those days and would be away for months
on end even up to a year and it would take that time and longer before they could
become engaged.
2. No, I don’t remember being to a reiteach, indeed in my time I really think it was
on the way out.
3. I don’t think engagements were celebrated, it was just a matter of becoming
engaged and rings exchanged.
4. Engaged couples continued their relationship in a very private manner. Indeed, I
remember a couple who were about to be married passing each other by without as
much as glance! I think that was the norm.
6. Again, like engagements, marriages also were postponed until one or two trips at
sea or more were completed.
7. Engaged couples continued their romance as before and would not be seen in
public together except maybe at someone else’s wedding.
8. In my early days ‘banais taigh’ was the normal and for that great preparation was
done. Food was rationed and everyone rallied round especially with the chickens.
The wedding took place usually on Thursday and the evening before was spent
plucking the chickens and general preparation.
9. I suppose the mothers helped out but most of the chores were done by the ‘waiters’ as the ladies were called. These were mostly near relatives, school-leavers and older. Some ladies were ‘professionals’ and they would be present at all weddings.
10. What I remember about weddings as a child, if the house where the wedding was on the way, coming from school we would go in and would be taken up to see the set table and be given something to eat, a piece and jam was not sniffed at in those days.

For a young adult wedding were great things. We would dress up in our best and very late, maybe tennish, would set off and make our way to the barn initially, where the dance would be. We would spend most of the night there, waiting our turn to be taken into the house, by the ‘waiters’ for the meal. It was up to them to see that everybody got something to eat. They would have a mixed table full each time. the bridal party would be at the head of the table most of the night. there would be a lot of hilarity at the table and some singing. Us young ones would be very alert and observant as regards fresh romances, a couple here and there discreetly leaving the barn. Many’s a romance began in this way.
12. In those days the couple would move in with one or other of the in-laws and this could not be easy, especially for the wife if the husband was seaman. She would have some adjusting to do.
17. I don’t think it was the case that women were expected to give up work. Most of them were working away from home, and coming home to live meant no work. It was not convenient to have work in town either.
18. My opinion about mothers working has not changed. I still believe that her place is in the house, providing a home for her family and be there for them at all times.
19. No, married couple made no display, verbal or physical, of their affection. That was for the bedroom.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Knowledge of the facts of life would be told by the mother but I think older girls were supposed to tell younger girls in the family. For myself it was through discussion with friends.
2. Older women would talk about these things as they spent evenings together knitting and chatting.
4. I doubt that there was any birth control methods used in those days. It was all left entirely to nature.
6. Things have changed enormously since our parents’ time. Methods of contraception has been rammed down our throats from all sides and where is it getting us. Unmarried mothers are on the increase.
7. People did become pregnant outwith marriage and there was an element of shame in connection with it.
8. In a God-fearing community any breach of God’s commandments were frowned upon (and this is a breach of the seventh commandment) and are as biding upon us today as when they were given out on Mt. Sinai.
9. As today, the women tend to get the more blame. They are the ones who entice the men, I think.
3L. KATAG

[Katag read my letter in the local press, but it was me who made initial contact with her. I was already in correspondence with a friend of hers who was not herself able to participate in my research. See 30.]

Marital status: Married  Date of birth: 1923
Birthplace: Tarbert, Harris
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
Ardhasaig, 16 years; Portree, 2 yrs; Glasgow, 2 yrs; Manish, 3 yrs; North Tolsta, 6 yrs; Stornoway, 7 yrs; Kallin, 3 yrs; Sollas, 33 yrs.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1902, Harris
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1902, Harris
Parents’ occupations: Father usually estate worker; mother housework
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s: One older sister and 3 younger sisters and 2 younger brothers
How old were you when you left school? 18 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Jordanhill College of Education
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Teaching in Manish, North Tolsta, Stornoway, Kallin, Sollas.
Age at marriage: 40 years
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1923, Sollas
Husband’s occupation: Labourer and crofter
Do you have any children? A foster son
Total number of children you have ever borne: None
Are any of your children married now? Foster son married and is divorced
Do you have any grandchildren? One foster grandson
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant
Parents’ religion: Protestant
Husband’s religion: Protestant

I. Language
1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. Yes.

II. Family and Household
1. Lived with father and mother and members of family.
2. None.
3. Yes.

III. Growing Up
1. Parents, teachers, skipping and ball throwing and little houses. School to me was always pleasant.
2. We loved mother - she died when we as children were young.
3. I always preferred my mother - father was too strict!
4. Normally close.
5. We were always very close. We liked all relatives - always friendly.
6. Father. Father had the say.
7. Father.
8. Always close to our ministers. Mother more involved in church.

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10. Yes! When a promising member was keen, then that one proceeded further in school.
11. No.
12. No.
13. To be educated.
14. Yes, on occasions.
15. Very akin.
16. Woman’s place was in the home, tending to her children - father and mother shared the worries of upbringing.

IV. Early Adulthood
2. Always helped parents in household chores.
3. We always respected them.
4. Helping at home, knitting, carrying home water, bring in peats, etc.
5. No male friends in my life in early years - school work more important.
6. They tried to guide them to the best of their ability.
7. No.
8. None.
9. Churches had a good discipline over all.
10. This is natural and youngsters always have an interest in each of the opposite sex.
11. Cannot answer for others.
12. Yes.
13. Cannot answer.
15. Women more interested in housework but many married at an early age.
17. Free sex now - I believe a firmer advice on ‘Do no commit adultery’ should be emphasized.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Not sure.
2. Yes.
3. Just showing off the ring.
4. No.
5. Couples were usually shy about engagements.
6. Maybe a lifetime.
7. Cannot answer for this.
8. Much preparations - preparing hens for meals, a sheep killed, and boiled for soups.
9. A lot.
10. Bride and groom arrived from church. The big meal served. Then dancing in the old barn - music (accordion).
11. No.
12. No - they were treated normally! Sometimes mother-in-law not too kind!
13. Not at all changed.
14. With us it made no difference.
15. Became naturally friendlier.
17. This was the done thing.
18. Mothers should be with their children in their homes.
19. No.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Cannot say.
2. Cannot say.
3. It comes naturally to a person.
4. Cannot say.
5. No.
6. Nowadays too much freedom is allowed in sex relationships.
7. Yes there were some.
8. An unmarried pregnancy was despised.
9. Cannot say.
10. The man may have been the wrong person and took advantage of girl.

Childbearing and Pregnancy
1. Cannot say.
2. No advice given.
3. Yes, within marriage bonds. Natural.
5 through 16 not applicable.
17. No.
18. No.
19. Callers were given a glass of wine. New baby got money.
20. Nil.
21. Baptisms were usually before the child was one year old.

3M. KATY-ANN (See 4F)

[I contacted Katy-Ann, having been a pupil of hers in the early 1980s.]

Marital status Married

Date of birth 5.6.49

Birthplace Glasgow

List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of

time that you stayed there, and the jobs that you have done

Glasgow, 12 years; Back, Lewis, 6 years; Edinburgh and Glasgow, 5 years -
university and teacher training; Scalpay, Harris, 9 years - teaching; Back, Lewis, 15
years - teaching in Leurbost, Bayble, Back. Also trainee journalist, Stornoway, and
hotel and shop work on the mainland, Lewis and Harris in vacations.

Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 24.2.21, Coll

Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 12.5.27, Scalpay

Parents’ occupations Father - seaman, berthmaster; mother - typist, home help

Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Brother, 5.1.48; sister, 30.8.52

How old were you when you left school? 18 years

What did you do directly after you left school? Edinburgh University

Age at marriage 23

Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 12.3.44, Scalpay
Husband’s occupation: Crane driver, maintenance engineer
No. of sons and their ages: 2, 22 and 20 years
Total number of children you have ever borne: 2
Are any of your children married now? No
Do you have any grandchildren? No
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Quietly non-religious
Parents’ religion: Free Church
Husband’s religion: Free Church (lapsed)

I. Language
1. No. 2. Yes. 3. My parents are native Gaelic speakers. Siblings are not although they understand a fair amount. 4. My husband is a native Gaelic speaker. My children continued with Learner Gaelic to Higher Standard. They understand a great deal, but lack fluency.

II. Family and Household
1. I lived in Glasgow till I was 12. Our family consisted of mother, father and three children. My mother was an only child and her parents were very involved with our upbringing. My maternal grandparents were from Harris although they lived in Glasgow during my twelve years there. My brother and I were particularly close to my grandparents and often spent weekends with them. I was ill when I was about 4 and my grandparents took me away from Glasgow for a year to live in Amhuinnsuidhe in Harris, ‘to build up my strength’. I vividly remember returning with them to Glasgow to start school when I was five. Apparently I could only speak Gaelic and had assimilated an embarrassing vocabulary of swear words. I lost the Gaelic - if not the swear words - within weeks.
2. When I married and had the boys I was living in Scalpay. My grandparents had returned there too. Despite their age they were a tremendous help and it helped that they lived close by. My grandfather came to live with us when my grandmother died. Although they both died when the boys were young, their influence was tremendous.
3. I think the part played by grandparents was typical. They ‘got stuck in’! Having a widowed grandparent to live with you was not uncommon, especially if he/she was ailing.

III. Growing Up
1. [Informant gives details of life in Glasgow.]
2. My mother was a warm, caring, gregarious person. She loved company and I can honestly say I’ve never seen her cross or bad-tempered. She liked being out and about, talking, visiting and entertaining visitors at home. She died after a long illness - aged 67 - which she bore unselfishly and cheerfully. My teenage relationship with my mother was almost sisterly - she the good-natured sister, me the moody one! She came to depend on me more than anyone in the family especially in the years of illness and I seemed to be the mother then. [Our relationship] seemed to be different to my friends’ relationships with their mothers. My girlfriends adored their fathers and feared their mothers. I adored my mother and feared my father.
3. My father is witty but quick-tempered. He was the disciplinarian in the family. He was at sea a lot so he seemed a stranger in some ways when he came home.
4. Husbands and wives were close but would not display this in public! And the women - who really ran the home - would never make this known outside the home. The men had to keep their pride at all costs.
(When a Scalpay man married in Tolsta about 50 years ago he kissed his bride (Gormelia) lightly on the cheek as they exited the church. This caused a scandal in Tolsta - any display of affection in public was frowned upon.)

5. . . . I was close to my granny, mother, grandfather, brother, sister, and father in that order.

6. My father was head of the household. What he decided was what usually happened, although it was often left to my mother to see that it did happen. I think this was true of most of my friends’ families too.

7. Father.

8. Both parents became converts of the Back Free Church. Mother was very tolerant, my father less so.

9. Boys came first. I think this is true of my friends’ families at the time. My mother and grandmother made a big fuss of my brother and to some extent so did my sister and I. A fresh cream sponge was a novelty in Lewis in the early 60s and my sister and I still remember my brother getting the extra piece! I think my father was harder on my brother than he was on us because of all the attention he got from the females in the family. Boys were expected to help out on the croft; the girls were expected to help out at home. You’d never see a boy helping out at home but you would often see the girls at the peats, at the potatoes, etc.!

10. I can’t say that there was any real difference in the attention given to sons and daughters. My parents’ attitude towards our education was that we should try our best but they left any final decisions to us. The 3 in our family could have gone to university. I was the only one of the three to decide - at the very last minute - to go. My brother joined the Navy, my sister joined the Nat. Westminster Bank in London, and I decided to go to university instead of the Civil Service in London. (London and the Swinging Sixties was a great attraction!) My parents accepted these decisions without any real comment.

11. Sheila MacLeod, the journalist, was my role model. She wrote, she travelled, she seemed to know where she was going and why. I still admire Sheila, but I’m not sure any of us know where we’re going or why!

12. Perhaps not consciously, but I felt my mother ‘went with the flow’ in her lifetime. I wanted to be more in control of what happened in my life.

13. It was the time of the Swinging Sixties and most of my friends in the Nicolson Institute wanted to get to the mainland, land good jobs and never come back to Lewis. The Nicolson Institute at this time was selective (11+). I’m sure my friends in the Back Junior Secondary felt the same but, looking back, it does seem as if my friends in Back Junior Secondary are now on the island whereas I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of friends from the Nicolson who live here. Having said that, I know of at least 3 Nicolson friends who are planning to come back in the coming year.

14. If I remember correctly, boys and girls did not usually play together a lot. As teenagers this was certainly true. We did mix (e.g. nicking and boiling potatoes on Coll beach) but not play together. Anyway, teenage romances were the thing. If you had a boyfriend or girlfriend you stayed with them if you weren’t with pals of the same gender.

15. More freedom to move away from your birthplace. More choice, more money, more time to do what you wanted to do, rather than what you had to do.

16. Males appeared to be dominant, important! The men and women colluded in conveying this image but it was not a true one and everyone knew it.
IV. Early Adulthood

1. I enjoyed the music, fashion and ‘new freedom’ of the Sixties. Television had come to Lewis and given it a window on the wider world. I enjoyed this and I feel it helped chip away some of the enormous intolerance to be found in the Islands. What I didn’t enjoy was the usual teenage angst.

2. We were expected to help at home - dishes, dusting and polishing, doing the shopping. As we got older we were expected to do more of the cooking too. My sister and I for some reason were never asked to do the washing or ironing.

3. My parents let us make our own decisions more and more e.g. the decision to go to university or not. I don’t think this was typical.

4. Social life - there seemed to be more for teenagers in Lewis then. We didn’t go to Stornoway as often as teenagers do today, but when we did go there was the cinema, 3 different cafes (open till 10.30 p.m.), the Y.M.C.A., and the Town Hall dances. Also, in the winter, there were the ‘socials’ every week (teenage dances, strictly supervised). In summer there were football matches which the girls attended faithfully. If we didn’t go up town we visited in each others’ homes, trying out new make-up, hairstyles etc. As the Highers approached, we didn’t go out as much. Instead we listened to music and watched T.V. a lot.

5. I had my first ‘boyfriend’ at 14 and more or less had some sort of boyfriend or other until I got married. I also had a lot of male platonic friends - and still do. I don’t think this is typical. Most Lewis women have more female friends than male friends. I’ve always had more male platonic friends than female friends - they’re less frivolous!!

6. Parents stopped a lot of children attending Town Hall dances until they found out they were not dens of iniquity! I feel parents let their children have a fair amount of freedom once they were sure that the activity was ‘respectable’. Teenagers in the 90s feel they have free time as a right. We didn’t but we were allowed to do pretty much as we wished as long as it was respectable, we were with ‘decent’ pals, and were home by a certain time - 10.30 the latest on weekdays, 11.00 the latest on a Saturday.

7. The two things that caused the most disagreements were smoking and hairstyles (boys) and smoking and clothes (girls). Looking back, I think parents were worried by what the neighbours would say seeing Murchadh with hair down to his collar and Murtag with her skirt six inches above the knee. Smoking was not frowned upon for health reasons - it just wasn’t a nice thing for a respectable young adult to do, especially girls. I think parents were stunned by the growing cult of the young in the Sixties - they didn’t know how to handle it.

8. I had my arguments about smoking, clothes and hair. I had intended to give myself some blonde tints and ended up platinum! My mother was more tolerant than my father. My brother, sister and I also had arguments with my parents over politics and religion. These didn’t lead anywhere because my parents would not listen in the end!

9. The Church was important in that we were compelled by our parents to attend Sunday School and Sunday services. We took this for granted, knowing that we could do as we wished once we were independent. My brother, sister and I are not churchgoers now, nor do I compel my own children to attend. Most of my friends from the Sixties who still live in the islands are churchgoers but again I feel it’s a matter of conforming socially rather than any religious zeal.

I found Sunday School and the church service (Free Church, Back) in my teenage years horrific. Tolerance and caring and friendship were unheard of in their philosophy - or so it seemed to a teenager.

10. First ‘boyfriend’ at 14 - purely platonic - and we’re still great pals.
11. This was pretty average although 15 and 16 were more acceptable. I don’t think my parents or my friends’ parents minded, as long as they knew who he was and where you were. My mother was different to some of my friends’ parents in that she encouraged our friends - male and female - to pop in whenever they wished.
12. Discussing boys was the main topic of our conversations and we did talk and tease each other about whom we fancied.
13. I found you could be quite open about this in Back and Stornoway. I’m not sure this was the case in other parts of Lewis. I know that when I went to Scalpay, Harris, in the early 1970s you couldn’t be seen courting in public - you would be the talk of the steamie if you were even seen taking a walk together and would probably be chased off the island if you were caught holding hands in public in day time.
14. ‘Bramair’, ‘clic’; your ‘cove’ or ‘blone’ (Stornoway influence).
15. The lives of older relatives were totally home-centred. Young unmarried relatives were less open in their social lives than teenagers. The females would always been in groups going up on the bus to town and so would be the males. They would then seem to disappear while the teenagers took over the cafes, streets, cinema, etc. We’d meet them again in the bus returning home, the males usually the worse for wear for drink. Back had a hall at that time and I was often astounded to see the older ‘singles’ there letting their hair down at the dances. I still haven’t found out where the older female singles went on their evening visits to town! Both my mother and grandmother were rather reticent in divulging much about their adolescent or courting days. A common answer was they were too busy cleaning and scrubbing, etc. to have a social life like teenagers in the Sixties.
16. Caithris na h-oidhche was just dying out when I went to Scalpay in 1970/71. I hadn’t heard of it before. It certainly wasn’t in Back in the Sixties. I was shocked at first and I often say to my husband that I only married him so that I could stop having my beauty sleep disturbed by having to entertain to tea the young Scalpay lads. I had to do a lot of entertaining in Scalpay in my first year because any new face was a novelty. caithris na h-oidhche took place any night the Scalpay fishing fleet was in although Saturday and Sunday night were off-limits. Groups of young men would meet and decide which house to caithris in that night. During any night in Scalpay about a dozen houses would have a group of young men visiting. It was not encouraged actively but was accepted and tolerated with some affection by most Scalpaich [Scalpay people]. Once a group of young men arrived at your door - usually midnight or after the ‘old folks’ had gone to bed - you would let them in quietly, offer them tea and talk. You didn’t have to entertain them for long if the ‘one you fancied’ wasn’t there. If he was, it was up to you to let them know when to go and that the ‘one you fancied’ could stay. There was a lot of rivalry and you had to pretend you were asking them all to leave e.g. at 2a.m. and make secret arrangements if you wanted one of them to return say at 2.30. I found it all rather hilarious and quite innocent because earlier caithris na h-oidhche involved not just tea and talk but tea and bed (even if all that took place in bed was talk), or so my mother told me.
I don’t know why the tradition developed. Was it a way for men who worked irregular hours at sea etc. to meet young women out of the public eye? Was it a way for families to let their daughters be courted out of the public eye, and safely under the protection of the family roof? I’ve heard of caithris na h-oidhche taking place at communions - when communions involved large numbers of people visiting another area for a long weekend - and pregnancies resulting. I don’t hear people talking about it much nowadays. I’m not sorry that it has passed. Too many unwanted pregnancies happened in the older caithris na h-oidhche. It forced young men to hunt in packs.
and young women to entertain them. It was socially acceptable but I'm sure many young men and women felt pressured by the whole business. Now, if you fancy someone you don't have to subject yourself to the rituals of *caithris na h-oidhche*.

17. Courting practices today are much more open and public. I'm amazed by the courting rituals of the young in Scalpay. In 1970 it was hidden, etc. In 1990 it was blatant. I was at a ceilidh in Scalpay then and I was shocked at the attitude of the young. It seemed as if they were determined to display themselves and their affections in front of parents, etc. Young girls drive around in cars with the young man, quite openly, in the afternoons and evening.

I'm not sure if this determined displaying of their affection is true in Lewis although there is generally more openness in boy-girl relationships.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. 1-2 years in my case and 1 sister-in-law, the other 2 sisters-in-law - 4-5 years.
2. I didn't have a ríteach but 2 of my 3 Scalpay sisters-in-law did. I attended both of them but can only vaguely remember the ritual involved.
3. Engagement ring, presents.
4. Nor for permission, merely to inform them and ask for advice on what arrangements were necessary.
5. In Scalpay you could be seen taking a walk together - and no comment would be passed! - once you were engaged. The *caithris na h-oidhche* stopped because you were regarded as good as married. I think privately this was true too, i.e. you could be more open with one another.
6. 1-2 years.
8. My own wedding was in the Caberfeidh so it involved minimal preparation. My sisters-in-law got married in the village hall, Scalpay, and this involved baking and cooking for days on end. I remember having 20 chickens defrosting in my bath ready for roasting. We also had to supply the tables, glassware, linen, etc. The men had relatively little to do except see to the liquid refreshments. It was an exhausting time for the females in an extended family.
9. Mothers and mothers-in-law were the directors of the operations. The bride's mother was allowed the most say, if both the bride and groom came from Scalpay, and could take malicious pleasure at times in putting the future in-laws in their place.
10. Hotel weddings were all the same, it seemed. Still very little change today. Village hall weddings were less formal and more enjoyable, especially if you were not close enough to be involved in all the operations.
11. I attended 8, 1 in Back and 7 in Scalpay. As I said they were noisier, cosier than hotel weddings. I also remember that more drink was consumed because the menfolk did not have to be in public in the same part of the hotel - e.g. they could go round the back of the village hall, go to upstairs bedrooms to sit and chat and drink. They weren't compelled to take to the dancefloor much of the night - because the room available meant that dancing was limited to a dozen couples or so at a time.
12. Again, I can only think of Scalpay but I feel it was much the same for W. Isles anyway. I feel that married couples were approached as individuals. I don't think anyone was seen to lose their individuality after marriage. You made it clear by marriage that you were a couple and this is how you were treated in the community but you didn't lose your individuality.
13. I probably felt sympathetic! The early years of marriage can be a testing time - setting up home, learning to compromise, tolerating each other's foibles, etc.
Looking back, I felt a lot of ‘fun’ went out of my relationships with friend once they married. Life had become serious for all of us.

14. Life became more serious and ‘respectable’. Socializing was mainly with other married couples, visiting each other, etc. Generally, you don’t go out much.

15. We didn’t socialize so much. I also think Island males become less attentive once they put the ring on your finger and their expectations of your home-making abilities are high.

16. We lived in a house I was renting in Scalpay. This was a small house, very basically furnished but handy for school. This was only for 9 months until our croft house was built. We lived there for almost 10 years before moving to Lewis.

17. In Scalpay you were expected not to work after marriage and start a family very soon unless you had a ‘good job’ - local nurse, teacher, school cook, etc. There was no condemnation from the community if you held on for a few years before starting a family if you had a ‘good job’.

18. I have worked all my life and now that the boys are in their twenties I tell them of the guilt I often felt at not giving them more of my time. They say they weren’t aware of any neglect. On the contrary, it was me and not their dad who gave them swimming lessons, drove them to football practice, etc. We have a very close relationship. I feel that our respect for one another grew partly from the fact that early on they realized that everyone had needs which they were entitled to fulfil. I could never have stayed at home being a dutiful wife and mother. I think this is a valuable and rewarding role, but I would have died of boredom. If a woman feels happy and fulfilled being a wife, housewife, mother, etc., there should be an acceptance that she has a very valuable role to play. Equally, it should be accepted that for many this is not enough. Sadly, there are many women who would like to stay at home raising their families but are compelled to go out to work for financial reasons.

19. In some Scalpay homes I witnessed displays of physical and verbal affection between married couples but it was done in a light-hearted, joking way and was not the norm. I don’t witness this in Lewis - they’re made of sterner stuff!

VI. Before Childbearing

1. We picked it up from each other and from magazines. At teacher-training college we had a week for ‘sex education’, much of which was shocking, although it was the male trainee teachers who tended to faint. An intelligent Lewis girl of my own age - then 20 - burst into tears after a ‘social’ in the Y.M.C.A. because she was frightened she would be pregnant having been kissed by a boy in a certain way.

2. Friends often discussed sex and, looking back, some of our theories were extraordinary - the result of arrogance and ignorance! Married women tended to discuss ‘female complaints’ rather than sex, especially the pains of childbirth etc. Older married women were more reticent all round although when they did talk about such things it was about the horrific suffering they endured at childbirth. Their stories were taken with a pinch of salt. They seem to derive some pleasure from ‘having survived life-threatening, excruciatingly painful deliveries’ etc. Although we knew they were greatly exaggerated they succeeded in frightening those who were yet to have children.

3. Friends discussed sex - mostly ‘myths’! Women’s magazines widened our knowledge, such as it was. It wasn’t until I was pregnant and was given literature by the pre-natal clinic that I had a rounded, factual picture of what was involved. There was no sex education in school and the sex education at training college set out to
present the issues in an ‘arty’ (and often sickening) manner. I was pregnant before I had all the basic, unadulterated facts!
4. I’ve read in books that some part of a lamb’s intestines was used by the male as an early condom, but I’ve never heard this from relatives. This just wouldn’t be discussed by my mother and grandmother’s generation. I’ve no idea how they would learn about contraception. Perhaps the males took responsibility. I feel they’d be more ready to discuss contraception with each other, if only in a joking way. I did hear my mother and grandmother - while we lived in Glasgow - talking about a neighbour who aborted herself regularly. She already had a family of 5. I wasn’t meant to hear and I wish I hadn’t because the image they conjured is still vivid in my mind. I’m not sure how true it was either because the neighbour was a German refugee from post-war Berlin and people were rather xenophobic in the 50s.
5. Young married women discussed family planning, i.e. contraception, with each other. The menfolk would be informed but I don’t think they’d be in on the discussion. Basically, you talked about it with married female friends, checked with the doctor and then informed your husband. The decision as to when to start a family, how many to have etc. was strictly between you and your husband.
6. I don’t think our grandmothers would have gone to any outside agency for advice. I’m not sure either if there was any communication with their husbands on this. They restricted discussion to sisters and married friends.
7. Pregnancy outside marriage was a terrible scandal. The church also made an example of those who got pregnant before marriage. Things eased a bit in the 70s. When my husband went to the church meeting which was for all those who were baptizing, he went on his own. I would only have had to attend with him if my pregnancy had happened before marriage. At that church meeting there were 6 fathers on their own and 4 couples - the couples being sinners in the eyes of the Free Church. It sounds awful but it was not terribly upsetting because the community had become more tolerant. It was treated as a mere formality. It must have been horrendous, however, in the 40s, 50s and perhaps even the 60s.
8 and 9. WOMEN were the ones to blame for pregnancies outside wedlock! Everyone blamed them - especially other women, and especially women to whom the same thing had happened. The worst finger-pointing was by those to whom the same thing had happened earlier.
10. Women were expected to be more moral. It was ‘natural’ for men to pursue the ladies and a decent girl would hold them at bay. An indecent or weak or badly brought up girl would give in to these lustful young men! Sadly, this is still the case today. Even in the 90s when a young single girl falls pregnant, the gossip is always directed at her. The male involved is hardly acknowledged and certainly not blamed in any way.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. We knew very little. . .
2. There was very little advice and support given beforehand. I had pre-eclampsia with my first birth - this was not explained at all. When the obstetrician said he would have to break my waters I didn’t know how he would do this or why. They gave little information and didn’t like being asked questions - so you didn’t. I feel the increasing number of female doctors has helped women gain more knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth and I think the male doctors have taken this up. It’s much easier nowadays to ask questions and the doctors - male and female - seem more than willing to supply whatever help and information is needed.
3. It was not referred to. It was rather distasteful. You were encouraged not to pay attention - unlike today when every pregnancy is announced before it shows.
4. N.a.
5. Not with my husband too much. Not too much with other women - apart from my mother and grandmother - either, but I think that might not be too typical. My husband wasn’t present at the births. It wasn’t the done thing in the Islands then. Even if it was, he wouldn’t have attended. He’s squeamish and I’d prefer to get on with the work of delivering a child without having a fainting male distracting me.
6. My first pregnancy was a worry because it was the first. I took my second pregnancy in my stride even wall-papered for my mother the day before the baby arrived. I knew exactly what was involved so I could relax and get on with it.
7. I can’t remember giving up anything except in the seventh month of my first pregnancy when fluid retention meant I was too breathless to rush about as much as I used to. One thing was that you didn’t have to attend church services after the sixth month. You could if you really wanted to but most didn’t.
8. No.
9. My 2 sons were born in the Lewis Hospital. I found it a rather cold experience. You were a name and a number and so was your precious baby. You were not encouraged to complain - even with a damaged coccyx which required long treatment later on - or even ask why your child had a rash, etc. This is a bit unfair, I’m sure, because they did have a maternity ward to run efficiently and after all ‘You weren’t ill or anything like that!’ If I had a baby now I’d try to have it at home. Having said that, I’m sure the hospitals of the 90s are more customer-friendly than those of the 70s.
10. We were kept in hospital 7-10 days, taking things very easily, with a first birth. After that the average stay was 5 days. You weren’t kept in bed, but you had to look after your baby, entertain visitors, etc. Everyone was desperate to go home because it was a strict regime.
11. You more or less returned to your normal routine of work once you got home from hospital.
12. I took some time adjusting to my new role. I remember the first week after returning to Scalpay from hospital being prodded by my mother-in-law into having meals ready on time. There was a time and a place for the baby, in her view, but the husband’s welfare must come first. My mother saw it slightly differently! I would have liked more time to settle in with the babies but this was not encouraged. Even my mother was of the view that a couple of weeks ‘baby cuddling’ was more than enough - life had to get back to normal quickly. I still regret that I didn’t live in a society which allowed mother and child all the time they needed just to be together. There was this urgency to get back to a normal routine.
13. Yes. Everything was harder for them! No painkillers, no fancy nappies and easily washed babygros. On the other hand, they could criticize readily young women who took pregnancy and childbirth in their stride.
14. I wanted a boy, partly because I knew my mother and grandmother adored boys and partly because my husband wanted a boy. I also didn’t want to have a baby girl who would grow up like me and give her parents the problems I had! My only brother was a much easier child than either my sister or I. Boys were always wanted. My sister-in-law has 4 daughters and 1 son. The arrival of the son was celebrated more then the four daughters put together. I’m older and wiser now. It would be marvellous to have a daughter, to talk to, to share experiences with as I did my mother and especially my grandmother.
15. You knew he cared but it was something you were supposed to take in your stride without too much involvement from him.

16. Motherhood changed my life literally. It gives you a different perspective on everything. From being quite careless in my dealings with people I cared about I became overly concerned that I wasn’t doing enough for them - with the result that I looked after my grandfather, grandmother, mother and father as if I were solely responsible for their welfare. Only my father is still alive and he is dependent on me and not his other children. As well as mothering my two sons I seemed to have mothered my husband, parents and grandparents as well. It’s a form of control, I suppose. When you’re left holding the baby literally, you are very vulnerable and only too aware of all that life can throw at you and your precious baby. Being in control of the lives of people you care about is almost a defence mechanism. It’s very tiring and I look forward to a time when I feel that no one has to be totally dependent or even mildly dependent on me.

17. I knew several who had home births - again on Scalpay. I was home on holiday from Glasgow and the lady of the house - now in her 70s - was having her fourth baby at home. There was no real fuss except before the birth she had a craving for apples which we respected... The birth was treated with a minimum of fuss. The nurse-midwife (local) called and delivered the baby. Also present were the lady’s mother-in-law, who lived with her, and her sister who came from the village especially. The child was breastfed and we were allowed to handle it from the 3rd day. The menfolk were kept out of the way - or kept themselves out of the way.

18. N.a.

19. In Scalpay, every caller was given whisky or sherry. Every islander made an effort to call with a gift. It was a time of celebration, especially if it was a boy.

20. My sons were named after their grandfathers with an uncle’s name added on. This was typical of the 70s in the Islands. I remember visiting my parents in Lewis in the late 70s and being told that a friend’s daughter had had a baby and they were calling her MICHELLE! This was a cause for scandal for at least a week!

21. The baptisms were rather dull. You dressed your baby in all its finery, were driven to the church, entered by the vestry door and took your seat beside your husband who was already present at the main service. The minister said a few words, sprinkled some water and that was it basically. You were aware of the interest and affection of the congregation for all the babies being baptized. Scalpay, more than any other place I know, adores its young. There were no god-parents and - being a Sunday - no celebratory meal as such afterwards. A bit of a damp squib really.

3N. LENA (See 4G)

[Responded to letter in the local island press.]

*Marital status:* Widowed                              *Date of birth:* 4.12.46

*Birthplace:* Peterhead

*List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.* Peterhead; Portnaguran; Sutton, Surrey.

*Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin:* 1911, Portnaguran (deceased).
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1925, Peterhead.
Parents’ occupations: Merchant Navy/fisherman; housewife.
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s: 3 younger brothers.
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Worked in local tweed mill till 18.
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Worked in tweed mill finishing department, Stornoway; 1966 to date, psychiatric nurse.
Age at marriage: 23 years.
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1942, Mauritius.
Husband’s occupation: Was a psychiatric nurse.
No. of daughters and their ages: 1, 20 years
Total number of children you have ever borne: 1
Are any of your children married now? No.
Do you have any grandchildren? No.
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Non-practising Free Church.
Parents’ religion: Free Church.
Husband’s religion: Moslem.

I. Language
1. Yes. 2. I have difficulty writing Gaelic so I’m looking at ways of improving this, e.g. open learning package. 3. Dad was a fluent Gaelic speaker. Mother spoke only English. 4. No.

II. Family and Household
1. I never actually lived with my parents except for a short time when we came to the island when I was 5 years old. My dad built a small two-bedrooomed house. It was expected that I would stay with my great aunt. I did this until I left home at 18 to come to Sutton.
2. For 3 years my father-in-law stayed with my husband and I. He had had a disagreement with the son he was living with, came for the weekend and stayed for 3 years before returning back to his second son.
3. There was always one member of the family who looked after either parents or aunts/uncles left by themselves. Either one of the children would move in or sleep there at night time. Other times when there was room in daughter’s/son’s/niece’s house they would move in to be looked after especially as they got older and more dependent. No such thing as being out in nursing homes as is common today. Of course wives did not go out to work in those days.

III. Growing Up
1. a. I enjoyed being with my dad when he tended to the sheep. I used to be fascinated when he used to work with the sheep and the sheep dog. Also on Sunday morning going for long walks on the moor again with my dad who would point out the various sea birds, even where he had put out his lobster pots the previous day. I always enjoyed listening to stories about the island or the family. I also loved going out by myself around the cliffs. I enjoyed the solitude. When I return to the village now I rarely go towards the village. I love the hills, cliffs and moors and the bleating of the local sheep I meet on my travels. I can walk for many miles without seeing anybody. During those times I also get ideas for my poetry that I occasionally write. My dad and my brother Finlay, Aunt Joan and Aunt Effie were the most important to me. Aunt Joan brought me up and she took my mother’s place.
b. Games I played - usual skipping, hopscotch, playing bothies - collecting nice pieces of broken china and displaying around walls or cliffs, making imaginary homes. All the girls in the village played this when young.

c. Although I lived with my Aunt Joan my mother had 3 sons so I used to help with the cleaning in both houses. I used to wash the families’ clothes on Saturdays, always hoped the weather was good enough to dry the clothes otherwise it would take all weekend to dry the clothes on the pulley in the kitchen. Each Saturday helped prepare Sunday dinner. Soup, prepare vegetables, I also used to bake. I enjoyed cooking.

I also would occasionally iron with the old iron you put into the fire.

d. I enjoyed certain aspects of school, mainly English and home economics.

2. I was never very close to my mother. To me she was of a generation that either was unable to or just did not show much affection. I feel many families were similar. It is still not a close relationship.

3. I had a more loving relationship with my dad. I was the only girl and we shared many interests - singing, poetry, reading, the sheep. He was a very straight and honest man and I suppose he was my role model in life. I loved him dearly. The first time I went home from Sutton to visit the family he had a heart attack and died in my arms. I was devastated - I was 19 years old. I had only recently started nursing, it was ironic that I carried out last offices on him. He was the first deceased person I had seen. Although I found it very traumatic I was pleased I was able to carry out this last task for him. My Aunt Effie helped me. Later we were reprimanded by the local men folk. I wasn’t aware then that the men dressed the men and the women did the women.

4. I would say they had a close relationship. He was very protective of my mother as she had come from a completely different culture and initially found it difficult to settle into this new culture, cutting peats, sowing potatoes, cutting corn and baiting fishing lines. I feel she deserved a medal for this. I’m not sure I would have been able to endure this hard life for as long as she did.

The isolation for her was difficult as she came from the town and was now living in a small village of maybe 12 houses or so, 12 miles from the nearest town. I didn’t see too much affection shown in public.

5. I was one of four, I had 3 brothers. I lived with an elderly aunt whilst my brothers lived with my parents. I did not get on very well with my eldest brother as he was always fighting with the middle brother. I would intervene and invariably get caught hitting him. Today we get on alright but I have a good relationship with Finlay, my middle brother. My youngest brother, Peter, was six when I left home so I do not know him terribly well although when we meet we seem to get on fine. I feel there was too much of a generation gap. I was closest to my dad. I didn’t have grandparents on the island, they had both died before I was born. I rarely saw my grandparents from Peterhead, but my granny always sent us big parcels of clothes and tins of sausages and beans and other things as she worked at a Crosse and Blackwell factory in Peterhead. I got on well with my cousins who lived next door, otherwise there were no other relations close to us.

6. My dad was head of the household. Both mother and father but if there were any disagreement my dad’s word was final. I feel this was often the case.

7. My dad.

8. My parents were not practising christians but dad did go to church to get us baptised. It was customary to go to church over a period of six months otherwise you could not get the children baptised. However he was christian in many other ways.
He was a kind and caring man to anyone he felt needed help. As a fisherman he would always make sure the old folk in the village were given fish; they would often come to him if they had any problems they could not manage; he would also write letters for them as often the older people only spoke/wrote Gaelic so he would do it on their behalf. Although he did not attend church regularly whatever part of the Bible you would choose to read he would follow you on. He had a wonderful memory. If he went a route once he would never forget the way. When I had to learn Gaelic psalms for school we would sit down together and we would sing them through until I learnt them off by heart.

9. Yes, boys certainly were encouraged if they were intellectually bright to attend university. Girls weren’t expected to be. The idea was - well, the girls would get married so it wasn’t important or they could go to the ‘hotels’ for seasonal work and spent the winter at home unemployed. I vowed that I would not go to the hotels and took up nursing as I wanted a secure job.

10. I felt my mother was more attuned to my brothers than me - mind you I did not live with her. I felt more attuned to my dad. If the boy was bright he would get first priority.

11. My dad. I always found him kind and fair, kind but strict. I felt it gave me the discipline I have continued throughout my life, this of course in conjunction with my nurse training. It suited me but I’m not sure that everybody would cope with the regime. I feel one needs a certain amount of discipline in one’s life, although I know not everybody would agree with me. They had a healthy but hard life with deadlines e.g. picking potatoes, cutting peats, so they had to be an organized but practical race. I still use methods of organization taught to me by my dad.

12. From the age of 14 I decided I wanted a career of some sort, I did not want the hard life of the island people, so I came to Surrey to do psychiatric nursing. However, I feel without the stable background I had I do not think I could have coped with the clients I nurse with.

13. After helping mother to bring up three brothers I certainly did not want to get married and have children for a very long time. It was quite customary for girls to get married from age 18 and settle down to island life. Some would live with mother or granny and look after them in their old age. I couldn’t envisage this before I had seen a bit of life outside the island first. Lots of girls went to the mainland to the hotels for the season and spent the winter unemployed. They did this until they got married. Many went to Oban, Glasgow, Perth, Inverness.

14. Sometimes but generally we played apart. We would play ‘bothies’, making up make-believe houses in walls or cliffs with broken china, always looking for the prettiest bits, sometimes we’d exchange them with one another. We also used to cut up old catalogues like Oxendales and Littlewoods and make up houses and families using the clothes and furniture and keeping them in a scrap book. Again we would exchange them with one another.

Boys usually played [with] and made up old bikes or made up boxes (wooden ones) and screwed them onto old pram wheels and would run them down hills. I suppose they made use of whatever was available.

15. My grandmother’s generation was much harder, they lived completely off the land, planting potatoes, vegetables, etc. Fish from the sea, meat from their own animals. Knitted and made their own clothes, cut their own peats for fuel. By the time [of] my mother’s generation things were slightly easier although not by much. Both generations, the women worked extremely hard on the land as well as bringing up the children and looking after their husbands as the husband felt that anything
within the home was the woman’s job. Thank goodness this generation acknowledges it should be shared.

16. Women and girls were definitely 2nd class citizens. Males were on the whole the dominant party. I certainly do not believe the woman had the luxury of having ‘a headache’, she got on with the task in hand as was expected of her.

**IV. Early Adulthood**

1. I had to help bring up my three brothers as my mother along with doing the main chores of cutting peats, planting potatoes, baiting the fishing lines, also had a knitting machine and made bobban sweaters and cardigans, so I had also to help her with the cooking and the tidying of the house and the Saturday washing as well as with the above tasks. . . . I also did a lot of reading and wanted to go to college in the mainland but I had to help my mother. As I’ve already said, I wanted to do a course in domestic science to teach in the subject but that was not to be. I suppose apart from all that I was quite happy during my teenage years, I certainly didn’t feel any different from others, as all the children were expected to help where it was necessary.

2. As above until I left home.

3. I had difficulty getting permission from my dad to go to late night dances even although I was working from the age of 15. Although I did not live with him he still laid down the rules as to when I should return home. Often I found this hard to contend with the rest of my friends’ parents did not seem to bother what time they came home.

4. Social life was limited. We boys and girls would meet up at certain points in the area and mainly walk from village to village singing en route and if you had a boyfriend you would stop every so often and kiss. This seemed to be accepted by everyone, the remainder of the group would just walk on until we reached the designated place. Once a month we had a travelling film show that came to the local hall. The films used to be years old before we saw them. There was also a picture house in town but it was only when you started working and had a boyfriend that you went there. I never went there with a group of girls - again the films were quite old before they reached us.

Once a month on a Friday a dance was held in the village hall and you could attend from the age of 15. In fact throughout the island most village halls would have a dance that would start about 10 p.m. until 2-3 next morning. If it was a good band often there would be a bus back to town (Stornoway).

5. Yes, up from 13-15 we went in groups and once one started working you tended to pair off. Yes, I had two platonic boyfriends. Yes.

6. So long as you did your chores and returned home at a reasonable time (it was 10 o’clock at night for me and I lived the farthest away from the rest), it was alright. If I was late in returning home I was grounded, possibly for the rest of the week. I resented this but had to abide by it.

7. My father was quite strict and I knew if he said I was not to go out that was the end of it. You could put your case forward but he would not change his mind once it was made up.

8. Time to come in at night. If I was late from the dance especially if it was on the other side of the island I might not get home before 5 a.m. This always caused arguments.

9. Most parents were religious and attended church on Sundays and some parents seemed not to worry about their children’s late nights, whereas my parents were not
churchgoers and I felt they were very strict. I suppose the majority of the young people of my generation rebelled against their parents.

10. Age 14, boyfriends; 19 before I met my future husband.

11. From age 14 onwards was the norm but like in every society there were always the early starters. On the whole I suppose they accepted it but warned us of the dangers of sex, not so explicit as parents of today would.

12. Yes, we played the teasing game.

13. Not very, it was all carried out at night on the walks from village to village. One usually didn’t bring it to the fore until one went to work then the parents would acknowledge or disagree with the courtship.

14. Walking out, suiridhe, courting.

15. They used to be visited by their boyfriends again late at night when courting. They would be knitting or sewing, or attended church unless courting.

16. Caithris na h-oidhche. It was carried out by courting couples. The girl would leave her bedroom window open so her boyfriend could visit her after the parents went to bed. He would have to be out of the home before the parents got up in the morning. It didn’t happen during my time although it may well have happened on other parts of the island. I’m not sure, although an old friend of mine’s boyfriend would stay Friday nights, go home 6 a.m. before the locals got up and sometimes again on Saturday night. I think the older people would have accepted this as it was part of their culture. I cannot answer this.

I suppose the main difference being the boyfriend would leave around 6 a.m. so as not to be seen by the locals otherwise it would be gossip in the village. Today they just stay on and don’t think too much about it.

Leabachas - sorry, I have not heard the word before, I looked it up in the dictionary.

17. It was more secretive. You tried to keep it that way for as long as possible especially if you were 14-16, then it didn’t seem to matter as much. Of course your own peer group knew all about it but not necessarily your parents.

V. Engagement and Marriage

1. 1 year to long engagements of 5-10 years.

2. Rèiteach - The bride’s family would announce a small party where friends, relatives, neighbours would bring small but useful gifts. . . for the bottom drawer. Two weeks before the wedding the couple would go to town and see the Registrar to have the banns put up.

3. Generally, a small party and the village people would give small things like pillow slips and teaspoons, etc.

4. Yes, I spoke with my mother as my father had died by that time.

5. Yes, sometimes they would show more affection in public; others did not show any. I suppose they did, they expected them to be more adult.

6. At least, 1 year, maybe more depending on the couple - if they moved in with the parents, 1 year, if they had to save for a place of their own, longer.

7. Holding hands, putting his arm around her in public; private, kissing, I can’t say.

8. It was usually help in the bride’s house and the village folk would contribute chickens, meat, home made cakes, etc.

9. Providing all was well they worked together with other family and friends.

10. Going to the local church and seeing the couple married by the minister. It was a white wedding. Then going back to the bride’s house and having a good meal - ‘a
great feed’ was often the expression. Each child would then be given sweets which were quite large, something like love heart sweets, with romantic messages on them. There would always be a box of them at weddings. In later years, some richer families would hire a hall or use one of hotels in town.

11. As above. Followed by a dance. Banais taigh - in olden days they had weddings in three parts: banais taighe was held in the groom’s home; wedding night in bride’s house; wedding again in bride’s house for those who were unable to attend the first night. The night before the wedding a scone (bannock) would be baked and a ring put in the bonnach; it would be thrown and whoever caught it would be the next bride, e.g. like throwing the bouquet. Everybody helped by cooking chickens, baking.

12. I feel they were treated differently. The new couple always attended church the first Sunday after they married and would probably continue until their child was born as you could not get a christening unless the men went to church regularly for at least 6 months. Some would stop after that but many would continue as it is part of the culture. I left the island when I was single so I cannot comment on this.

13. I would say, yes - you respected them, you saw them in a different light. I suppose they had grown up and would continue the local culture.

14. They would become more home orientated. They didn’t attend the local dances. A number would start going to church. I suppose they felt they were more adult now. Dances seemed less important.

15. I suppose I became more of a home maker, saved up to buy our first house, generally had to be more responsible. Continued a modest social life, enjoyed our time together more.

16. I lived in a flat for 18 months then we bought a small terraced house. It was there my daughter was born. The same year we moved to a larger semi-detached house.

17. I do not agree with it. I never gave up work when I had my daughter. My husband and I shared the care and the chores; as we had a mortgage to pay up, my pay was also needed to live on. The pressure to have children was not a great issue when I got married, the Pill was available. My mother never actually went out to work from the day she got married as it was the done thing in those days. It was after my middle brother that she started working from home. Had she gone out to work it would have been frowned upon.

18. It would have been great if I had been able to remain at home when my daughter was young. Unfortunately, it was not financially possible so we both shared her care. However, I do believe it should be up to the individual/s to decide. I do believe I would have gone bananas if I didn’t have work or other interests to do whilst my daughter was growing up. I do not think I could have enjoyed being a mother full time.

19. No - only rarely and that would have been likely to have been an ‘English man’ showing affection to his wife. I cannot say that I saw locals exchanging affection in front of others. Certainly within my own family it was not obvious. I must say I show a lot more affection to my family today than was openly shown to me. We just accepted this as the norm.

VI. Before Childbearing

1. We were not told about the ‘fact of life’. I got my knowledge from books I sent away for through woman’s magazines, problem pages in ‘true love story’ magazines. I, of course, gained more knowledge through my nursing training.

2. We would share our knowledge gained from the books with our friends. I’m not sure, they seemed very private about discussing such personal issues.
3. Yes, some would tell us that the stork dropped the baby, or some seagulls. It was only as a teenager that I noticed pregnant women, I didn’t seem to take any notice before.

4. In my mother’s generation the ‘Dutch cap’ was available through the G.P. I’m not sure that the previous generation used any contraception, hence the large families. Families were limited during the wars or if the husband was a sailor and was away from home for long periods. I do not know.

I have just spoken to my brother and he felt that in the olden days one method of contraception was by using specific herbs but he did not know what they were.

5. The Pill was available when I got married and I briefly discussed it with him, but mostly with my G.P. I had no sister to discuss any problems with. I’m not sure many people would have discussed such private issues with the district nurse, if anybody it would have been with their G.P.

6. Today and during my time - times were changing and the young were beginning to be more open about contraception. Family Planning Centres were set up in local hospitals where young couples could go for advice. Generally, the woman went by herself for advice. My husband never came with me. That was my job as I decided to try the Pill. Prior to this we would use condoms, that was his responsibility. Today, I’m pleased to say that even the unmarried are sensible enough to go and get advice and take/use the necessary protection. Although sadly there is still the occasional accident.

7. Yes. Usually the parents of the girl were offered the sympathy. It would also be said that she was a ‘loose woman’ or ‘easy’. You’d hear from the people in the village talking about it.

8. With sadness and sometimes anger. ‘Up the spout.’ In the family way. Trom. Some people would shun the girl. The boy never seemed to have any problems. The girl was often classed as ‘easy’.

9. Yes, the girl always seemed to be blamed, although it took two to complete the act.

10. Yes, the men were treated lightly. On rare occasions some men may have had one or two illegitimate children within the same district, some while they were single and some even though they were married. The marriage somehow survived. Yes, the women were expected to be moral, in my own day, yes. Today it doesn’t seem to be so much of an issue. There are many unmarried mothers on the island either living singly or with their partner.

**VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy**

1. Not a lot. I read books to get information. Probably when they were actually pregnant.

2. I was in Sutton when I was pregnant and the only support I had was my husband and my G.P. who then referred me to the clinic. Even at home by this time, most babies were born in hospital not at home. I felt I was given answers to any questions I asked. I felt relatively well prepared and my daughter was born in hospital after only 4 hours labour so I felt that I had a reasonably easy birth.

3. Yes, my mother was pregnant with my youngest brother when I was about 12. I was very embarrassed about this as a baby had not been born in the village for many years before. I suppose it was alright if it was not your own mother that was pregnant. The older boys and girls would make nasty jokes about my parents being too old to still be having sex. I found this very upsetting but did not feel I could discuss it with anyone.
4. Trom; a' dò a faighinn leanabh.

5. Yes, especially as the pregnancy progressed and Marian started to kick. Also spoke about him being with me during the birth which he was. It was beginning to be 'the in-thing' in the late 60s. No, not much.

6. I had two miscarriages at about 3 months. My pregnancy with Marian was fine but I was addicted to lemons pickled in their own juice with chilli powder added. . .

7. I worked full-time until 18 weeks before and I returned to full time work 6 weeks after the birth. I didn’t actually feel pregnant until I was about 8½ months so I continued my normal activities until she was born. I do believe in the last month that I gave up driving as I had difficulty with concentration.

8. No.

9. Yes. . .

10. I was up after I had a good sleep. I stayed there 5 days. . .

11. When I returned home as I was on my own and my husband worked night duty I had to care for the baby day/night. He would help when he got up in the evenings before going back to work.

12. It was hard work as people only seem to tell you the good things - not about being up most of the night, the colic they get. I learnt by trial and error as most mums do.

13. Yes - as they had their babies at home and the families/relatives were there to help, also the children.

14. I was happy that the child was normal and perfectly formed, sex was not an issue.

15. I found my husband as supportive as he could be. We were both learning together and neither of us had any family about us.

16. Well, I had another person to think about. No more parties or going out as before. We worked around her. I made friends with the new mothers I had met in hospital, to share ideas with, etc. Our friends who had no children couldn’t seem to understand why a child should change our lifestyle. They soon changed when they had their own. Irritated at times.

17. Yes, my mother. She gave birth to my brother on a Sunday night. The telephone had been recently installed at about ½ mile from where we lived. I was sent to call the doctor. The phone was broken (often happened with the bad weather) so I had to go 3 miles to the Post Office to get through and then I ran all the way back. My father looked after us whilst my aunt helped with the birth. The doctor came and I had to clear up afterwards. Not a pretty sight. We had no running water inside, so I had to boil up the nappies daily and rinse them outside under the running tap - it was freezing. At this point I said I would never have children. Of course time changes us all.

18. No, I have never heard of it.

19. By the father giving all around a drink of whisky to wet the baby’s head.

20. Generally, the first male born was named after the father, first girls were called after their granny/grannies.

21. Baptism - the father if he wasn’t a regular church goer had to start going to church for 6 months prior to the birth and continue until the child was baptized, which could be anything up to 18 months, 2 years after the child was born. Only sick babies were baptized at birth otherwise the minister waited until he had a few to baptize before he did it in the local church.
30. MAIREAD (See 4H)

[I wrote to Mairead having been told about her by the same person who put me in touch with Katag (3L).]

*Marital status* Widow  
*Date of birth* 15.6.30

*Birthplace* Crowlista, Uig, Lewis  
*List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.* Crowlista, 12/13 yrs; Stornoway, 3/4 yrs; Berwick, 1 1/2 yrs; Glasgow, 2 yrs; Ayrshire, 2 yrs; Aberdeen, 2 yrs; Edinburgh, 4 mths; Fife, 1 yr; Back. Lewis, 4 yrs; Ardroil, Lewis, 35 yrs.  
*Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin* 1889, Crowlista  
*Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin* 1897, Crowlista  
*Parents’ occupations* Crofter  
*Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s* One older sister and brother and one younger sister and brother

*How old were you when you left school?* 16 years  
*What did you do directly after you left school?* Children’s nurse, then nursing training

*Age at marriage* 30.  
*Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin* 1926, Ardroil, Lewis  
*Husband’s occupation* Crofter  
*Total number of children you have ever borne* None  
*Religion: how would you describe yourself?* Protestant  
*Parents’ religion* Protestant  
*Husband’s religion* Protestant

I. Language

1 and 2. Native Gaelic speaker. 3. Yes. 4. Yes.

II. Family and Household

1. Father, mother and four other children. Grandfather and grandmother for 3-4 yrs.  
2. Husband only.  
3. N.a.

III. Growing Up

1. Parents were important, playmates, brothers and sisters. Teacher and minister were respected. Rounders, hide and seek, playing at housekeeping with old dishes, etc. This was usually in a sheltered area. Cricket with boys and girls. There were around 30-40 children in school and we had to walk two miles in all weathers. Discipline was strict and we were taught the 3Rs. At lunch we had cocoa and a piece. We had a coal fire and outside toilets.  
2. My mother was kind and liked to help other people and neighbours if there was a crisis. I had a loving relationship with my mother but I wasn’t able to discuss some questions with her and it was only after marriage that I could talk freely with her on many subjects. I think it was a typical [relationship] at that time.  
3. My father was very quiet but exercised discipline with just a ‘look’. He was a devoted father.
4. My father and mother seemed to me to get on well with other couples and in those days helped each other. To me the husband and wife relationship was close.
5. We were a close family and each one stood up for one another when necessary. I was closest to my older brother and sister. We were taught to respect grandparents and help them. Our cousins and aunts and uncles lived on the mainland and we looked forward very much to them coming on holiday in the summertime. We learnt some English from them and had a few English phrases going to school.
6. My father was head of the household. Any decisions were taken by both parents. I think it was the case in other families.
7. My mother was more responsible but for any real naughtiness my father exercised discipline.
8. We had family worship morning and evening and grace before and after meals. My parents attended church regularly which was a five mile walk and when we were old enough to walk that distance we went to church as well. We were given religious instruction at school and by my parents. I first learned to read Gaelic from St. John’s Gospel, chap. 1 - taught by my mother.
9. Boys didn’t do any housework but girls were encouraged to sweep the floor and wash dishes.
10. My parents gave the same attention to each one in the family, but my grandparents gave more attention to the boys and thought their education more important.
11. No role models.
12. Yes. Croft work was very hard in those days.
13. I intended to leave home and learn a career and eventually marry and have children. I think most girls were the same.
14. Yes, boys and girls played together but at times the girls were shunned by the boys in certain games.
15. There wasn’t much difference between my mother’s generation and my grandmother’s generation as the women still had to work hard on the croft and raise a family while the menfolk had another occupation like fishing or weaving to make a living.
16. Women were in the background as far as public speaking and working after marriage was concerned.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Looking back on my teenage years they were happy times.
2. We were expected to help in the house and on the croft and with the peats.
3. As you are young adults you are allowed to make your own decisions.
4. We used to visit each others’ houses for a ceilidh. We were allowed to go to a concert or dances but still disapproved of by our elders.
5. Time spent with the opposite sex was just in a public place like a concert or dance.
6. Parents allowed more freedom but disapproversing because of religious beliefs.
7. In some homes there was disagreement about behaviour.
8. Rules about coming home on time.
9. The church disapproved of dancing and concerts. Most young people were uncaring about the church’s attitudes.
10. In my late teens.
11. 16-17. Usually disapproved by parents.
12. Yes. Boys were discussed with female friends and we teased about boys.
13. Courting relationships were secretive and adults approved only if it led to marriage.
14. Gaelic words were used to describe people who were going out together.
15. Older, unmarried women had no social life. If there was a wedding in the village they went to the reception, but they didn’t go to dances or concerts.
16. Caithris na h-oidhche was still practised in my young days - sitting up and talking maybe once or twice weekly. Young men came from some distance when courting. It was all very secretive without older people’s knowledge. I haven’t heard of leabachas.
17. It’s much more open and better as it is nowadays.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Some people went for years before an engagement.
2. I was never at a reiteach.
3. There wasn’t an engagement party.
4. No.
5. I don’t think the way they behaved towards each other in public changed. They were treated more as a couple by others.
6. Engagements lasted months-year - usually a wedding date was set on the engagement being announced.
7. No show of affection was allowed in public except at a wedding dance or concert - holding hands, etc.
8. All preparations were done by myself and my husband-to-be - the wedding reception was in Stornoway.
9. None.
10. Those wedding receptions were usually in the bride’s home and everyone in the village and farther afield helped preparing and cooking and serving the meal.
11. No.
12. They were expected to be more sedate.
13. N.a.
14. They were expected to be at home.
15. You wanted to help one another as much as possible.
16. In the house I’m in now except my father-in-law was with us for 1 year.
17. There was very little work for women in those days.
18. I believe in working wives and mothers but I think they should be with their children till school age. Then part-time work.
19. No verbal or physical affection were displayed.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Very little was learned from their mother. It was usually from their friends.
2. Very privately discussed among friends. I don’t think older married women talked about this.
3. I was thirteen when my mother had to tell me what was happening to me. The facts of life were more fully discussed by school friends in the school hostel.
4. I don’t know of any birth control that might have been used. They thought if they breastfed their babies for a long period, up to 2 years or more, that it was a birth control.
5. I didn’t discuss family planning with my husband. Probably women would discuss it with a sister in my young days.
6. The present generation ask the nurse, health visitor or Dr. about family planning.
7. Pregnancies outside of marriage were kept very secret.
8. People talked of girls as having ‘fallen’ - ‘tuiteam’.
9. The girl was blamed more for a pregnancy outside of wedlock.
10. A pregnancy outside of wedlock is still considered a shame in this community.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. They mostly heard from older women and sad to say some of their stories only frightened the younger ones.
2-12. N.a.
13. Women in the past usually stayed at home during their pregnancy and weren’t seen in public places. Nowadays they go to work and drive around for great distances during their pregnancy. . .
15. Husbands were supportive in contacting midwife and doctor, looking after children, making tea and meals if there was no ‘granny’ available.
16. N.a.
17. When my young brother was born I was in hospital and when they told me that I had a brother it was unbelievable. I was ten years at the time.
18. I haven’t heard of ‘churching’ or ‘kicking’.
19. A glass of wine for the women and a glass of spirits for the men.

Married Life and Parenthood
1. No change in appearance.
2 and 3. N.a.
4. I visited friends at their own homes or vice versa. General conversation about our homes and news about people in the community.
5. N.a.
6. I am a widow but most people have been very supportive and have helped me with any difficult work on the croft or with my sheep. It hasn’t changed my relationship with married or widowed people.
7. At the beginning of my marriage some people were hinting about my not having a family, but through time it was accepted.

3P. MARJORIE

[Marjorie is one of my mother’s elder sisters and has spent most of her life on the mainland.]

Marital status Married
Birthplace North Tolsta
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there, and the jobs that you have done.
North Tolsta, 16 years; worked in Woolworths in Stornoway; Inverness - housemaid (hotel); Pitlochry - waitress (hotel); Dunkeld, 38 years - Waitress, dinner lady, school cleaner.
Father's d.o.b. and place of origin 20.8.1905, North Tolsta
Mother's d.o.b. and place of origin 11.1.1911, North Tolsta
Parents' occupations Housewife, labourer
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Sisters: 14.1.34; 13.11.37; 26.4.40; brothers: 26.9.32; 16.2.50.
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Worked in Woolworths in Stornoway
Age at marriage 25 years
Husband's d.o.b. and place of origin 11.3.33, Dunkeld, Perthshire
Husband's occupation Postman
No. of daughters and their ages 1, aged 35
Total number of children you have ever borne 1
Are any of your children married now? Yes
Do you have any grandchildren? 4
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Protestant [Church of Scotland]
Parents' religion Protestant [Free Presbyterian]
Husband's religion Protestant [Church of Scotland elder]

I. Language
1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. No.

II. Family and Household
1. Three adults and 6 children. Paternal grandmother lived with us, in fact the house belonged to her, it had been built by my grandfather when they got married. 2. No. 3. Most families had grandparents living with them.

III. Growing Up
1. Memories of happy carefree days, playing with friends. We used to spend hours playing ‘tighean beag’ [houses], sisters and friends went round collecting bits of crockery, cans and wood, then we would set it all up into a fine ‘wee house’ on a hill behind our house. Summer holidays were spent out on the moor at the peats, helping mothers and grannies, hard work. The high point was teabreak, tea brewed on an open peat fire, fresh boiled eggs and home made scones, family sitting together. Other days spent at the Cladach [beach name], coming home laden with crabs. Work around the house - I preferred collecting the water from the well, 2 buckets with a cearcail [wooden frame], to ease the weight, I guess; during hot summers our own well would dry up so we had to walk some distance over the hills to get water.
2. Mothers in those days were not as close and open with their children as we are now. This was typical of most families.
3. Father was the same.
4. I suppose husbands and wives were very close to each other in their own way.
5. I would say we had a happy loving childhood. Paternal grandmother was a loving and caring person who used to cover up for us when we did anything wrong.
6. Mother had more say in family matters.
7. Mother.
8. Both parents were involved in our religious upbringing. Family prayers morning and night.
9. Can’t recall if girls and boys were treated differently by adults.
10. Mothers tended to give more attention to the boys.
11. I suppose our parents were our role models.
12. I never consciously decided to live a different life style to my mother.
13. My expectations were not high, I expected to leave home, as the majority of young girls did, and work in hotels.
14. Boys usually kept to themselves, but sometimes we would go fishing with my big brother and his pals, out to the lochs on the moor, fishing with the otter board.
15. Our mothers had a hard life, but I maintain our grandmothers had it even harder; I reckon the men treated them like slaves.
16. I believe men gave little thought to the well-being of women.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Teenage years were happy most of the time, I loved dancing. Heartaches - yes, over boys, nothing changes where that's concerned.
2. We were away from home most of the time. Financially, we helped a lot.
3. I think we got closer to our parents as we got older.
4. Social life at home didn't amount to much, but we were happy.
5. Yes! We did spend more time with the boys, my friends and I would meet up with the boys at 'tigh Kate' [a local ceilidh house frequented especially by the young], a special place, and will always remain a special place in my memory. Kate was a spinster, living on her own, she was an angel. Yes, I had male platonic friends, everybody approved of this.
6. Parents had a lot of say in how we spent our time, if we listened; we turned a deaf ear quite a lot.
7. There used to be a lot of disagreement between adults and the young, but I think we were quite lucky as our parents moved with the times.
8. Make-up was frowned upon. Smoking was taboo, but we managed a smoke now and again behind their backs.
9. The church did not have much influence on us.
10. 15 to 16 when I took an interest in boys.
11. Seventeen, maybe, parents didn't seem to approve.
12. We took great delight discussing boys we fancied.
13. People were very secretive about relationships with the opposite sex. Adults seemed to distance themselves from these things.
14. Caraphidh - used to describe boyfriend and girlfriend.
15. Social life for older women was going for a ceilidh to somebody else's house.
16. Caithris na h-oidheche was very much the in-thing in my time. The boy would call about three nights a week, Mon., Wed., Fri., he would wait around till the rest of the family were in bed. He would give a special knock on the window. We would be by the fire chatting till the early hours of the morning. My parents did not object to it. There were no other places for them to do their courting.

Leabachas - I never heard of this word.
17. I suppose.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Two years or more.
2. No, I didn't have a réiteach. I remember being at a réiteach, great celebration before the wedding.
3. I don't remember any celebration for an engagement.
4. I told them I was getting engaged.
5. I can't say couples behaved differently.
6. Two years or more.
7. No show of affection in public.
8. I did not have a Lewis wedding, but I remember a lot of island weddings. ... The next night there would be a smaller reception at the groom’s house.
9. I don’t remember.
10. Children were not invited to many weddings.
11. I can’t say.
12. I was not aware if they were treated different.
13. Same as above.
14. When we were young social life in the village after marriage was nil.
15. Can’t say things changed a great deal, except as above social life.
16. We lived in Dunkeld in our own house.
17. I did not approve of women having to give up work after marriage.
18. Nowadays quite a number of women go back to work after having babies. I do not approve of the way they leave their children with childminders.
19. Couples years back would never show any physical display of affection in public.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. We knew very little about the facts of life as teenager, what we learnt later came from friends.
2. It was discussed among friends. I shouldn’t think older women talked about sex, etc.
3. We learnt about the facts of life from sisters and friends.
4. I don’t know if our parents used birth control. They couldn’t have used it very often as women seemed to be forever producing children.
5. My husband and I discussed family planning.
6. Pregnancy in my day was no big deal, but I remember in my mother’s day it was kept so secret you would think it was a sin.
7. I remember when I was young, some girls that got pregnant before marriage were doomed.
8. Unmarried pregnancy was so shameful (or so they thought).
9. The girls was always blamed for getting pregnant.
10. The boy got off very lightly in those circumstances.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. Women in my age group knew everything as we attended clinics.
2. Women were then given quite a lot of advice, but not in our mothers’ day.
3. I remember my mother being pregnant when I was a teenager. I thought at the time this was terrible, couldn’t imagine them having sex at their age.
4. Trom.
5. My husband and I discussed it, also with friends.
6. I had a pretty difficult pregnancy, it being a breach birth.
7. I gave up work three months before giving birth.
8. No.
9. Had a hospital birth and was well looked after.
10. After having the baby we were kept in hospital for ten days.
11. Had to return to normal household chores after coming out of hospital.
12. Quite difficult adjusting to this new role, although I was lucky I had help from my in-laws.
13. Never heard older women discuss childbirth.
14. I didn’t have a preference for boy or girl when pregnant. Mother-in-law as desperate for a boy.
15. I had a very supportive husband.
16. After having the baby, I think my outlook on life changed, this was a very big responsibility.
17. I remember my mother giving birth at home. She had everything prepared for the birth. When she felt she was in labour we had to go and get an old neighbour who was referred to as the ‘knee wife’ [from Gaelic ‘bean ghlùine’, a term for a traditional midwife], the village nurse would be called in. All we had to do was keep them supplied with hot water. Even though we were in our teens nothing was discussed with us.
18. I haven’t heard of ‘kirking’ new mothers.
19. If a baby’s birth was celebrated, I really can’t remember this.
20. Our daughter was named after my mother - this was typical in those days.
21. Our baby was christened in the Church of Scotland in Dunkeld; after we had a family get-together. In the village, I remember, if parents wanted babies christened, the dads had to go up before a minister and elders of the church and get asked questions about the Bible, sometimes they were refused the baptism if they failed the test.

3Q. MARY

[Responded to letter in island press.]

Marital status Single Date of birth 28.2.24
Birthplace Isle of Skye
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there, and list the jobs that you have had.
Skye, 18 years; Inverness, 1 year - nurses’ home domestic; Elgin, 6 mths - nursing; Glasgow, 40 years - nursing; Paisley, 11 years.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin C.1883, Isle of Skye
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin C.1883, Isle of Skye
Parents’ occupations Crofting and fishing
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s None
How old were you when you left school? 14 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Became a slave on the croft till 18.
Are you, or have you ever been, married? No
Do you have any children? No
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Tend to believe in spiritualism. Born to Free Church now doubtful as to its merits.
Parents’ religion Free Presbyterian and Free Church

I. Language
1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. No family.

II. Family and Household
1. 4, lived with granny.
2. Not married.
3. Most young couples moved in with their parents.

### III. Growing Up
1. Granny was a tyrant obsessed with sin and religion generally. Not much time for play, all work and no play.
2. She died when I was 2.
3. Did not know him well.
4. Husband a 1st class citizen, wife subservient.
5. Closest to aunt who pretended to be my mother.
6. Granny was the boss. It was her house.
7. Aunt.
8. Granny.
9. Boys were more important than girls.
10. Girls would only be housewives so education would be wasted on them.
11. No.
12. Marriage would lead to slavery.
13. To remain forever in slavery on the croft or to go into domestic service. Aunt suggested nursing so acquiesced to get away.
14. Boys and girls played together until puberty then they were separated.
15. Granny was nearer the time of the Clearances.
16. Inferior to men, were expected generally to clean up after men. We had to shine the men’s shoes on a Saturday in preparation for Sunday.

### IV. Early Adulthood
1. No, we were told to keep away from boys as they were evil.
2. We slaved. Granny sat in regal splendour being waited on.
3. Eventually broke the umbilical cord but some of my friends never did.
4. No spare time, no social life, recreation would have been a sin.
5. Not till I left home. All males were platonic. Sex was a sin.
6. A lot of say. Young people got away soon.
7. We all wanted away - anywhere. Some of my friends remained as slaves.
8. Wanted new clothes and never got any.
9. The Church was everything - threats of hell, etc.
10. Never as husbands. Males and females kept rigidly apart.
12. Yes, but we knew that parents disapproved.
13. Very furtive and after dark, but adults still spied on them.
15. No social life, adults were not supposed to have ever courted.
*Leabhachas* was probably ‘bundling’ as was practised in Orkney. The girl was sewn into a bundle of sheeting or similar, but as a cynical friend of mine said, they probably undid the sewing and sewed it back up again for the morning. It was probably used in Lewis as they were not so strongly Calvinist.
17. Much healthier now but gone too far. Children are into sex and this is not right.

### V. Engagement and Marriage
1. Most were already pregnant and left the area to get married.
2. I can only remember one réiteach and it was a very tame affair.
3. The man went away and got a job and the girl followed then.
4. They wrote home and told of their engagement. They could not face telling the parents face-to-face.
5. There were nudges and wink winks. That was probably why they went away.
6. If at home it went on for years.
7. None.
8. In granny’s day hens were slaughtered for the feast. In my day, nothing.
9. Disapproval unless the couple were over 40.
10. There was only one and it was very quiet. Other couples married ‘away’.
11. No. There were no riotous 3-day affairs in Skye in my time.
13. Poverty struck, especially if children came - another mouth to feed.
14. No social life before or after.
15. Owing to stalker never married. He chased off any boyfriends, threatening to slash my face if they did not clear off.
16. Most couples started in the same house as wife’s parents.
17. No other alternative, the Pill had not been invented.
18. Women have always worked. In the old days they were not paid.
19. Definitely no, rather the opposite.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. Some learned on their honeymoon. Parents did not explain, nor did teachers.
2. Probably, but they were not well informed.
3. We never talked about it at school. My cousin from ‘away’ told me some things.
4. Abstinence, but once an Indian gentleman came round selling French letters.
5. Probably the district nurse would advise but nothing would be available.
6. Today’s generation are as well informed as anyone.
7. It was a disgrace - usually the couple went away.
8. Air an rathad [‘on the road/way’] was used in all pregnancies.
9. The woman was the one shamed. She had led the man on.
10. Still the case. A man may sow his wild oats. A woman never.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. When they missed a period they knew and the nurse explained.
2. Childcare was passed on by grannies and was not always good advice.
3. No.
4. Trom.
5. Grannies advised the young women.
6. Some women died in childbirth.
7. Women worked on. They might be out working in the field till the first pains.
8. All births were at home. District nurse only unless complications.
9. No women were delivered in hospitals.
10. Grannies took charge. The lying-in period was not long.
11. Next day for most women.
12. Grannies took charge.
13. No.
14. They were only too happy to get a healthy child.
15. They ignored the babies. Never changed nappies.
16. Women felt a responsibility for the new life.
17. Before district nurses there was a handy woman who came.
18. No.
19. Father wet the baby’s head with whisky. Mother soldiered on.
20. After grandparents.
21. There would be a questionnaire and advice re religious duties from the minister. The father stood in front of the minister for ages before the reverend eventually sprinkled the water.

**3R. MORAG**

[Morag first contacted me in connection with an undergraduate project. We continue to keep in touch by letter and telephone, although we have only met briefly. She has a keen interest in island history.]

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status: Single</th>
<th>Date of birth: 21.5.1930</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace: Glasgow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1886, Gravir, South Lochs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin: 1895, Cromore, South Lochs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ occupations: Father - clerk, L.M.S. Railway; mother - cook</td>
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<td>Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s: None</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How old were you when you left school? 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>What did you do directly after you left school? Office junior and night school for printing and publishing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Wholesale warehouse office junior, newspaper offices and printing firms offices, all in Glasgow area.</td>
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<td>Are you, or have you ever been, married? No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have any children? No</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Religion: how would you describe yourself? Church of Scotland</td>
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<td>Parents’ religion: Free Church</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**I. Language**

1. Yes. 2. In a sense, yes. 3. Yes. 4. N.a.

**II. Family and Household**

1. Just parents and myself, except when on holiday with grandparents on island. Then there would be up to seventeen of us.
2. Couples marrying in my day usually lived in rooms or with parents as after the War accommodation was scarce. Till family came along. Then husbands went to sea or had a trade to earn more for a deposit on a house. Wife returned to live with parents and carried on her job till children arrived.
3. That was common in a city like Glasgow. I had a friend who didn’t want to leave her family home when her husband came home, as her daughter had arrived and she returned to work, and her brothers and sisters liked to baby-sit. Her mother enjoyed
new role as grandmother. Her husband bought or put down a deposit on a flat. Told her if she didn’t join him marriage was over. He went back to sea to furnish flat. She only went to flat to collect her allowance cheque. That went on till her daughter went to school and he came ashore. He got a job as an engineering consultant. Sold flat, bought house in an upmarket area. She still continued to work part-time.

III. Growing Up
1. My strongest memories of childhood is all the churches we belonged to in the city. There was something on every evening of week, all practical things, like learning to knit and sew and mix with all kinds, Brownies/Guides, Band of Hope, choirs. Also in summer all different Sunday school outings were attended. We went by train with our coronation mugs around our necks. Having a sick mother, till I went to school was brought to island frequently by aunts going to and fro. Mum had a leaking heart valve and epilepsy from birth. Having a lot of sisters, my mum being oldest, I would go with anyone. Also was brought up to be independent from an early age. Teachers in school also very dedicated, people who ran church organizations, were important to us all. We played hopscotch, known in our area as beds. We chalked the pavement and jumped from one to another. Also skipping ropes... I did shopping also, cooking with instructions from mum from bed, also shopping for elderly neighbours. Also took babies to park in prams. We went as a group armed with usual sandwiches and lemonade. School was big classes. We enjoyed students as they usually had brighter subjects. I enjoyed my dancing classes on other side of the city. We went as a group by subway or underground. We paid for it ourselves out of money we got doing shopping and chores for elderly neighbours. My mum made outfits for dancing displays out of dresses her sisters had. We all performed in church hall for fabrics funds.
2. My mother was a well-travelled lady before she married. My dad and her met in Glasgow, got engaged and fell out. She went to London to work, then Australia and New Zealand. They met up again, she was on holiday to island so was he. They just lived for one another. She did all chastising, he did all the spoiling. She was a strong lady, only wish I had her longer. I came up here to island in 1939, at 9 years old. We were on holiday when war started and I was left here, evacuated. Dad took me back in June 1942. Mum died in Feb. 1943. She had bronchitis every winter then with all the smoke in Glasgow which was an extra strain on her heart. On her deathbed she asked me to stay with dad, not to return to gran on the island. I thought she was only waiting to go to hospital. Alas, it wasn’t to be. I was 12 years old then. I’m afraid I had to grow up very quickly. She died the day I was to go to secondary school. Dad for a period of time just opted out of things. In these days neighbours in city were very supportive, but I’m afraid fellow islanders weren’t - all the ones who shared our home and hospitality, they all disappeared like snow off a dyke. The excuse given, in case people thought they were after my dad. What a joke, man was too shell shocked to know.
3. As I was only with both my parents for 9 years, being evacuated here for three years, my father did spoiling, my mother chastising. All that changed with death of my mother. I, although young, had to be strong one. No doubt reason why I didn’t want to marry when I grew up. It didn’t seem an attractive proposition. Although I had an awful lot of boyfriends I seemed to shy away from commitment. I had enough responsibilities between working full-time, also night school training for a job and running a home also. Shopping was also a problem as foodstuffs were rationed and people had to queue when things became available. But as years went by dad
overcame his grief and returned to his writing hobby of poetry and songs. He also enjoyed my friends coming around the house.

4. My parents were very close, in fact, I think they shouldn’t have had a family at all. They just lived for one another. My mother being epileptic, either he or I went everywhere with her. Other couples we knew seemed to live separate lives, like wife had her female friends, husband went drinking with his male friends.

5. I suppose being an only one, grandparents - only seeing them once a year, also aunts, cousins and extended family relations were very important to me. Also I was oldest grandchild and only one in fact till 1939. I felt here nearly everyone was a relative, also on my mother’s death I discovered she was a half sister of all the other sisters and one brother. Grannie had her before she was married. I discovered when with my father registering her death. I then wanted to know who my grandfather was. My father told me it wasn’t any of my business, not to upset grannie or all aunts with silly questions. He never asked her. I discovered who he was since I came to live here in last few years. He taught in local school and grannie was housekeeper. She refused to marry him as she couldn’t read or write. He was a native of Tifee and left to go there before mum was born. Grannie then married a widower with one daughter. I found out who my grandfather was in local library where records. I checked with Barbara, who was still alive, grannie’s stepdaughter. In fact I called Doug my dog after a man I never knew (don’t laugh). In fact I didn’t know my father’s parents either as he was youngest in family. His mother was a Sutherland lady. My Gravir grandfather followed fishing as a cobbler mending boots and shoes. He met her in Peterhead. She was in service there. So I guess I’m not a real islander but a real mixture (or candyball).

6. My father no doubt thought so, but my mother no doubt put ideas in his head to begin with, as I did in later years. That seemed to be the way things were conducted in those days. Also island and Scotsmen like to think they are in control within the family orbit, even if they aren’t in workplace. That’s why so many Scotsmen follow football to shout and bawl and get all aggro. out of their systems from home and workplace, otherwise I suppose there would be even more battered wives.

7. Mother. Father left it to her so as not to damage his halo no doubt. Oh, yes, I was always told by dad that other women would be my most severest critics regarding my behaviour. No doubt he meant aunts who all lived in London except for one at home with parents. The others called annually on way to island on holiday.

8. Boyfriends of different religion, that was usually topic of conversation at mealtimes, especially in a city like Glasgow, where we were educated separately and only met as teenagers when we went dancing.

9. The church had a central role in our lives or I should say churches, till we started work then our horizons got wider but we accepted this as norm for long time afterwards. The boys seemed to drift away from churches when left home to do their National Service. The ones who were doing apprenticeships didn’t do Nat. Service till apprenticeship finished, but had to go to sea then till 26 years old.

10. I used to get notes from boys in school here when I was 12. Maybe island ones were more advanced, or I was leaving to go home to Glasgow, but I didn’t look on them as boyfriends, but as school pals.

11. No doubt 15 or 16, but never on our own, in groups of 6 or more, all right as long as there was a crowd of us.

12. Yes, we would discuss them all the time no doubt and swap partners off and on. Also tease one another about fancying certain ones more than others.
13. Among or own age group we were very open, but not so to older adults as they were always finding fault. That’s always been the way.
14. Falbh [going], winching (a Glasgow term).
15. My mother was working here from early age and said only other sisters took part in caithris na h-oidhche. She went to Glasgow at 16 years, met my dad and they went to pictures and music halls, which was courting practice there. My grandmother like my mother was working early, usually before leaving home, in homes where a new baby was expected, looking after others, as mothers then tended to be in bed for a fortnight.
16. Women and girls though after training were working expected to help around the house also. Boys got off Scot-free. In Glasgow there was a ritual. Girls did various types of cleaning around the house on a Friday evening, whereas boys were out enjoying themselves, but then we didn’t have all the labour-saving facilities that we have won.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Yes, I enjoyed them except for all the things I had to do to exist and survive.
2. I had to do it all. Dad only did heavy things, like window cleaning and decorating. Being a Leòdhhasach [Lewis person] of an older generation, had been waited on hand and foot for most of his life.
3. I discovered I could sift an idea into his head. After some time he thought it was his idea.
4. Our social life. We went Highland dancing, also to pictures. Not easy when we had night classes and other commitments. Everything was cheap. Also church choir and other activities in church like youth fellowship, etc.
5. We mixed freely with opposite sex. We also met after evening classes. We had male platonic friends, mostly Glaswegians. The island male was more serious in outlook, yes, other girls also did and it was approved of.
6. Quite a lot, always wanting to know who you were with.
7. Of course there was and always will be.
8. Mostly religion, usually at meal times. It was felt to socialize with Catholics was to be a second class citizen. Yet I always had very good Catholic friends. But you must remember we were educated separately and only met in work environment.
9. A very big role and input. We accepted it as norm.
10. Sixteen. But I wasn’t as interested as my friends were in marriage as I felt there had to be something else, no doubt having been left young. I didn’t want further responsibilities without some fun and enjoyment.
11. Usually 16/17/18 years. It was accepted if person concerned was agreeable to parents. It was frowned on playing the field, but all right for boys.
12. Yes, we would tease each other all time. Also change our minds weekly.
13. Among our own age group very frank. Older adults kept hoping it wouldn’t last long. When it did they got anxious.
15. My grandmother seemed to think we had too much freedom.
16. Caithris na h-oidhche wasn’t practised in my day. I think it stopped with 1939 war when all the islanders travelled so far afield. My mother said she left home too early to take part. Her sisters, younger ones, took part in it. There was a bedroom in my grandparents’ house off scullery where unmarried daughter at home slept at holiday times. I slept with her there. There couldn’t be any hanky-panky with a child there. It was all mostly gossip about their friends all around, also things that
happened locally and jokes. It depended no doubt on weather conditions, during week, or if there was a concert in the village or dance. I suppose so if doors were locked and no facilities available for it. I think they ignored it provided it didn’t interfere with them. No doubt to allow young people from outlying districts to meet, as otherwise would only meet at church. Very tame in comparison with today’s standards.

17. If they don’t sleep with one another on first or second date they think there is something wrong. In my day it was very much frowned upon.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. A year, sometimes longer, although long engagements were frowned upon.
2. I’ve only been at a réiteach here on the island.
2. With a party for family and friends.
4. The man usually had to go to ask for your parents’ permission.
5. Yes, they didn’t go out with the opposite sex. They looked on them as an item.
6. A year or shorter.
7. Kissing only.
8. Vast preparations with bride’s father footing the bill except drinks provided by groom.
9. Plenty of the same amount was invited from each side.
10. I’ve been bridesmaid proverbial three times, a very expensive business, had to get your own dress. Also got a pressie from the bride and groom to mark the occasion.
11. Yes, it was mostly for children and older people in the village. Plenty of eats and drinks and laughs.
12. Seem to be treated responsibly. Also people seem to think there is a stigma being ‘Miss’.
13. Women get more matey with one another, but still keep friendly with single friends.
14. Mostly only socializing as a couple except for girls-only nights and boys-only nights.
15. Have to consult one another on all things (no running home to mum).
16. Most people lived in rooms until got deposit to put down on a house.
17. I think women should be allowed to work to contribute until children come along.
18. I think women who work have more to offer their husbands and families. No.
19. Yes, kissing before going to work.

VI. Before Childbearing.
1. From their friends, their mothers didn’t give them any info.
2. Yes, not as openly as future generations.
3. From one another. Yes, a lot of myths.
4. Breast-feeding longer than necessary. From one another.
5. No doubt, between husband and wife.
6. Very much. No-one need be in ignorance these days.
7. Yes, quickly arranged marriages.
8. In hush-hush terms.
9. Female usually as men don’t have same control.
VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. Very little until it happened to themselves. By talking about it with one another.
2. No, other women. That mothers were open with their daughters.
3. Yes. Wondered when nurse with bag was calling at our home.
4. Turas, 'interesting condition'.
5. Mostly with other women. Men can be quite squeamish.
6. My friends were quite normal.
7. They worked until seventh month during first pregnancy.
8. Mostly all born in hospital.
9. Usually pretty straightforward.
10. Usually a fortnight, well treated.
11. In most instances not until child or children were in school.
12. Although mothers don’t give advice when a baby arrives.
13. Yes, always, as each generation things are done differently.
14. Younger mothers don’t usually bother; older mothers prefer a daughter.
15. Not very, wasn’t done thing.
16. Became aware of many things, looked to you for advice, some pleasant, others not so.
17. I remember on way home from school being asked by my mother to call and assist at a home birth.
19. With pressies for best wishes for child.
20. Usually after parents.
21. About christening pieces, given to first female (if a boy), also first male (if a girl), you meet. Christening piece consisted of piece of cake with silver coin inside it. I was given a half-sovereign as a christening piece by a male friend of my parents.

3S. MURDINA (See 4I and 5D)

[I have known Murdina for many years and she is a relative. She has helped me in the past with other research.]

Marital status Married
Date of birth 12.5.22
Birthplace North Tolsta
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
North Tolsta; Gress, from 1947.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1877, North Tolsta
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1885, North Tolsta
Parents’ occupations Crofter; fisherman Housewife
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s 5 brothers and 5 sisters (she gives their names and ages)
How old were you when you left school? 14 years
What did you do directly after you left school? I stayed at home until I was old enough to go to work at about 16-17 years old.
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
Domestic work in a private home in Beauly; house/tablemaid in a nurses’ home in
Inverness; house/tablemaid in a doctor's house in Glasgow; factory worker in Fort William during the war years.

**Age at marriage** 24 years

**Husband's d.o.b. and place of origin** 6.7.18, North Tolsta

**Husband's occupation** Weaving, building trade.

**No. of sons and their ages** One son, 11.4.48

**No. of daughters and their ages** One daughter, 1.11.51

**Total number of children you have ever borne** 2 children

**Are any of your children married now?** Yes, both

**Do you have any grandchildren?** 2 grandchildren

**Religion: how would you describe yourself?** Free Church, a professing Christian who would like to do to others as I would like others to do unto me.

**Parents’ religion** Free Presbyterian

**Husband’s religion** Free Church

### I. Language

1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. Yes.

### II. Family and Household

1. We all lived in the family home, my parents brought up 9 children, 5 boys and 4 girls. One daughter died in infancy. As we came of age we left home to earn a living, there was no such thing as Child or Income Support, the number living together varied. We had no older relatives living with us. The home built by my father was our own.

2. After our marriage we moved to Gress to stay with my in-laws and stayed with them for less than two years until our home was ready. During that time we shared the home with my father-in-law and his two sons and one daughter.

3. The situation described above was common in our community.

### III. Growing Up

1. I had a happy carefree childhood. Parents and all the family were very important, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins played an important part in my life. We played the usual childish games with school friends: skipping, ball games, running, jumping, etc. We all helped our parents in and around the house. My mother and older sisters taught me how to bake, sew, knit, cooking, table and house work which stood me in good stead when I left home. School was a happy place to be in . . .

2. Mother was kind and loving, forming a good relationship which lasted through her life, that was typical at that time. Mother was always there, a tower of strength, comfort and love.

3. My father was equally kind and loving and very fair in his dealings with us. Very firm, we respected him and we were careful never to hurt or offend him.

4. All our neighbours were friendly and on good terms with each other. I cannot remember any of them quarrelling over anything . . .

5. I was very close to both my parents, they were special people in my life as were all brothers and sisters . . .

6. We always looked on my father as being head of the household but when he was away from home my mother took over and was respected as such, but the older members of the family were consulted in some cases. Any important family decisions were discussed and settled by them taking into consideration the individual’s needs and wishes. I think this was the case in all the families I knew.

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7. If my father disapproved of what we wanted to do, he would reason with us and if his answer was no we accepted that though I am sure we were reluctant to do so, but we obeyed. I could at times get round my mother, within reason of course.

8. Family worship morning and evening, Bible reading, Shorter Catechism in both Gaelic and English, Sabbath school attendance, my parents were very much involved in all this and we accepted it as part of our upbringing.

9. We as children were treated fairly and were allowed within reason to mix with others and join in any activities that were going on at the time. I just believe that all families were brought up along these lines.

10. I should say that we all got the same attention, the only time one or more were treated specially was when it came to giving help and advice during exam time or important decisions like moving to higher education or a job. We were all given help and encouragement.

11. I think my only models if I can call them that were our school teachers whom I admired and treated with respect and affection.

12. I don’t think I ever did decide to be different in my lifestyle to my mother’s but later on in life I knew that wasn’t the sort of life that I wanted. My mother had a lot of work to do both inside and outside. No time for holidays and very little spare time except for an occasional evening visit or a day away from home. Later on as the family moved away and married she had the pleasure of spending some time with them on the mainland.

13. I didn’t give much thought to marriage or having a family, to me these thoughts were for older people. I did want to leave home to earn my living though I wasn’t qualified in any subject except housework, that was typical of girls in my age group. there was little to choose from in town and that meant leaving home at an early age and that I did before I was seventeen.

14. Yes, boys and girls played together, but the common rule was for boys to play on their own, football, fishing, swimming, rock climbing, card playing, dominoes, etc. Girls played at keeping house, knitting, sewing, baking and cooking, solving puzzles, skipping, reading library books was a favourite pastime, there was never time for boredom.

15. My mother and her generation before settling down to get married had to leave home for the herring season to the east coast of Scotland, England and Shetland. I believe their grandmothers’ generation had to do the same. At home, bringing up a family, housework, croft work, peats, water carrying, cattle and sheep to tend took up much of their time especially when the men folk were away from home.

16. A woman’s place was in the home, girls and boys were expected to help as they got older. No laws were laid down, we first followed in our mother’s footsteps under her guidance.

IV. Early Adulthood

1. Every day was a day to look forward to. No worries or cares. Stress was unheard of in my young days.

2. We were expected to give a hand with all household jobs. We took turns... All these jobs had to be done every day, it was just our way of life and we accepted it as such.

3. My relationship with my parents didn’t change, they were always there, very dear and very close to me. I think this was typical of all young adults as we were limited to village life styles and depended on our parents and older siblings for help and guidance, knowing that they would never fail us.
4. Social life was limited but never boring, every day and evening held its own attraction. We visited each others' homes with our knitting or sewing, baby or granny sitting, exchanging tales, reading and exchanging any books to hand, an hour or so dancing outside (weather permitting) to melodeon music, weddings galore when the older couples came home for the winter, young and old were invited to the wedding feast. There never seemed to be a dull moment, days were not long enough.

5. . .I did have male platonic friends, real and sincere and I can look back even now and cherish their friendship, other girls were the same and it was approved of, it was all above board.

6. Parents did have a say in the way in which we spent our time though we all had our own secrets. We usually went out after tea if we had no school work to do but we had to be in at a certain time. . . .

7 and 8. I dare say there was some disagreement between parents and young people but I cannot remember any serious argument, just trivial matters not worth mentioning.

9. As children and as we grew up we attended church, not because we understood or were interested, it was our duty to our parents and we didn't rebel against, most young people went to church, it was something we all took for granted and accepted. It was no burden to us and walking home with the young ones after a service was an added bonus.

10 and 11. Boys took on a different meaning as I got older, seventeen to eighteen but not seriously and certainly not looking for a husband until much later, twenty years [old] onwards. This was quite common and parents were quite happy with this arrangement as long as we took care of ourselves.

12. Of course we discussed our affairs and had many a laugh as we compared our different dates and fancies.

13. Relationship was a bit more discreet than it is today but the older ones and parents accepted this as a natural growing up process.

14. Courting or suiridhe was and still is used for a boy and girl going out together. Leannan, leannanachd.

15. Social life of the older and young women was very limited while living in the village. There was little entertainment provided for them as we know it now. Public transport to and from the town was limited, no taxis and few cars even if we could afford it. Money and employment were scarce. One had to leave home for work, money and social life.

16. Caithris na h-oidhche was common with most or maybe all couples. This practice arose, I think, because of lack of privacy for young people. It was quite in order for the boyfriend to come into the girl's home after or before the household retired for the night giving the young couple a chance to talk and make plans. It was all above board and nothing immoral about it. Parents were well aware of the situation. The couple met once or twice a week. . . . I did heard the word leabachas but never paid any attention to it as it meant nothing to me. The Gaelic dictionary gives two meanings. One is lodgement or leabachan meaning bedfellow. All new to me.

17. . . . I do admire the today's young couples in sharing their friendship with families and friends. It's a natural process of growing up and should be admired as such.
V. Engagement and Marriage
1. The time . . . depended on circumstances, for instance the man could be away at sea, etc., but there was no set time . . .
2. Yes, we did have a rítéach - a party in the bride’s home with both sets of parents, bridesmaids and best man and families and a few close friends. A great feast of goodies and drinks were laid on.
3. Engagements were very quiet and family affairs, again cost had to be kept down.

VI. Before Childbearing
1-3. N.a.
4. I never in my young days heard of birth control methods and I am quite sure that my mother’s generation or older generations never even heard the word. I learned about the facts from my older sisters, they themselves had been told them but those older than them. I never heard of any ‘myths’ amongst the young people.
5. Talks on family planning was much easier with one’s husband or district nurse than it was with anyone else. I didn’t find any difficulty or embarrassment in talking over this matter.
6. It’s much easier now . . . as the young now have access to books, leaflets, social workers and family planning groups, all these were unheard of in my day.
7. Yes, I was aware of girls becoming pregnant outside of marriage and hearing it through the usual gossip channels.
8. Parents didn’t talk much about unmarried pregnancy, but they felt let down and hurt but had to be admired in that they cared and gave support through that period. Trom was the Gaelic word used. Other people’s reaction was one of disgust or rejection which serves no purpose though we must not agree with such behaviour.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. I knew little except what I learnt through talking matters over with those who had been through it.
2. The district nurse and doctor gave every support and advice during and after the event, they couldn’t have done more. I cannot think of anything that I would have wanted to know beforehand.
3. Yes, I can remember older women being pregnant but knowing very little about such matters I never gave it much thought. When I was very young I was innocent enough to think that the nurse or doctor had given them the baby.
4. As mentioned above, trom; breith-chloinne for childbirth.
5. Yes, I did talk to my husband about pregnancy and childbirth and women talked about both amongst themselves.
6. Both mine were normal without any complications.
7. I didn’t give up normal duties or activities except for heavy work until near the time the baby was due.
8. Both our children were born at home without complications, attended by the district nurse and doctor. 9. No.
10. I had to stay in bed for ten days. The nurse was very attentive and I was lovingly cared for by my sister-in-law.
11. I returned to normal light duties as soon as possible.
12. I was well looked after by my own family and in-laws and soon adjusted to the new role of becoming a mother and looking after my baby.
13. Older women . . . accepted it all as a natural process and soon forgot about any difficulties they may have had.
14. No, I cannot say that I ever wished or would prefer a boy or girl but I know of people who did and were very disappointed when their wish was not fulfilled. 

15. My husband though keeping in the background was very supportive and helped me in every way. 

16. I cannot say that my attitude or behaviour changed in any noticeable way and I never noticed if other people’s relationship or attitude changed towards me. 

17. It was common in my day and my mother’s day to give birth at home, no-one went to hospital unless it was necessary. 

18. No, I never heard of ‘kirk’ or ‘churching’ of new mothers. 

19. The birth of a baby was always celebrated with great joy, family, friends, neighbours and relations called, drink, tea, cakes and biscuits were shared. Everyone brought a present for the baby. 

20. The boy was called Iain after my own father and the girl Christine after my mother-in-law, this was typical of parents at that time and still is with the young ones today. 

21. Both were baptized in church along with other children of about the same age, this was usually carried out at a very early stage. I remember them both being very good. A proud moment for all parents. After the service dinner was served for members of the family, this is still the custom.

3T. NAN (See 4J and 5C)

[Responded to letter in local press.]

Marital status Married Date of birth 20.8.35 
Birthplace Stornoway

List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there. Stornoway, 1935-55; Glasgow, 1955-57; Stornoway, 1957-58; Glasgow, 19588-59; Stornoway, 1959-63; Swordale (approx. 5 m away), 1963-65; Stornoway (present address), 1965 -.

Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin N.a.
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1902, Stornoway

Parents’ occupations Fisherman and herring gutter

Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s 4 brothers (3 older than her), 2 sisters (both younger).

How old were you when you left school? 15 1/1 years

What did you do directly after you left school? Sales assistant in a local shop.

Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Sales assistant in shoe shop, Stornoway; Lewis Hospital nurse (1953-55); completing R.G.N. and then midwifery training, Glasgow; Lewis Hospital nursing sister (1959-66); nursing, Ness; research on mentally handicapped for Aberdeen University, Stornoway (1978-1992) and school nurse, Nicolson Institute.

Age at marriage 27 years

Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1928, Clydebank, Glasgow

Husband’s occupation Retired - manager of car hire firm; airport security officer an courier

No. of sons and their ages 3 - 29, 27 and 25
Total number of children you have ever borne 3
Are any of your children married now? Yes
Do you have any grandchildren? Two
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Devout Presbyterian
Parents’ religion None - nominal Protestants
Husband’s religion Devout Presbyterian, church deacon.

I. Language
1. No. 2. Yes.
3. Yes, both my parents were fluent Gaelic speakers.
4. My husband understands every word but has no desire to speak it.
My parents always spoke Gaelic to each other, but always spoke English to the family.
At school, the town children (in our ignorance) felt superior to our Gaelic speaking ‘country cousins’. This same attitude persisted throughout my sons’ schooldays. Although I made every effort to instil a sense of pride in their Gaelic heritage they showed no interest. During the last few years there has been an upsurge in the Gaelic language and culture. My only misgiving is that it puts a division between village children. My grandson attends an English playgroup while his neighbours who are also his best friends attend a Gaelic croileagan. This division will continue throughout their school lives.

II. Family and Household
1. In our family home there were my parents, four brothers, two sisters. My maternal grandmother lived across the road and visited several times every day. We all loved her and welcomed her warmly each time she came in. Our paternal grandmother was blind and, although she only lived a few doors away, we were all afraid of her, as she only spoke Gaelic and waved a white stick when we went to see her. When she lost her sight, she lived forever more between her bed and sitting in a chair, endlessly twisting balls of tweed wool from bobbins, although she had no other infirmity.
2. During my own marriage only my husband and sons occupied our home, apart from family members for holidays. We had my mother-in-law with us, as we nursed her for several months before her death in 1976.
3. The situations above were typical in this community, except that most people when I was a child had a grandparent living with them. Someone said recently, ‘When we were children, Grannie sat in a chair in the corner, listening to all our woes and guiding our path in life. Today Grannie is in an Eventide Home and the television is our ‘guiding star’ in the corner.’

III. Growing Up
1. My strongest memories of childhood were extremely happy ones. Although I remember the summers being hot, and we all walked barefoot, keeping to the grassy verges, as the sun melted blisters of tar on the road. Every May holiday crowds went away to various parts of the island for picnics. It was a public holiday and most workers went for bus tours. Each year I went for a picnic to the Castle Grounds - a beautiful forest which is the backdrop to our local harbour. My four best friends were my cousins, almost co-ages. We were friends from babyhood to the present day. We ‘phone one another and meet on a regular basis.
It always seemed to rain every May holiday, but that did not deter us, we were determined to enjoy ourselves and invariably we ended up having our sandwiches
and lemonade in the porch of the woodcutter’s hut, playing among the trees, and gathering primroses, between the showers.

One particular May holiday we were returning home when we heard the sound of music and shouting coming from the town centre. We went to investigate the matter, and crowds of people were dancing, laughing and shouting with joy, to the sound of accordions. We later learnt it was V.E. Day.

On August holidays each year, everyone in our area, went as families, in small open boats to a nearby peninsula (though we thought it was an island) called Arnish. We spent the day there, with adults making peat fires and preparing heather scented meals, while we played around Prince Charlie’s loch and monument.

The winters were cold with lots of snow and we played on the streets with sledges. There was no traffic, two businessmen owned a lorry each, but they were in the garage in the evening and the roads were our playground. We also skated (just with our shoes) on a frozen pond.

2. My mother was a plump, loving, warm hearted woman, kind to a fault, she was a cheerful giver, who always told us ‘Give a penny with your heart rather than a sixpence with a grudge.’ She was completely happy with her lot. We were always conscious of her great love for us, although she made no secret that Alexander, the eldest, was her favourite, but his nature was always so much like hers, that we were never jealous.

She was not particularly houseproud, as long as the kitchen was tidy, the stove polished and the beds made, she was content. I always said we had the cleanest front path in Scotland, as she brushed it several times a day. This was just an excuse to talk to people who were passing by. Our house was truly a home and we always had visitors.

The whole family had a good relationship with our mother. I can never recall any open disobedience to her, and the same can be said of all my friends and their parents.

3. My father was more intelligent and capable than my mother. He worked hard all week, but he drank heavily every Friday evening and Saturday. All my friends’ fathers were exactly the same. I loved my father when he was sober, but I loathed his drunkenness. Neither we - nor anyone I knew, were ever physically or sexually abused by our fathers. I hated his drunken inability to walk and his swearing. From an early age I began to dread his drunken behaviour from a Thursday evening. To this day I abhor alcohol.

This pattern continued until several years before he died aged 57, and he bitterly regretted his years of folly. All my friends’ fathers continued their drinking habits until they died.

4. My parents were happy together. Looking back all the couples I knew were good friends. None of them ever went out together, no nights out, no holidays ever, just a comfortable sharing of home and family, no birthdays, no gifts, no flowers, no chocolates. And yet a closeness that few achieve today.

5. As a family we were friendly. I always felt the ‘odd one out’. My brothers paired off, the two older, and the two younger ones were closer to each other. My younger sister was always immature for her age and formed a closeness with the youngest. I always felt closest to my oldest brother, he was ever kind to us. My maternal grandmother was particularly loved by all of us. Aunts and cousins were very important. For some reason uncles less so.
6. We always regarded my father as head of the household, as in all other homes at that time. Father made all the important family decisions, although they discussed all matters with their wives, and in most cases it would be a joint decision.

7. My father was responsible for discipline. The girls were never smacked, the boys got severe ‘talkings to’, and on rare occasions, if they had, e.g., broken a neighbour’s window with a football, they were leathered across the buttocks with a thick leather belt several times.

8. There were no religious elements in our home.

9. I cannot say there were any differences in the treatment of boys and girls except in matters of discipline and household chores. Girls were expected to wash and dry the dishes, brush floors, help with ironing, using a box iron which contained a stone, heated among the fire embers until red hot. It made a click-clack, click-clack noise as I ironed a never-ending number of shirts in our laundry basket. Girls always helped with younger family members, changing nappies, and rocking the cradle. Boys, on the other hand, broke sticks and filled coal buckets for the fire. From an early age (10 years), they made kipper boxes for a local kipper yard for two hours every evening, earning sixpence a box, and this was a welcome supplement to the family income. We girls learned to knit at an early age. I wore a two-tone green pattern jumper to school, which I knitted myself at eight years of age. At twelve years and for several years my cousins and I knitted Harris wool sleeveless pullovers and sold them to a local tweed merchant.

10. My brothers and I were treated the same by our parents. Education was not important, as long as we could read and write. My friends were the same, we got no encouragement to learn, and many a night I secretly did my homework in bed, with a paraffin lamp (we had no electricity in those days) scared my parents would come in. Household chores were more important than homework.

11. I never had any role model when I was growing up. I just lived for the time I was in, I didn’t look ahead.

12. From an early age I wanted a different life from my mother. Due to my father’s heavy drinking we never had much money. She never went anywhere. In the herring season when the gutters were very busy, they came for her to help out. The smelly barrels of salt pickle, heavy rubber aprons, wellingtons, headscarves, and rag covered fingers bore no attraction for our generation.

I saw my mother’s life as a boring, humdrum existence.

13. When we were growing up my friends and I gave little thought to the future. We expected to leave school at fourteen years and probably work in a shop or mill (which is exactly what all my friends did). I worked in a shoe shop after leaving school. One day I had toothache and went to the dentist’s for a filling. Having completed my treatment, he said to me, ‘You are very patient; you should go in for nursing.’ That chance remark altered my whole life, the seed was planted. I knew nothing about nursing, but I made it my business to find out, and two weeks later I applied to our local hospital, and was accepted.

This is the only time I ever had any great disagreement with my mother. She could not stand the sight of blood and was totally opposed to my becoming a nurse. Grandmothers and aunts were called in to counsel me. One stern spinster aunt was adamant that I would not disgrace the family. ‘They tell me nurses see men’s bottoms,’ she said. How many times over the years I used to think, ‘If my Auntie Peggy was here now’!!

However, I stood fast and my father supported me and signed the necessary forms. I never had any desire to get married or have children. I never felt ‘maternal’. That
instinct was delivered along with my first born. To this day I am like a tigress where my boys are concerned. Deeply maternal.

14. When we were young, up until our late teens, boys and girls played together, pretend houses in a disused military area, with old pots, pans, broken dishes, boxes from a nearby rubbish dump - and a lot of imagination, while the boys played football.

15. My mother’s generation had a hard life, no washing machines or any of the electrical appliances we take for granted. No electricity, no hot water, no carpets, no cars, and yet my grandmother’s generation was much harder. They lived in poverty, none of the ‘luxuries’ mentioned, but they didn’t even have buses and walked many miles with heavy burdens.

16. I think women and girls had far more respect from men than they have today when we were young. I grew up to believe a woman’s place is in the home and, as soon as I was sure I was pregnant, I gave up a well-paid, fulfilling nursing sister’s post to stay at home. I remained at home for twelve years, and I have never regretted these years spent with the boys. We shared so much together, and all the money in the world would [never] make up for the love and joy of these formative years. While all my friends had their childminders and guilt trips. For me (I take nothing to do with other women’s decisions) it was such a happy family time.

IV. Early Adulthood

1. My teenage years were very happy, I had lots of friends. We went to the cinema as a group, three times a week. From the age of seventeen we went to a dance every Friday evening. Other evenings we met in each others’ houses, talking and knitting.

2. I have already mentioned the various chores expected of us, these continued all the time I lived at home, as I got older the full burden of ironing and darning became mine. When I was fifteen years old we got electricity in our area and the joy of ironing with an electric iron was magical.

3. Our relationship with our parents did not change much as we grew up, looking back we must have been a very subservient generation. The boys got into trouble for drinking, but smoking wasn’t thought to be wrong for young men. We girls never smoked or drank, we were always home by 10.30p.m., although our parents would have preferred 9.30p.m. None of us gave thought to or experienced with sex. Premarital chastity was instilled in us like the A.B.C

4. See 1.

5. I cannot say I spent more time with males as I got older. We had always been a group of boys and girls together. It was the practice of the day. We went about in groups rather than couples.

6. Our parents had a lot of say in how we spent our time. They could refuse to allow us to the cinema, if they thought the film unsuitable. We were far more obedient than children (young adults) today. My parents never had the rebellion, defiance and problems that we had with our own sons, despite their religious upbringing.

7. There was not a lot of disagreement, nothing major. They complained about how short our clothes were - two inches below the knee. They disapproved of our cosmetics, particularly mascara. Earrings clipped on were considered as bad as tattoos. We would never have dared to stay out all night and everyone stayed with their parents until they went to work on the mainland or got married. It would have been a scandal to leave home to live in a flat, etc.

8. See 7.
(One thing I must mention about the house, each one had a ‘good room’, the best furnished one in the house, but only used when important visitors called, e.g. the minister. Otherwise it was unused until there was a death in the family and the coffin was put there and wakes held. It was so ridiculous, most people, like us, had large families crowded into bedrooms. My four brothers shared a bedroom, my two younger sisters shared a small closet bedroom. I shared my parents’ bedroom as I always sleep-walked (until I was seventeen years!) and had been caught twice outside during the night. While we had this grand empty room which could have been more profitably utilised.)

9. In our area the church played no part whatsoever in our young lives.

10. I was about eighteen years when I became interested in boyfriends but definitely not in marriage.

11. Girls began to go out with boys about 17-18 years. Their parents usually knew the boy’s ‘pedigree’, and as long as they approved of them, and the couple were home before 10.30p.m. all was well.

12. We always, as girls together’ teased each other about fancying boys and discussed every detail of our ‘dates’ with each other.

13. At first courting couples met secretly and gradually their relationship became more open.

14. Older people described us having ‘bramers’. We merely spoke of ‘getting together’.

15. My main memories of unmarried older relatives were their dresses, brightly coloured clothes, very high heeled shoes and they wore lots of make-up, particularly lipstick. They wore ballgowns to every dance and we used to gather together to watch them like fairy princesses going off in taxis, though many in their finery went by bus. How we longed to be grown up and dress like them, but, alas, as the years passed fashions changed and we wore ordinary dresses to dances.

16. Caithris na h-oidhche was like sex-taboo. It belonged to a previous generation and was only practised in certain villages. The boyfriends crept into the girl’s bedroom after her parents were asleep. The couple slept together - nothing else happened?? and he slipped away before her parents awoke. I think caithris na h-oidhche was more permissive than the ‘60s. When I was nursing and taking gynaecological facts from women of my mother’s age - many of them were spinsters who had had a baby in their late teens-twenties. I have never heard of leabachas.

17. Our courting days were like a friendship that ripened. We could truly wear ‘white for purity’ wedding dresses. Today - and I largely blame television for this - they share a bed on their first date, they kiss in public and are bold in their display. Spend nights together.

V. Engagement and Marriage

1. It was usual for couples to go together for a year before getting engaged.

2. Rèiteachs were not practised in the town, and although I have heard of them was never at any.

3. We had no special celebration, just showing off our ring to family and friends.

4. My parents had died before I married, but all my friends had discussed it with their parents, and it was still the habit for the prospective groom to ask the bride’s father for her hand in marriage.

5. There was a distinctive change in the way engaged couples behaved in public. They were more openly seen together but if they went, e.g., to church together the
man always went into the pew first. It was only after marriage he allowed the woman in first. It was taken for granted an engaged couple would get married.

6. Everyone I knew - and myself- were engaged for a year, though some couples were engaged for longer.

7. No physical contact or shows of affection were permitted in public. In private couples today have more contact on their first date than we had when we were engaged.

8. The wedding preparations went on for months, the dress, the church hall, flowers, etc., etc., just as today. The invitations, who to invite? who to leave out? Cousins seem to appear from everywhere. We had 175 guests and many were offended at not being invited. My brother said, 'I think if we ask the whole of Lewis, Harris will be grumbling.'

9. The bride’s mother was very involved in everything, while the mother-in-law to-be was left completely out in the cold. I felt this very much, in silence, at my own son’s marriage.

10. What I remember most about weddings as a child was the bride’s father throwing shower of money, usually pennies and small silver to the children as the taxi left the bride’s home for the church. How we loved to scramble for the coins. My own wedding we the last one I saw this custom practised.

11. When I was growing up all the weddings were banais taighe. I can remember helping to paint, paper, polish houses from top to bottom before the wedding, going round neighbours’ gardens for flowers, borrowing tablecloths, cutlery, china. Everyone was willing to give their best to the young couple.

It is no exaggeration to say the bride’s home was invaded on her wedding night. There did not seem to be any limit to the number of guests, and countless tables were served, until everyone was fed. There was a lot of alcohol, telegrams of which there was always an abundance were either pious, witty or obscene, but all were read aloud by the best man. They were on the whole extremely happy occasion, although sometimes drunkeness could get out of hand and an unsteady guest would damage ornaments and furniture.

How could I forget the pre-wedding nights, plucking endless chickens donated by neighbours, preparing trifles and sweets, the whole neighbourhood were involved in the catering.

12. I don’t know that I can verbally account for the post-marriage attitude of people, but the couple were treated as ? more mature.

13. I cannot remember my attitude being any different to others’.

14. A person’s social life changed, we became more involved in household chores and had little outside activities as we saved hard for furnishings and home comforts.

15. In our day our relationship came to fruition in marriage.

16. We shared our first home, occupying two rooms in an unmarried uncle’s house. Unfortunately, he had a serious drink problem which caused many difficulties. Several months later, we moved in with my mother-in-law - for me a case of ‘out of the frying pan into the fire’. She lived several miles from town and, with no phone, no car and no bus after 6p.m., I was completely cut off from family and friends. Two years later we bought our own house in town - ‘Bliss!’ - we still occupy this house.

17. When I married women had begun to stay at work, with their mothers, or minders caring for the children. I was four years married before our first son was born and suffered many hurtful remarks, from older married women particularly, about being childless. I think people interfered in others’ lives then more than today.
18. I fully appreciate that monetary problems in a family can force a young mother to seek employment, but the majority work because they are career minded or for luxuries. I have given my view previously on working mothers, and personally I am glad I was with my children when they were young, the many luxuries I may have denied myself were compensated by our togetherness. I was always there for the boys.

19. I never witnessed any verbal or physical display of affection by married couples when I was young.

VI. Before Childbearing

1. We had excellent and explicit sex education lessons from a female PE teacher in school when we were 13 and 14 years old. She also taught the boys these lessons separately. She encouraged us to put questions anonymously into a box in her room throughout the week and explained these later in class. We took full advantage of her question box, but actual child-bearing was never discussed and remained a mystery. We learned how the baby got into the womb but had no idea how it came out!

2. We never discussed sex and childbearing and I never heard older women discuss these matters.

3. I taught my younger sisters the ‘fact of life’, though I was amazed at my youngest sister’s knowledge, nine years my junior. She knew more than I did - and could have taught me. Like myself, Miss Cockane our PE teacher enlightened all my friends - incidentally, several parents refused to allow their children to attend these classes - which was a waste of time because we told them all we had learnt! Before our PE sex lectures, we heard from older girls that in our early teens we would begin to bleed heavily and this would last for forty years!

4. I am sure my parents’ generation and those before had no knowledge of birth control.

5. Most women of my generation discussed family planning with their husbands - and absolutely no-one else.

6. There has been a dramatic change in attitudes to pregnancy and the openness in discussing childbearing matters, even since my own - never mind my grandmother’s - day. We were closer to our grandmothers’ than young mothers are to our generation. We didn’t tell anyone we were pregnant - except husbands - until our body’s changes began to show, nowadays the announcement is made after one period is missed!

7. It was considered a scandal for a pregnancy outside marriage, usually heard on the ‘grapevine’, the girl’s whole family were disgraced. It was the ultimate in brazenness if the bride wore white, if the couple later married. It was more usual for the couple to wed in a manse, not the church, with the bride wearing a suit.

8. People frowned on unmarried pregnancies. The girl carried a stigma and was treated almost like leper. The unborn child was openly described as a bastard, and even after birth was often referred to as one ‘born on the wrong side of the blankets’. Looking back I am ashamed of the way our generation and the ones before treated an innocent, blameless child.

9. The girl was always totally blamed, she should ‘have kept her hand on her ha’penny’. She should have refused. The girl’s parents were also blamed for not bringing her up properly.

10. Men were definitely treated more leniently. Women were expected to have higher morals. I don’t think this is the case today. Men and women are treated alike. Both have full knowledge of their relationship and the effects of unwanted pregnancy.
VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy

1. As I was a registered midwife, and had delivered over a hundred babies, I knew all about childbirth. Ante-natal classes had started by this time and pregnant women were - as today - well prepared.

2. Not applicable.

3. I well remember my mother and aunts being pregnant. We were thrilled at the prospect of a new baby.

4. ‘Expecting’, ‘a bun in the oven’, ‘up the shoot’, *t’ha i truime*.

5. I spoke about pregnancy and childbirth to my husband but not really anyone else.

6. As I have suffered from rheumatoid arthritis since 1958 and my condition greatly improved while I was pregnant, it was a good time for me.

7. With all my pregnancies I continued my life as usual throughout except that each time for the last three months I avoided going into crowds or socializing except with close friends. I was very conscious of my enlarged figure, e.g., I would never attend a wedding during the last three months. This was typical of other pregnant women at that time.

8. No, although I would have liked to, being a nurse I was expected to set a good example as the medical profession preferred hospital confinements.

9. Yes, the care and attention was marvellous.

10. It was the happiest time of my life. The joy of motherhood has to be experienced to be believed. I was up the day after delivery, in hospital ten days with the first, and seven days with each of the others - too long, as I was longing to get home, despite the kindness of the staff.

11. I immediately resumed my normal work in the house, but my husband was very supportive. Every other mother I knew had their mother with them for two weeks after going home. I did not have this benefit and both my sisters worked on the mainland, one in Glasgow, the other in Israel.

12. I thoroughly enjoyed being a mother, fully breastfed a contented baby. My husband was my main support.

13. When I was pregnant I was thankful that I had full knowledge of the situation, as older women told me horror stories of their own deliveries, days in labour, refusal of the placenta to come away, haemorrhages, ‘blue’ babies, those with respiratory problems. After the babies were born, as they were so contented and slept a lot, older women often told me they thought they were mentally retarded, as they were so quiet. I think many young mothers without my experience would have been made over-anxious.

14. I desperately wanted a boy for my first child and I wished I did not feel like that, as the most important factor was that the baby was healthy. Most first time mothers expressed a desire for a certain sex, and they usually wanted a girl. No. 2 I again wanted a boy as I wanted them to be friends. No. 3 I was desperate for a girl (I believe every mother would love a daughter). Again my older female relatives and neighbours, the ‘scans’ of the day, assured me I was positively to bear a girl, ‘the baby was lying more to the front than the back’, and of course they were never wrong - but they were!

15. Although it was totally frowned upon for husbands to attend ante-natal classes and they were totally banned from the delivery room, at home they were very supportive.

16. After childbirth I became extremely maternal and enjoyed meeting other young mothers and babies. I felt I was included in a mothers’ circle from which barren women were barred.
17. I remember my mother and aunts having home confinements. An old woman - usually a spinster, having no commitment of her own - moved in with the family several days before the expected date of delivery. She sent someone for the district nurse when labour was established. The district nurse arrived with her 'baby bag' - instruments for the delivery. She demanded lots of boiling water, clean sheets and towels. It was an unnecessarily 'messy' operation. Everyone was banned from the labour room, apart from the nurse and the 'home help'.

18. I have never heard of 'churching', 'kirking' new mothers.

19. The baby's birth was celebrated by the father buying whisky and having a drink with all male friends and relatives, known as 'wetting the baby's head'. This is still practised by some young fathers here. Friends, neighbours, relations all brought gifts for the new-born.

20. As was the habit in our day, the children were always called after relatives, our eldest after my father, second after my husband, but as I had four brothers and my husband two, we broke with tradition and called the youngest a name we both liked - David - offending our older relatives and neighbours.

21. I recall many baptisms. In our church baptisms were - and are - held twice a year, approximately sixteen to twenty babies each time. When we baptised the mothers and babies went into the church at 12.15 p.m. after the sermon, heard the minister’s lecture on bringing up the children in the nurture of the Lord, then the sacrament was dispensed and mothers with babies stayed in until after the last singing, leaving minutes before the congregation. Nowadays mothers and babies are in church for the sacrament only, leaving immediately afterwards.

3U. PEGGY

[Responded to letter in local press. Peggy has a keen interest in island history.]

Marital status Widowed
Birthplace Inverness

Date of birth 20.2.19

List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.

Inverness, 22 years; London, 4; Kinloch, Amulree, near Dunkeld, Perthshire, 3; Inverness, 10; Uig, Isle of Skye, 20, moved there in 1959; Gravir, Pairc, Isle of Lewis, 8, moved there in 1979 when husband retired; Uig, Isle of Skye, 9 years, moved there in 1987 when widowed.

Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1874, Gravir, Lewis
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1885, Gravir, Lewis

Parents' occupations Father regular soldier, Cameron Highlanders, till 1918; stores clerk, L.M.S. Railway, Inverness, 1918-39; stores clerk, Royal Engineers, Inverness, 1939-45. Mother housewife.

Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s 7 brothers and 2 sisters, eldest brother was 10 years older, elder sister 8 years older and younger sister 4 years younger.

How old were you when you left school? 17 1/2.

What did you do directly after you left school? Junior shorthand typist, Town Clerk’s Office, Inverness.

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Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Junior shorthand typist, Town Clerk’s Office, Inverness; senior shorthand typist, civil service, Inverness; code and cipher officer, war service, 1939-45, Cameron Barracks, Inverness and then War Office, Whitehall, London; assistant in husband’s shop (painter and decorator), Dunkeld; various part-time jobs as domestic circumstances permitted, Inverness; executy and trust assistant with solicitors, Portree, retired 1979; also part-time Registrar of Births, etc. and Census Officer for North Skye (retired), and part-time Official Court Shorthand Writer, Skye, Western Isles and sometimes the mainland (retired 1994). Voluntary member of Children’s Haring Panel; clerk to Uig Village Council and then to Uig Community Council; clerk to Pairc Community, Lewis; Brownie and Guide Leader; local organizer, W.R.V.S., Skye and Lochalsh area till 1994; retired from all these posts.

Age at marriage 24 years

Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1914, Gravir

Husband’s occupation Painter and decorator, but because of his health he was advised to change his occupation; general merchant.

No. of sons and their ages 1 aged 47

No. of daughters and their ages 4 aged 48-38

Total number of children you have ever borne 5

Are any of your children married now? Yes, all

Do you have any grandchildren? 7

Religion: how would you describe yourself? Presbyterian

Parents’ religion Presbyterian

Husband’s religion Presbyterian

I. Language

1. No. 2. I have a working knowledge of Gaelic through having gone every year to Lewis on holiday and through living and working in Skye and Lewis.

3. My parents were both Gaelic speakers but, at the time we were growing up in Inverness, there were few Gaelic-speaking families there in the thirties. They all seemed to gravitate to Glasgow rather than Inverness and, when I was on holiday in Lewis as a child, I was surprised to find the Glasgow-based cousins were fluent in speaking Gaelic. I put it down to the fact that they all seemed to live in areas like Partick, which was full of Gaels. My parents sent us to the Gaelic choir but did not teach us Gaelic and used it rather as a ‘secret language’ at home. 4.No.

II. Family and Household

1. When I was growing up, only my parents and my siblings lived in our home. We never had any other relatives staying except for holidays.

2. Only my husband and children lived with me during marriage.

3. As far as I can remember, growing up in Inverness, I knew only one or two families who had a grandparent living with them.

III. Growing Up

1. My strongest memories of childhood are of a stable, happy home with brothers who teased me but also helped me. I looked up to my parents and my elder sister and to my teachers. We were children of the outdoors and, although we had a garden, we all played in the street and, in the summer, went exploring the countryside and gathering berries - brambles, raspberries and blueberries (blueberries). The only work I ever did around the house were light tasks, like washing dishes, sweeping the floor.
and dusting. I liked school and, although not sorry to leave in a way, I felt I had gained much by the experience. Indeed, when I started my new job I felt I knew everything about office work but, after one day there, I realised I knew nothing except some theory.

2. My mother was the epitome of the word ‘Mother’ and I think she was quite typical of most of the mothers of that day. I looked up to my mother but thought that some of her values were a bit old-fashioned as she seemed to put husband and children first. She was a tall dignified woman with a placid nature (for instance, she could sit at her sewing machine at a table in the middle of our kitchen-living room, absolutely oblivious to the noise made by the four of my brothers playing the bagpipes - two playing an alto and two paying the melody - while she stitched unhurriedly). She was the ‘Enquire Within’ of the neighbours and always seemed to have other little ones sitting on the box seats of the fender, watching her working or telling her their problems. Over the years, when I got older, I realized that there was a fund of knowledge and wisdom in my mother’s advice, which I once thought old-hat!

3. My father was more of an extrovert than my mother and had a great sense of humour. He attended to the outside work - garden, etc. He also leased a plot of ground from his employers at the railway, with the result that we always had plenty of vegetables for our stews, etc. He seemed very proud of having a big family. He taught piping classes and taught his seven sons to play the bagpipes and he was always in demand to play at charity concerts, etc. When we were very young he made us place our shoes along the fender before we went to bed, ‘Where the Brownies will polish them for you.’ It was a while before I discovered he was the Brownie!

4. I would describe the relationship between my parents as being fairly easy-going but they would never discuss anything important while we were present. They would always support each other, for instance, I always remember that, if any of us thought we could get round Dad more easily than Mum on something we wanted permission to do, he would look at us and say, ‘Well, we shall see what we shall see’, which really meant, ‘Mum and I will discuss it and let you know.’ I never ever knew what way my parents voted, although they always went to vote and I never heard them arguing about money, the way modern parents seem to do. I think that, as children, we weren’t interested in what ‘grown-ups’ were doing and thinking. We had so much to think about at our own level that we didn’t really take much notice of other relationships and certainly wouldn’t butt in on conversations among grown-ups. I don’t know about the relationship between other couples except those neighbours and the many friends who came to visit; but I knew of only two men who upset their wives by overindulging in alcohol. Probably any other scandal would be kept from us.

5. As my elder sister was so much older, and my younger sister so much younger, I felt closer to my brothers when I was young. Anyway, they were much more ladylike, whereas I was more of a tomboy. However, I had very good chums, whom we always say, we ‘met in our prams’, with whom I am still friendly today. We joined with the boys for certain games but I was a hockey buff and devoted to the game. By the time I was ten, my eldest brother was sailing for India with the Army and spent most of his life overseas. Then my other brothers left home to work away and my sister got married - but we always kept in touch. Although my brothers teased me sometimes, they always saw that I got fair play in games, etc. We saw our cousins and grandparents only when we went on our annual holiday to Lewis. We had no relatives in Inverness, except for a grand-aunt whom we occasionally visited.
6. I think we always looked on Dad as being the head of the household but we thought that Mum had a way of getting her own way when she wanted. As I said already, I don’t really know about decisions in other families - such matters never entered my head.

7. My father disciplined the boys and my mother saw to the girls. I never saw my father use a belt but he could fairly whack with his slipper. My mother had been a Monitor (a kind of Pupil-Teacher) at one time and had a school 'strap' (which the southern Scots called a ‘tawse’) and now and then we would get a flick with the strap for some misdemeanour.

8. There was a strong religious element in our upbringing. We went to Church every Sunday morning as a family but, in the evenings, we were allowed to go to our friends’ churches and they took turns of coming to ours. One of my friends was a Methodist and another a Brethren but whereas my Methodist friend came to our church, the Brethren wasn’t allowed to come to our church although I sometimes went to hers. Sometimes after Sunday evening service in our church, my parents and friends would go to the Baptist Church to the after-church fellowship. My parents had friends from different churches. When we were little, on a good day, my Dad would take us walking in the afternoon on Sunday but, if it rained, my Mum would sing psalms, hymns and choruses to us at home. We went to Sunday school and I think my Mum was more involved in our religious upbringing as Dad had other duties.

9. I used to accuse my mother of being more lenient towards my brothers but, looking back, I don’t really think this was so. I objected once, when I was very young, because my immediate elder brother got an egg for breakfast, whereas I got porridge. My Mum told me that he was very tall and thin and needed extra nourishment whereas I was strong and healthy. It was just jealousy on my part because I loved porridge. However, boys were never expected to do housework but they had to help Dad in cutting sticks, etc. and going on errands.

10. My parents seemed to be stricter in discipline with the boys but they didn’t show any difference in regard to our education, as we were all encouraged and helped with our homework, etc.

11. My role models were my elder sister, my parents and teachers. I looked up to Royalty and members of Parliament and practising Christians who did good works. For a time I wanted to be an actress or a concert pianist but soon discarded that idea as I didn’t think I was good enough for either. I rather looked up to girls who were good at sports rather than those who were clever at school. Looking back, I expect I was typical of my generation.

12. I thought my mother was too unselfish and she put herself last and seemed always to be busy. I thought that, when I got married, I wouldn’t be so tied up with household duties as she was. She rarely went out to visit friends and never went to the cinema or concerts but then, there always seemed to be visitors coming to our house; so perhaps she got all the companionship she needed from that.

13. I wanted to have a career before marriage but we always thought we would get married some day and prepared our ‘bottom drawer’. This consisted mostly of embroidered traycloths, etc. I thought the age of 30 was soon enough to get married but, probably because of the circumstances, I was only 24 when I married. I always wanted to have four of a family - two boys and two girls. I didn’t intend to leave home and was quite happy to live at home but I was a member of the A.T.S. which was a part-time women’s Territorial Army and was called up 2 days before war broke out in 1939.

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14. The boys and girls all played together although the girls would play apart from the boys - say if skipping or other sorts of 'girl' games.
15. There was probably a difference between the life of my mother, who was born and brought up in a village in the Islands and had to go away to work and had, judging from my experiences in visiting the Islands, a quite different upbringing from my own. My grandmother's generation was totally different again, as most of those women had to work very hard on the crofts and cutting peats, etc. while the men were away at the fishing grounds.
16. When I was growing up, women didn't go out to work, if married, except for widows, who usually could only get domestic work. When a teacher or nurse or Local Government worker married, she had to leave her job. Of course spinsters had to work and they usually worked in shops or offices or as teachers and nurses. There were little or no openings for women in Industry and the reason I didn't go to University was that the only opening was for teaching - which I wouldn't have had the patience to do.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. I enjoyed my teenage years very much. I liked the cinema and the theatre and tennis, hockey and badminton. Very often, on a Saturday, when not playing a hockey match, we would go for cycle runs - usually a 15 mile there and back to such places as Castle Urquhart (17 miles there and then 17 miles back), Beauly (15 miles) or Nairn or sometimes we would 'climb' Craig Dunain or other hills around Inverness. We also liked dancing but were only allowed to go to dances when we were 17-18, except for special invitation ones.
2. I seemed to have helped in just light work and I'm ashamed to say that I never cooked a meal until after I was married. When I was in the Army I had orderlies to cook for me and do my laundry and, when I was younger, my elder sister and my mother and her 'Mother's Help' did most of the work around the house. I think this was typical of my own close friends but my mother taught me to knit and sew and to cut out patterns and I used to make summer dresses, blouses, skirts and underwear under her guidance. I did sometimes do baking for my mother, just ordinary scones, etc.
3. I don't think my relationship changed all that much when I grew older except in some small ways. I once told my parents that it was unfair that children should have to adopt the same religion as their parents and I went to the library and got the Koran and the Talmud and read them both, and in spite of visits to other churches (including Catholic and Church of England) I find I prefer the simplicity and democracy of the Presbyterian more to my liking - so I've come back full circle!
4. As well as mixing socially with our peers, my friends and I visited each other's homes and as we and most of my friends had a piano, we used to gather round the piano and sing together community songs or songs we were taught in school. The boys often joined us in this. We were often invited to parties but there was never drink served there as they were usually held in private homes. I felt I used to get so many invitations as I could always bring one of my brothers as a partner and they were all popular with girls!
5. We all got on with boys, on a platonic basis as we got older and one of my chums and I went around with two of the boys in the street when we got older. I had 'crushes' on boys at school over the years but it wasn't the done thing to go out with a boy until you left school. It was only then that we thought of boys as a different species!
6. My parents encouraged us to bring our friends home and, while they didn’t lay down heavy rules, we wouldn’t stay out late or go anywhere where we thought they wouldn’t approve.

7. We all thought our parents had outmoded views on some matters but we respected that and I wasn’t conscious of very much disagreements. My own slight annoyance was that my mum didn’t approve of my wearing lipstick but she didn’t forbid it and just tolerated it.

8. I don’t remember disagreeing with my parents over anything important. Their opinion was always respected and we wouldn’t argue. We just accepted that.

9. I think everyone had a Church connection when I was growing up in Inverness and we went to Sunday School, as did most other people. I then went to Bible Class until I left school. I think my Church upbringing gave me a foundation for living and knowing what was right and what was wrong. It didn’t inhibit me in any way and I’m glad to have had that foundation.

10. People didn’t usually go out with the opposite sex until they left school or older and that was when I thought seriously of a possible boyfriend (although I had already met my husband in Lewis by that time).

11. I think my parents were quite in favour of having boyfriends once we left school.

12. We would discuss boyfriends with our female friends, even when we had started at Secondary School. We would talk about fancying boys - but it wasn’t our main interest - we had other important things to talk about.

13. Adults did not object to young adults going out together, as long as they were circumspect and did not act undecorously.

14. I don’t know what the Gaelic word was but, we in Inverness just said ‘So-and-so is going out with so-and-so’. We heard the boys sometimes saying that someone was somebody’s else’s ‘Tart’, but they didn’t mean a ‘Prostitute’ as per today. They probably meant a shortened version of ‘Sweetheart’. We called a boyfriend so-and-so’s ‘Lad’.

15. We were not interested in the social life of older women and had no unmarried relatives near us. My mother would sometimes tell me about her days of courting and adolescence, only when I would tease her about something I had heard about an admirer when I was in Lewis on holiday.

16. Caithris na h-oidhche - was unheard of Inverness but I heard of it in Lewis when I was older and had it explained to me but, by that time, I think it had died out. I was told that it was a custom for a boy (or several boys) to visit a girl (or girls) in the late evenings and that the girls would go to bed and lie under the clothes. The boy would come in, take off his shoes and lie beside her on top of the covers. The parents were, supposedly, aware of the custom and were within earshot if anything untoward happened. It was a throwback to the days when the men would be out working or fishing all day and could only do their courting in the late evening - some of them having to walk miles to do so. Looking back to my days in Lewis, I must say that I was aware of very few illegitimacies - so there must have been rules about what was permitted. I think the Orcadians had a custom of ‘bundle’ which sounded similar. I never experienced this custom and my Granny always locked the doors at night. I was shocked when I heard of it but perhaps there were excuses because of the circumstances. Today is a much more permissive society and there are far more illegitimacies. I’ve never heard of leabachas but it take it that it must mean something to do with ‘bed’.

17. Courting practices today are far more demonstrative - and sometimes possibly embarrassing to onlookers - than in my day. Manners were far more evident in my
day - e.g. a boy would walk on the outside of the pavement and never walk in front of a girl when going through a door and would salute anyone who spoke to him or his girlfriend and would stand when a lady entered a room. Even a boy of 11 would salute a girl he met in town and touch his cap, even if they despised each other and the girl would nod her head in passing.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. As far as I can remember, people would go together at least for 6 months or a year before becoming engaged.
2. When I was grown up I once attended a rèiteach.
3. Sometimes an engagement party - but sometimes not.
4. I did not speak to my parents about my engagement but they knew my boyfriend was coming from Lewis to see me at that particular time and he was invited to stay with the family. He asked for Dad’s permission to marry me!
5. I don’t think the couple behaved very demonstratively but did seem to have a special caring relationship with each other. People did treat them differently and did a lot of teasing about the future, children, etc.
6. I would say, most were long engagements - 6 months or a year.
7. Some couples were more demonstrative than others and this was accepted.
8. I remember very little about the preparation for my own wedding as I was stationed in London and couldn’t get home until shortly before the wedding, with the result that my sister and my parents did most of the preliminary work. At that time we were only allowed thirty guests because of rationing in the hotels. This was very much different from my brother’s and sister’s previous weddings in peacetime when the guest list ran into hundreds.
9. My mother-in-law had died shortly before I married but my parents were involved in all the other weddings as well as my own.
10. I don’t remember ever going to a wedding as a child but, when a teenager, I attended the weddings of my siblings.
11. I never heard of a banais taighde in Inverness but I believe it was quite common in the Islands where the whole village would partake and supply all the trappings - chickens, eggs, etc. I do remember seeing poles with white flags set up in a village where a wedding was held and, a few years ago, I attended a Church wedding in Inverness where guns were fired outside the Church when the couple came out - but it wasn’t a ‘shotgun’ wedding in the usual meaning of the word. I remember when we came to Skye at first, there were bonfires lit to welcome a young couple home to Uig and all the lights in all the houses were kept blazing - but that had died out now.
12. I think it was natural for people to treat married people differently. They were then elevated to the status of a household and were considered mature enough to discuss problems and situations as they arose.
13. We knew that our friends could not be depended upon to meet up with us so often once they were married and that their first priority was to their husbands and home.
14. Couples didn’t have as much money to spend once they got married as the woman wouldn’t be working - so they couldn’t spend so much time on leisure but, usually, they worked hard at building up a home and rearing their children.
15. We became more responsible and I had to learn all about cooking and housekeeping and looking after a husband and children, neither of which I had any experience of.
16. My husband had a contract to work on an estate, which consisted of several buildings and farms, etc., and we were given a cottage of our own. We had two
bedrooms and a kitchen-living room and bathroom with electricity from a generator on the estate. When the contract was finished we moved to Inverness where we had a house of our own - a new house with 3 bedrooms and all modern conveniences.

17. I don’t think it was fair to expect women to give up working when they were married. It should have been left to their own choice although, on the other hand it kept jobs from younger people who were looking for work and weren’t married.

18. Having been a working mother myself but not having had a working mother, I think this also should be a choice. As my husband was self-employed and, therefore, money came in irregularly, I worked part-time at first when my first child went to school but then worked full-time. I feel that, as long as there is one partner at home when the children come from and go to school and that the parents are involved with their children’s activities, then it might be a good thing. Being self-employed my husband was usually at home if I weren’t there and his shop was just an extension of our garden.

19. Very few couples made any display of verbal or physical affection, except sometimes in jest.

VI. Before Childbearing

1. We knew little or nothing about childbearing before we married. Neither my mother nor my sister enlightened me about the ‘facts of life’ and we learnt very little. However, when I was about 15, my chum and I sent for a hardback book called something like ‘What every woman should know’. It was advertised in a women’s magazine quite openly and it gave us quite a lot of information.

2. We naturally discussed sex amongst friends. I was not conscious of whether older women ever talked about it and I don’t remember ever hearing sex being discussed.

3. People didn’t talk as openly about sex as they do today but a lot of ‘myths’ did circulate - I remember one girl when I was 11 who believed in the stork. We didn’t but we didn’t know much more than she did.

4. My sister told me that my mother had a friend or an aunt who advised her, after she had her fourth child, to come to her for birth control but my Mum never took it up with her. I think this might have been on religious grounds and, if she had done so, I wouldn’t have been in existence!

5. Before we married I told my husband I wanted 4 children but that I didn’t want family planning in the way of contraceptives, as I had heard they were unpleasant and had side effects. We decided to let nature take its course and rely on the Catholic ‘safe period’ method. We eventually had a bonus - 5 children instead of 4. I know my chum discussed planning with her husband also.

6. I think contraception has made great strides since my grandmother’s time but, on the other hand, it has also encouraged permissiveness.

7. I only vaguely remember hearing of someone having an illegitimate child. One day at school a boy said his sister had a baby and I remember the teacher asking if she was married. When he said ‘No’, I asked my Mum why the teacher looked so horrified and I was then informed that it was not the done thing to have a child before you were married.

8. People talked about unmarried pregnancy in hushed voices. In English they just said ‘so-and-so’ had a baby but I don’t know what the Gaelic expression was. I think that, although probably scandalized, they had sympathy with the mother.

9. Publicly the girl seemed to be blamed, but, privately, most people blamed both.

10. I think men were treated more lightly in public but I think most people disliked the idea of leaving the girl ‘holding the baby’ and thought he should have married
her. Nowadays, with all the contraception available people are not so sympathetic towards unmarried mothers but I myself think her family should support her, no matter what she does, as she might need help later on in life.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. I knew little or nothing and never really talked about it much.
2. I was given support and advice from my husband and family doctor, whom I questioned about all sorts of things - from keeping fit during pregnancy to breastfeeding a baby.
3. I don’t remember older women being pregnant when I was a child.
4. In English we just said so-and-so was ‘expecting’.
5. I talked about my pregnancy with my husband and with my mother and other friends who had had babies.
6. My first two pregnancies were difficult - chloroform and forceps but the others were easier. I had no problems with health during my pregnancies - just at the time of the birth of the first two.
7. My doctor was in favour of carrying on doing usual housework (except stretching) during pregnancy and I did just that.
8. I had no home births - all hospital.
9. In those days we had expert and caring attention in hospital.
10. After the baby was born was a new way of life. I stayed in bed in hospital about 10 days and then gradually took up my usual life after I came home
11. I returned to my usual routine once I learnt how to deal with a baby on my own.
12. I felt very fulfilled when I had my first baby and felt I had become a real woman now that I had experienced marriage and birth. My husband helped in many ways but never had to feed the baby as I breast-fed her for six months and then she learnt to drink from a cup - so none of my children were ever fed from a bottle. My mother came and stayed with us and gave me lots of advice after I had my first child with the result that I felt quite confident once she went home again.
13. My mother told me she had all her babies at home but knew nothing of the actual birth as she was given chloroform by her family doctor. I don’t remember ever being conscious of my mother being pregnant before any of my siblings were born. Our generation weren’t as curious as the present one, obviously.
14. I had always thought I would like a family of 2 boys and 2 girls but I was quite content with what I got - 4 girls and one boy and the extra girl was a bonus!
15. My husband was very supportive but I would never have wanted him to be present at the birth and I don’t think he would have enjoyed the experience. We never talked about the ‘blood and guts’ of periods and childbirth to each other and I think most of my friends had the same opinions.
16. My attitudes and behaviour changed considerably once I had a family. I put my children first and decided to give up on most of my social life and concentrate on raising my family. Some of my friends envied me my family but others felt sorry for me - but I feel I had the best of both worlds - a family and a career!
17. I think that most of the births in my young days were home births with help from the ‘Jubilee Nurses’ according to my mother.
18. I’ve never heard of the ‘Churching’ or ‘Kirking’ of new mothers.
19. A new baby was celebrated all around and brothers and sisters would bring their friends into the house to see the new arrival.
20. My own siblings were all given family names in the Island traditional way - my oldest brother was called after my mother’s father and the next brother was called
after my father’s mother [sic]. My elder sister was called after my father’s mother and I was called after my mother’s mother and my mother’s granny. I gave four of my children family names but chose another name I liked for my youngest.

21. All my children were baptised in Church at a ceremony where other children were baptised on the same day.

3V. SANDRA

[Responded to letter in local press.]

Marital status Separated but not divorced Date of birth 21.6.49
Birthplace Uig, Isle of Skye
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1923, Barrow-in-Furness
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1921, London
Parents’ occupations Father, novelist; mother, housewife
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s One older and one younger brother
How old were you when you left school? 16 (started at 4)
What did you do directly after you left school? Went to college
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
Registered Nurse (qualified in 1970); Medical Secretary (Member of the British Association of Medical Secretaries); Diploma in Counselling; about to embark on a BA in Counselling and Psychotherapy
Age at marriage 22
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1946, London (parents were refugees as children form the Spanish Civil War)
Husband’s occupation Teaches English as a second language to ethnic minorities
Do you have any children? One daughter, aged 23
Total number of children you have ever borne One
Are any of your children married now? Not yet
Do you have any grandchildren? Not yet
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Pagan
Parents’ religion Mother, Church of England, father came from a Scottish Presbyterian background but both agnostic
Husband’s religion None

I. Language

1-4. I am not a native Gaelic speaker and when I started school at the age of four I was the only child in my class who could speak English. The others all spoke Gaelic at home and were not expected to learn English until their first year in primary school. They seemed to learn very quickly and I picked up a lot of Gaelic because that was the language spoken around me in the playground etc. Much the same applied with my brothers. My parents had spent their earlier adult lives in England,
did not understand Gaelic and never really learned it. I lost touch with Gaelic when I left Skye and I would certainly have to struggle to understand it now.

II. Family and Household
1-3. I think our family was a bit different from most others on the island. My parents were ‘incomers’ and had no relatives who lived in Scotland. My father came from a family of ten children and his mother used to spend a year at a time living in each child’s household. Because of the distance involved, when we got her she stayed for several years with us. I think at that time it was very typical indeed for elderly relatives to be part of most households. In fact, towards the end of the 1950s it became quite the thing for people to build extensions on to their houses to accommodate their increasing numbers.
When I married and moved to London, for a while I lived in a communal household which included some of my husband’s family and a host of hippy-type individuals. I don’t think this was typical of anyone or anything (although of course it’s common enough in continental households to share accommodation in this way) but was more a reflection of our idealism at that time which leaned towards the hippy culture.

III. Growing Up
1. My strongest memories of childhood are unhappy ones. My elder brother, Gus, and I were tormented at school by the other kids for being ‘Sassenachs’. Gus handled this better than me because he was an excellent fighter and always won his battles. I spent a lot of time with Gus, largely because there were few other children in the vicinity. Gus taught me how to read when I was three years old before I went to school, and I regarded him as my mentor and protector throughout my years at primary school.
Although I am 46 years old now, I can still see my primary school teachers in my mind’s eye to this day. They were all pretty horrible. We spent an enormous amount of time at primary school learning great chunks of the Bible off by heart. Old and New Testament, Psalms, Paraphrases of the Psalms, the Shorter Catechism, etc., etc. The catechism was a much-hated small beige-coloured book filled with questions and answers about the ten commandments and so on, and the teachers would ask the class a question and we would be expected to all chant back the answer together in a chorus.
The first question in the catechism is ‘What is man’s chief end?’ and the answer we had to chorus back was ‘man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.’ For at least my first year in school I thought it was ‘man’s cheffend’. I had no idea what a ‘cheffend’ might be, but the catechism was like that. No matter that you didn’t understand a word of it - you nevertheless learnt it off by heart. Failure to learn our catechism was punished by being kept in the classroom at playtime and not allowed out into the playground. That was not a punishment for me, since I was usually tormented in the playground.
We were not allowed to question any of the monstrous stories in the Bible. I once (aged 6) said I did not believe it was possible that people could walk into a fiery furnace and come out without a hair on their heads being burnt and I was belted with a leather strap for this blasphemy. A lot of perceived naughtiness was punished with the strap and at that time corporal punishment was regarded as just discipline in most households so if any child went home and complained of getting belted, the likelihood was that their parents would belt them again on account of their being badly behaved in school!
The other big deal in primary school was the Eleven Plus examination. At the time I started school in the early fifties this was a very big deal indeed and our whole lives revolved around tests and exams and threats of dire end should we fail to pass the Eleven Plus.

2. My mother. I think my mother was unhappy in Skye and had only come along because it was my father's dream to live in the Highlands because he came from Scottish parentage and had romantic notions about island life. When they arrived in Skye my elder brother was just as few months old and almost immediately my mother became pregnant with me which was a terrible mistake. I don't think that she and I have ever really had a great relationship and I would think that our poor relationship was not typical of others at the time.

3. My father. My father was a novelist and worked from home. He was usually shut up in his study typing. We didn't spend much time with him as children and we perceived him as being rather grumpy with us. He was an ardent socialist but was totally unenlightened in terms of women in that my mother did all the cooking and the household chores, etc. and he was seen as the head of the household.

4. I took a dim view of the adult relationships around me. I hated to see my mother scuttling around after my father like she was some kind of medieval serving wenches. I swore I would never marry and have children, and in fact it never occurred to me that I would change my mind, so nobody was more surprised than me when I got married at twenty-two. As far as the parents of other children were concerned, the husbands and wives hardly seemed to exchange a word. In fact, you would be hard pressed to imagine them ever having fun together or enjoying each other's company.

5. I was closest to my brother Gus. We very rarely saw our relations because they all lived in England and we very rarely left the island.

6. My father was the undisputed, uncontested head of the household. In other families I would say that the women had a much greater say in decision-making.

7. My father. They were both tedious disciplinarians.

8. I have already described the religious carry-on at school. My parents were agnostic but didn't want to rock the boat in the local community by making too much of it, so they were not terribly helpful in assisting us to sort out the hellfire and damnation aspects of what we were learning in school. Gus and I sometimes used to do a sort of 'controlled trial' where we would come out of school at 4p.m., say all the bad words we knew and then run like hell for home. We figured that if God didn't get us with a thunderbolt (or a plague of locusts, or whatever) then there was a good argument for his non-existence. We were quite young then, about 8 or 9.

9. Yes, girls were expected to help out at home and boys were expected to do bloke-ish things. For instance, young boys would be expected to work on the croft and look after the animals and although girls did a lot of this too, they were further expected to participate in housework. Men did not do housework. Overall, women and girls did a lot of work on the croft and in the house.

10. Overall boys were favoured over girls in everything. My parents pretended we were equal but I was quite aware we were not. In educational terms this was the time of the Eleven Plus and parents were keen to push their kids to pass it and 'get on in the world' and there was always a lot of talk about what great opportunities we had and how our parents never had such privileges, etc., etc. I think girls were expected to try and do well in school but I don't think it was considered to be as important as boys doing well. I think in other families there was a heavier expectation on the girls to get married as a career. I was expected by my parents to do well in school, go to university and have a career of some sort.
11. No, my role models were all characters from books and from my imagination.
12. Yes, I was determined to be different from my mother. I wanted to be independent and brave and be able to take care of myself. From about the age of eight I wanted to be an adult very badly. I wanted to leave home and please myself, preferably in a big bad sinful city.
13. No, I never expected to marry and have children. I imagined myself living alone, having a high flying career and being generally sinful and sophisticated. I was totally and completely atypical in this in relation to other people of my age group. I was very lonely I think during childhood and adolescence.
14. Boys and girls did play together but you must remember that most boys and girls were expected to contribute labour on the croft and looking after the animals. It was often the case that whilst my brother and I were free to go out and play, our neighbours’ children would be expected to help out at home.
15. I’m not sure. From what I can surmise my mother was a straightforward product of her own mother, and my mother herself to this day has hardly changed in her opinions and behaviour. I think she’s stuck in a time warp, circa 1946.
16. Pretty abysmal. During the fifties young women were ‘birds’ and ‘chicks’ and very much seen as sexual objects. During the sixties they were expected to be sexual sophisticates. During the seventies I became strongly aware of the Women’s Movement and one of the most powerful books I read at that time was called The Women’s Room by Marilyn French. This book had a profound effect on me and I passed it around many of my women friends. It sounds trite to say this, but what now seems like a very ordinary novel actually changed our lives. The other book from the seventies that stands out in my mind as being a powerful influence was Down Among the Women by Fay Weldon.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. I’m sorry to say that I was also an unhappy teenager. I desperately wanted to be adult and leave home and take care of myself. I was terribly lonely. There were very few people of my age in the village where I lived, and when we moved to Inverness I started on my own at a school where everyone already knew each other and had established their own cliques.
2. We were expected to wash dishes and otherwise keep out of my mother’s way.
3. I felt more and more restricted and oppressed but I don’t think this was at all typical of other families. I think my parents were probably more restrictive than most.
4. I was unable to have a proper social life whilst at school because my parents expected me to come home too early for it to be worth my while going out. I was always in a lot of trouble with my parents at this time because naturally I would go out and stay out and then brave the shouting when I returned.
5. Yes. I did an awful lot of flirting with the opposite sex but not much else.
6. My parents had a lot of say about how I spent my time. I think other parents were rather different.
7. Yes, I think there was in general terms but that’s not unusual.
8. I used to disagree about the restrictions on my movements, the way I dressed, the way I did my hair, etc. etc.
9. Having left Skye, the role of the church became less dominant.
10. I never viewed the opposite sex in terms of potential husbands but I certainly saw them as potential boyfriends and I was a terrible flirt from about the age of 14.
11. About 13 or 14. I think most parents accepted this and those who didn’t weren’t
told about it.
12. Yes, we talked about boys a lot. In fact, everyone was teased a lot about this and
sometimes I used to wish that there were no boys at school because it made me feel
very self-conscious.
13. See q.11.
15. While I was living on Skye older unmarried females used to go to dances, often
miles away from their own home village. Most of the less well educated females
would work during the summer season as live-in waitresses at hotels in the larger
villages and sometimes on the mainland. The social lives of the married women
appeared non-existent to me.
16. I have never heard of this.
17. I think that the women’s movement has changed the behaviour of some girls now
but a lot of this is dependent on their education and culture.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. That varied a lot. Some would go out and only get engaged once the girl was
pregnant.
2. No, never heard of such a thing.
3. I can’t remember any significant celebration in terms of engagement.
4. No.
5. I don’t really remember. I seem to remember that when I was a child girls who
were engaged to be married were treated with a degree of respect, as though they
were more adult somehow than girls who were not engaged.
6. Varied.
7. I cannot remember.
9. I really don’t know about other people but my own parents had very little
involvement in mine.
10. Very little. Usually that the woman was pregnant prior to the marriage.
11. I don’t know what that is.
12. I don’t really remember much about this sort of thing.
13. No recollection. I don’t think there could have been a lot of weddings going on
where I lived as a child because I’m sure this sort of thing would stick in my mind
had I seen it going on.
14. My perception as a child was that one was supposed to ‘settle down’ at the time
of marriage but I don’t recall actually noting how one behaved. As above, I don’t
think I actually knew a lot of people in this situation.
15. Marriage didn’t change my own relationship with my partner. Childbirth changed
it.
16. We lived for one year in Inverness in a house that we bought ourselves. We
moved one year later to London under pressure from his parents and family.
17. In my own life I was under no pressure to have children. In the past, I’m sure
people were pressurized, and nowadays with the benefit of hindsight it’s actually
regarded in medical terms as not a bad thing to have your children in your early
twenties when your fertility is at its best. Unfortunately nowadays it’s often
economically impossible for young people to have children.
18. I myself have always been a working mother and couldn’t imagine being a ‘home
alone’ mother.
19. When I was growing up it was most unusual to see married couples being demonstrative.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. My teenage years were lived through the time of the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ of the sixties and we were assumed to know a lot more than we did. I was something of an innocent and knew nothing of the facts of life until I was about twelve. We learnt through dirty jokes and information from older children. In fact, I was probably just starting to ‘go out’ with boys when I learnt about sex. I learned about menstruation before I really knew about sex, and I only found out about that a month before I started having periods myself at the age of 11!
2. There was always a lot of talk about sex at secondary school in terms of who was ‘doing it’, etc. I’m sure that older married women did talk about sex but certainly not in front of me. My own mother was utterly useless at talking about physical things and it’s a mystery to me to this day how she managed to disguise the presence of sanitary towels etc. so that nobody was ever aware of the existence of such things.
3. I learned about it from my brother in the first instance.
4. We all knew about Durex and that’s about it.
5. I certainly did, but I wasn’t living in Skye by that time. My own mother started taking the contraceptive pill in 1963 and this was given to her by the family doctor. We were still living on Skye at that time. Of course, I didn’t know about it then but she told me about it later on in my adult life.
6. I think this has changed remarkably. From my early adulthood I always felt in charge of my fertility and I think this was not the case when my mother was young.
7. Very aware of it. In Skye it was very common for women to have children out of wedlock. I know one woman who had five illegitimate children.
8. It was disapproved of in general terms but on the islands I felt there was a certain level of acceptance of it.
9. I’m not really sure but I think that the man was expected to marry the woman so long as she was clearly going out with him and there was no question of anyone else being the father.
10. Women were always expected to be more moral. No, I don’t think this is the case anymore.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy
1. I don’t know about other women but I knew nothing about childbirth.
2. I am glad I knew nothing. If I had known what it is like I would have been put off the whole business.
3. Yes, I remember my mother being pregnant with my younger brother. I don’t remember much about my feelings because I was only three years old.
4. I don’t really remember.
5. Yes, and with other women.
6. My pregnancy and the birth itself were complicated by toxaemia.
7. I didn’t give up any of my normal activities.
8. No.
9. Yes. Just the one. I had pre-eclamptic toxaemia which causes a huge elevation in blood pressure and complicates the birth process. I ended up with a urinary catheter for about ten days and about thirty stitches! Everyone in the hospital was very nice to me and I actually had a terrific rest. The food was so awful that I actually lost almost
all of the weight that I had put on during the pregnancy which was an excellent bonus.
10. In hospital I had a good time, once I got home it was awful and I don’t think I had a full night’s sleep for around the next two years.
11. I never returned to a ‘normal routine’ of work. I worked when I could and where I could and sometimes had to stop work intermittently on account of not having good childminders.
12. Very difficult. My husband wasn’t very much help, poor thing. I think it was even more of a shock to his system than to mine to have to be responsible for another human being 24 hours a day. To be a bit brutal about things, I enjoyed being a mother much more once I’d got shot of my husband. In fact, I love being a mother, and still do even though my daughter is grown up.
13. I don’t think so.
14. At the time of pregnancy I didn’t mind much whether I had a boy or a girl. Now I feel very happy that I had a girl because it may have been more difficult to bring up a boy on my own.
15. My husband thought he was very supportive but he was absolutely useless.
16. I became a distinctly different person really when I became a mother. I don’t think I noticed a distinct change in other people’s attitudes to me because I had moved to London in the seventh month of pregnancy and was in the middle of getting to know a whole new set of people at the same time as becoming a mother.
17. I know nothing about this.
18. No.
19. I don’t know. On Skye, I think the men got very drunk.
20. On Skye everyone seemed to name their children after relatives. I myself gave my daughter a name that seemed to go well with her surname.
21. I did not have my child baptized and I was not baptized myself.

3W. SEONAG (See 5E)

[Seonag is active in the local history and community associations in my home village. We have written and spoken several times in connection with my research. Her husband is a relative of my father’s.]

Marital status Married for 45 years
Date of birth 11.3.1924
Birthplace At home in North Dell, Ness
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
North Dell, 12 years; Girls’ Hostel, Stornoway, 6 years; Aberdeen, 2 years; Guildford, Surrey, 9 mths; London, 1 year; Bombay, mths; Bangalore, about 9 months; Delhi, 9 mths-1year; Edinburgh, 1 year; North Dell, mths; London, 40 years; North Tolsta, 11 years.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin C. 1898, North Dell
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin C.1900, North Dell
Parent’s occupations Father - with Hudson Bay Company, Canada; house builder in Lewis; mother - youngest of eight, stayed at home.
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s Murdo, 1922; Norman, 1926; Alexander, 1927; Mary, 1929; Henrietta, 1931; Angus Allan, 1934; Mairi, 1937.

How old were you when you left school? 18

What did you do directly after you left school? University of Aberdeen

Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked. Army Intelligence Corps School, Hampstead, decoding, etc.; then India; Civil Service, Executive Officer Ministry of Food, London; Royal Free Hospital clerical work, London; Royal National Institute for the Blind, Great Portland Street, London, Braillist; short periods teaching for Surrey County Council - Latin in Nonsuch Grammar School, home tuition for problem pupils, Marsden Hospital for 2 years, then Sutton Manor Boys Grammar School for 3 years until we left London.

Age at marriage 26

Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 25.9.1920, North Tolsta
Husband’s occupation Police Officer, retired Deputy Asst. Commissioner.

No. of sons and their ages Two aged 36 and 40
No. of daughters and their ages Two aged 38 and 42
Total number of children you have ever borne Four
Are any of your children married now? Three
Do you have any grandchildren? Seven

Religion: how would you describe yourself? Christian, but not sectarian, presently Free Church

Parents’ religion Free Church

Husband’s religion Free Presbyterian but chose to leave it to as we went to the nearest church wherever we lived.

I. Language
[N.a., but 1-3, Yes, 4, No.]

II. Family and Household

1. When I was growing up there were four adults, two grandparents and both my parents in our home for the first ten years of my life. At that time there were also five children towards the end of my grandparents’ life. My grandmother was bedridden for many years and my grandfather who outlived her by several years was blind for eight years. He, probably, had cataracts but in those days no one operated for eye problems. He was completely self-confident and mobile. An unmarried uncle came to live with us when my grandfather died. We lived in a stonebuilt house, built by my father when I was about two years old. It was attached to a long flat-roofed felt covered house which extended the length of what we call the white house. The ‘flat’ was where all the washing was done and all the chores. It had an earthen floor and a wide chimney place. At one end there was a byre for the cows. Behind the house was the stable and also a barn. There were lots of cats in the barn because of the rats and mice.

2. When we married we lived for a short time in rented rooms till we got a Police house in London. As soon as we could afford it we bought our own home. No one other than my husband and children lived with us.

3. The situation of my parents was not typical of most folk of their generation. My grandfather had been a carter in pre-car days. That meant that he earned money at a time when labour and barter and sharing were common. My father would plough for neighbours for their labour at harvest time. My father had gone to Canada as a young man and when the First World War came he served in the Canadian Navy. Many, or
rather most of the villagers were in thatched houses which I thought was quite romantic but I greatly appreciated some privacy which they did not have.

III. Growing Up

1. My strongest memories of childhood are of the love and warmth which pervaded my home and of the support of my parents even when I was wrong. I realised that in most households girls were disadvantaged and boys were favoured. My father insisted that the boys did their fair share of work and all the heavy house work. I remember being strapped when I was about eight years old. My father went straight away to see the teacher dragging me unwillingly after him to show her my swollen hand. ‘See what you did to the child,’ he said. ‘And what did she do?’ she asked. Then added, ‘She put her tongue out at me.’ I admitted that I did. We turned homewards but he never said a word to me, I don’t even know if he told my mother. My grandmother though bedridden was very important. We searched for herbs for her and were rewarded with sweets. She made medicines with these. I remember that my mother always gave tea to the tinker women who came round the house with tin mugs, jugs and little pails. She never looked down on anyone and we were constantly reminded of the story in the Bible where boys mocked a bald-headed prophet and bears came out of a thicket and ate them.

Our house was a bit isolated so I played the same games as my brothers, one older, one younger than me. We sailed boats that we made of rushes on the river at the end of the house. We tried to catch eels and one of my brothers could get honey out of honey bees.

We all did jobs after school, in fact the children did most of the chores. My father thought mother had enough to do, making food for us all, though she usually had a girl to help her. Money was scarce and women would come asking if my mother would take a girl for her keep and a little money. The girls seemed perfectly happy. They read lurid magazines which they hid under chair covers. I found them and read them.

We had twenty acres of land, mostly cultivated so in season there was a lot of work - haymaking, tying sheaves, feeding the threshing mill in the barn. My father worked it with pedals. We helped stack the hay and the corn and played games around the stacks. The first year in school was fun. I loved it. The next three teachers were sadistic horrors. I found the work easy but hated the teachers and the treatment they meted out.

2. My relationship with my mother was always good. I remember being ill often and being lovingly cared for. I remember her as being pretty and having nice clothes. She was the youngest of a family of eight, all of whom left home in their early teens. Two sisters and two brothers went to America and prospered there. Frequent parcels came from them, as did money. One of them came at least every second year. I think they felt guilty as my mother did not have the same choice as they did. However, at the age of seventy she went to America and spent several enjoyable months there. I don’t know if my relationship was typical but I think not. When my children were born in London, which she didn’t like, she came and stayed as long as I needed her. I know that my sisters were also devoted to her.

3. I adored my father which made me think that he was perfect. He died when I was sixteen. The first tragedy in my life. He was fun. I remember him coming from the yearly farm market, An Dronsaidh, in Stornoway and putting a sack with some wriggling thing inside it onto the kitchen floor. He said, ‘It’s a pig in a poke.’ It really was. I must have been ten years old and that was my first sight of a pig.
4. My parents were very happy. The only time I remember my mother being angry was when she got a parcel from America. One of the things in it was a very nice sweater. My uncle, who by then had come to live with us, admired it. My father gave it to him and my mother told him off. I knew of other couples who were definitely unhappy and one couple who spoke to each other through the children. Another husband preferred the company of a younger single woman. Everyone knew these things but never interfered. An instance of husband and wife relationship is given in the booklet ‘Happy Norman’ (Eng. version of Tormod Sona) where the writer says that Tormod coming from the Ness Communions on his way to the next Communions, would hide under a tarpaulin in a cart until he had passed his home in Galson. The writer seemed to be commending this!

5. I think my family were lively, loving, quarrelling and argumentative. I was closest, when young, to my older brother and my next younger in age. Later in life I became closer to the two Mary sisters. Grandparents were very important because they were part of everyday life. They were affectionate. The only other really important relative was Uncle Finlay. He came to live with us shortly before my father died. He was like a father to us. He was also like an older brother and he was more intelligent than us. He remembered everything he ever read. He liked poetry and taught us Wordsworth, Kipling, Tennyson, Edward Lear. He taught us to play cards and draughts during the winter evenings. He was exasperating because he could remember every card which had been played and knew when we were bluffing. My mother who was deeply religious never checked our games though card-playing was supposed to be wicked.

6. My mother was head of the household. My father’s only insistence was that the girls as well as the boys should have a university education if they were capable of it. I think this was not the case in my husband’s family.

7. My mother was. Discipline was instantaneous, not waiting till my father came home. Anyway, my father died when most were young.

8. As stated already my mother was deeply religious but never pushed religion down our throats. She read a lot and thought a lot. Once, I remember, an elder came in and found her reading a book which the Rev. Angus Smith had condemned from the pulpit. It was by an eminent preacher and lecturer. ‘Why shouldn’t I read it?’ ‘Well, I don’t know but the minister says we shouldn’t read anything by him.’ ‘You come back next week and, if I find anything wrong with it, I’ll tell you.’ My mother taught us to think for ourselves and not to accept blindly.

9. Boys were generally treated better than girls and they expected this, but not in our family.

10. I answered this above. I don’t think my in-laws considered the education of girls to be very important. They were expected to marry and have children and things would go on in the same way from generation to generation. Working as servants and at the fish curing were accepted occupations for many girls. The parents could not afford to think otherwise.

11. I honestly don’t think that I had any role model when growing up. I remember a fierce determination not to be like the sadistic teachers. I wished that I could do something about them.

12. Yes, I did want my life to be different from my mother’s. I thought hers was a sacrificial life. She stayed to look after aged parents and when her elder brother married she was sort of a maid in the house which had been her home. It was a thatched house with little privacy and she had to accept her role as she had no means of escaping. I know this though she never said so. I believe that she loved my father but he was also a means for escape from an unhappy situation. He built a house for
her and provided well but she still had to look after his father and mother as well as her own growing family. I felt that there must be more to life than this.

13. Just to get out of North Dell and then out of Lewis - not forever but to find out whether the grass was really greener on the other side. I truly never thought about marriage. I had seen it in the village and for many it was a trap but one willingly entered into as the alternative was more unacceptable. Even when I married, or rather before, I said that I did not want to have children. To return to the question of what work I would like to do, I only knew about teaching and thinking of teachers I knew didn’t much want that. I think the girls who left school as soon as they could thought mainly of marriage. In the Girls’ Hostel I never discussed these things with other girls. I think we had to work too hard to pass exams well.

14. Boys and girls played together when really young, just around the haystacks as far I can recall.

15. I think my grandmother’s (maternal) life was one of hardship and hand to mouth existence. Some young wives saw them as an encumbrance and nuisance and extra mouths to feed. My mother used to tell how life altered for them when on 1st January 1911 David Lloyd George introduced the Old Age Pension for people over seventy. Five shillings a week was wealth to some households so the aged were fished out of their corners. They were no longer a nuisance but the only members of many a house with a settled income. The Education Act of 1872 was not compulsory but those who took advantage of the schools, which were few, also had a fuller life. Apart from the Bible and Catechism there was little reading material available. I think my mother’s generation were considerably better off. First World War widows also had a pension.

16. I find this difficult as I think my own home was very liberated due to my father’s ideas about equality of the sexes and my mother’s easygoing compliance. I remember that my mother always had a ‘girl’ to help her. Mother much preferred working out-of-doors to being indoor. I think I said previously that women would come to ask if their daughter could come into service in the family. This made my own life much easier. I was encouraged to study, which I liked, as I knew it was the gateway out of what seemed a monotonous existence. Women were child bearers. Most families around consisted of six, eight or ten children - there were eight of us. I remember that my uncle made a washing machine for my mother. The boys had to work it by turning a handle and it made life easier for her although all the water had to be carried from the river (boys’ work) and then boiled in a big three-legged cauldron. This was done outside in summer over an open fire with raised stone sides. During the war we used an empty mine for this purpose. Mines used to be thrown ashore by rough Atlantic storms. Women seemed to produce a child every third year - they used to say that as long as you breast-fed you didn’t get pregnant. I think women were quite proud of being pregnant but they generally stayed away from the public gaze once it became obvious. I think that generally the women were the main forces in the homes.

**IV. Early Adulthood**

1. I enjoyed my teenage years. During term times I lived in the Girls’ Hostel in town. Very regimented but I had company of like-minded friends. We had to be indoors at 7.30 p.m. weekdays and later on Saturday. We could go to the pictures after matron had vetted the picture. The picture-house was opposite the hostel so matron stood at the door and checked us all in. We learnt to play hockey and badminton and had access to a gramophone and records. We were allowed two weekends at home during term. I was spoilt then.
2. General housework and looking after my younger brothers and sisters - much as I would expect from my daughters. Helped with haymaking, corn stacking and general outside work. I think all the girls in the hostel did roughly the same kind of work at home. In some families the boys had to do less work and this made the girls' lot more difficult and themselves more resentful.

3. My father died when I was sixteen. Mother was left with eight children at a time when there was no social security. We all became more protective of mother, especially my two older brothers and myself. I think some mothers were hard on their daughters and thought that they should earn money as soon as possible and get married. Some got pregnant to get away from home. It was the done thing to marry a girl who was pregnant. I know one who pretended to be pregnant so that a schoolteacher would marry her. He did and he felt cheated for the rest of his life. Professional men had to be very careful as they could be threatened with breach of promise - if proved they might be debarred from their jobs e.g. teachers, doctors, ministers, etc. I think this law was rescinded in recent years.

4. Very little except what I described in the hostel. I saw my first 'picture' when I was fourteen - it was 'Les Miserables' with Frederick March. I think I loved him for most of my adult life! Life was work and conversation. There was little spare time.

5. I spent more time with members of the opposite sex when I went to university. It was wartime and we got drawn into entertainment provided for the Forces. Went to a lot of dances - loved dancing. I had several male platonic friends who continued to be good friends. The main ones were boys I had gone to school with and who were at other universities. This was approved of by my mother. I thought that most friendships between the sexes were platonic apart from one close friend. I never openly disapproved of my friend's carry-on, though in my heart I did.

6. These questions are difficult when asked of a wartime generation. I told my mother once that I sowed all my wild oats in India. I think she half-believed me. The fact was that in spite of many friendships I was a virgin when I married. I wasn't aware if parents interfered in the way others behaved. Some were very anxious that their daughters should marry as their own experiences when they had lived in what was once their home and then became the domain of an older brother's wife was something to be dreaded. Unmarried women always had a hard time due to the fact that the home always went to one of the boys.

7. Not that I am aware of. Neighbours were more likely to disapprove than parents.

8. I would argue anything just for the fun of it. My mother was always worth arguing with whether about religion, morals or hypocrites.

9. I think we grew up with ingrained moral values. I think that these were acquired in the home rather than in church which I found boring. Our Sunday School teachers were godly persons but had no idea how to communicate with us. We learnt reams by heart. I appreciate this now as I can recall much of what I was forced to learn. Most young persons were rebellious. I always persuaded my mother she would benefit more from attending and I would baby-sit.

10. At least twenty-one years old. I just had not met anyone with whom I would like to spend the rest of my life.

11. Some of the girls in the 4th form in the Nicolson were committed to serious relationships and went on to marry them many years later, such as Dr. Annie MacKenzie who married her first boyfriend as his third wife. Kathleen MacAskill also had her eye on Donald. I think most others began serious relationships in their late teens.

12. Yes, we did discuss boys and lightheartedly talked of fancying some.
13. People were secretive on the whole. Courting was done in the dark or in the Castle Grounds - a favourite haunt for boys and girls. I don’t think the relationship among the young went beyond the heavy petting stage. Older folk were generally amused. Nowadays I hear older folk like myself talking seriously about boy-girl relationships but I think this is because there is much less flirting and therefore much less fun.

14. ‘Tha e ’falbh leatha.’

15. The social life of older women, when I was young, consisted mainly of visiting which was done on a large extensive scale. Women from a long distance would come to visit and gossip with each other. They never went to a cinema, a dance or any social gathering which would be condemned by the church. Which reminds of the great fun of dancing on the bridges to melodeon music. The minister used to come and break it up.

16. Caithris na h-oidhche. Can’t help as I had no experience of it. Those who went in for it always left the door open. I’ve never asked and as I am doing this in a hurry I don’t know. Now, I shall find out. There was a lady across the road from us and she had a night visitor for years. She married him eventually. The older people had done it themselves and conditioned it. I never heard it condemned. I think the tradition developed because there was nowhere for young folk to meet away from prying eyes. It was cold outside most of the time so it made sense to meet in the house. I’ve never heard of leabachas nor did my husband. We looked it up in Dwelly’s but were no wiser.

17. I think courting practices today lack subtlety. They seem to hop into bed too willingly and without the preliminaries of flirting.

V. Engagement and Marriage

1. My husband and I were close friends for three to four years before we became engaged. This was a deliberate decision not to get engaged until, we set the date of our wedding.

2. We did have a rèiteach. This was usually a week before the wedding and was a party for the two families to get to know each other.

3. A rèiteach was not to celebrate an engagement. We just celebrated on our own.

4. My husband came to Ness to ask permission to marry me. I had told my mother long before that and he had visited my home.

5. I think we were sort of secretive as if we were shy of folk knowing we were ‘Going together’. Afterwards we went everywhere together - and still do.

6. Our engagement lasted about 9 months until we had made our arrangements.

7. We never had any physical contact or shows of affection in public. In private anything short of the sexual act was permitted. I have Gàidhlig bardachd written by a relative where she states how thankful she is that the peats in the stack can’t talk!

8. It was a village wedding. Everyone in the village was invited and probably most of Tolsta. Each family provided a hen which the women plucked in a huge communal and merry gathering in an appointed house. The menu for the meal consisted of chicken soup cooked all over the village and chicken, potatoes and vegetables, can’t remember if there was a sweet, cakes and a piece of wedding cake - this would have been at the first sitting where relatives, family and close friends sat - it went on all night till everyone had been fed once. I think the drink was whisky and sherry - I think I was in university before I tasted wine. The young men of the village would supplement the beer provided for the all-night dance with casks in addition to what the bride’s and perhaps the groom’s family provided. The second night the same
partying went on at my husband’s home - for the older folk who couldn’t manage to come to Ness.
(See Maggie Anne’s song of the wedding.)
9. My mother was very involved in all the preparations but not my mother-in-law.
10. I remember the house marriage ceremony of many older than me. The minister would perform the ceremony in the ‘culaisd’ of the thatched house. Tables would be laid and the festivities began at once. I remember getting a real telling-off once when I came home from such a ‘do’ and told my parents off for not having me at their wedding as this couple had their children - no explanation, of course.
11. I seem to have covered this - Maggie Anne’s song is entitled ‘Banais Taighe’.
12. I don’t remember this happening to me but then we returned immediately to London.
13. I can’t remember - I liked my friends to have homes I/we could visit without the previous secrecy - I think part of that was an innate desire not to suffer the embarrassment of a ‘breaking-up’. This was just after the war when a lot of us were footloose and fancy free. Now young couples in Lewis, anyway, seem to commit themselves to one person much sooner than my generation would ream of. Recently my husband commented that most couples of our generation had lasting marriages. I think we had our ups and downs with boyfriends and girlfriends before we got too serious.
14. Only that we were invited out as couples whereas before marriage friends tried to be helpful pairing people off - Horrors.
15. This answers itself from the foregoing question - it was great to have all the restraints removed.
16. Rented accommodation, then a Police house, then we saved and bought our own .
17. I don’t think women of my generation were expected to stop working till they had children. We chose not to have children for the first four years of marriage, in fact I told my husband before we got married that I didn’t want children, but I had an ‘accident’ and my husband was so overjoyed that I decided to have one, which became four eventually. I would not have married anyone who wanted to me to stop work and stay at home. I would not want to be dictated to.
18. I think mothers should be real mothers for the first five years of a child’s life, if at all possible. Working childless wives are almost obligatory in my view. Why should they stay home and live on their husbands.
19. I never saw my parents kissing except when my father was in hospital. He was very affectionate towards her and brought her little presents and rarely addressed her other than as ‘dear’.

VI. Before Childbearing
1. I don’t think I knew anything beyond that the sexual act might make me pregnant. I think I was pregnant before I wondered where the baby was to come out of me. It had happened to millions before me so I assumed it would be painful but all right.
2. I’m sure that childbearing etc. must have been discussed by some. I wasn’t even vaguely interested nor were my close friends. We talked of boyfriends and of friends who were sleeping around. As I said before I told my future husband that I didn’t want to have children. He had agreed. I think we spoke less about things but flirted more with impunity as most of the boys we mixed with knew the boundaries. I think it was much more fun. Sex seems such an earnest preoccupation now. Yes, I know that older women talked about difficult confinements and I did vaguely wonder how
most of the large families in the village had this two-year age gap. I never thought of asking how it was managed.

3. There was a six-year gap between me and the sister nearest to me in age, by the time she went to school I was in secondary school. She and the next sister became nurses and would have learnt the facts of life that way - not from our mother. I never heard any myths - after all if you have any sense and live among animals you hear plenty talk about rams, cats, bulls etc. and deduce the rest.

4. The only birth control that I heard mentioned was that if you breastfed long enough that staved off another pregnancy. In a religious community any artificial means would be regarded with horror.

5. I discussed family planning with my husband early in marriage and did something about it.

6. Things have changed completely but not altogether for the better. I think there are natural stages in human development and the emphasis on sex among the young is morally and physically unhealthy. Children are being encouraged into sexual activity. It is more like an industry than a natural progression as one matures through friendships between the sexes and flirtations and then commitments.

7. Yes, in the past and in my own day. Just general conversation but I never recall that anyone was ostracized because of this. All my life I thought that it was highly unfair that illegitimate children and their children carried a label with them due to the Gaelic system of naming children by their previous generation e.g. Joan, daughter of Annie, daughter of Jessie - the female line denoting that there was a string of illegitimacy.

8. I have strayed into this question. I recall being with some student friends in a home in Ness. One of the number was smoking. The lady of the house appeared and told her off. The girl replied ‘But you are knitting for the illegitimate baby across the road.’ ‘Yes,’ was the reply, ‘But illegitimate babies have always been with us but smoking is a new sin!’ I often thought that those who condemned others sanctimoniously were the ones who knew how to avoid getting pregnant.

9. It seemed to me that women always condemned the girls - ‘they led them on!’

10. Men were treated more lightly because, for one thing, they could walk away from the consequences. And they often did. I don’t know if it was a case of expecting women to be more moral but expecting them to be more careful because it could ruin the rest of their lives. I think there is still an underlying attitude in society towards single mothers but now it seems they go into this state often and deliberately as there is so much advice available.

VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy

1. I didn’t know a thing about childbirth and pregnancy but having grown up in a society/community of large families and women being pregnant in the village all the time and animals giving birth, I just accepted it as natural and interesting once I was involved in it myself. I learnt at clinics to a certain extent.

2. I was given advice and support as above.

3. I thought that it was natural for married women to be pregnant when I was growing up.

4. Trom; Tha dùil aice ri duine beag; Bha duine beag aice.

5. Yes. We both thought it interesting and exciting. Talked with women I met at the clinic and with the lady doctor.
6. Exhausting. Horribly sick for the first three months. They didn’t offer anything to relieve this with my first three. Then life settled down to a waiting-game that seemed never ending.
7. Not till the very last days. Though the doctor said it was o.k. I decided to stop any sexual activity at least a month before my babies were born lest I should harm them.
8. My fourth child was a homebirth by preference. I enjoyed it. My family and friends were in shortly afterwards and we all thought it was great.
9. I had three hospital births. I haven’t got a pleasant memory of any of them. It was so disinterested and business-like in atmosphere. There was no friendly face and husbands were certainly neither wanted nor tolerated. Looking back I would hate to have my husband present at a birth. I think it would have destroyed some feeling of romance in our relationship.
10 and 11. I was in hospital the first time for fourteen days. A lot of time was spent in bed. Babies were in a ward for themselves and brought in for feeding. At home I was up and about in a few days. I remember hanging washing out at the end of a week - because the midwife told me off. But by then I was back to my normal routine as the oldest of four was still not of school age.
12. With the first baby I was tired and unsure of how to cope with someone so small. My sister who was a nurse moved to a London hospital beside me. She and her friends helped in every way. My mother came for the next one and my second nurse sister came to London for the third.
13. Not to me.
14. I never even in my heart expressed a preference for either sex - I had two of each. No one connected with me expressed a preference.
15. My husband was supportive in every way.
16. I can’t think that I changed in any way except that I found it hard to be sort of cut off from my usual adult company and from the routine of work which I loved - as a Braillist with the Nat. Lib. for the Blind. I thought my brain was dying - got a babysitter and went to lots of evening classes.
17. I remember my mother having my youngest sister at home. All her eight children were home pregnancies - there were no maternity wards then - birth was regarded as natural and just too bad when things went wrong. I recall quite a few deaths of mothers and babies. I remember the nurse being in most days before the birth. Lots and lots of hot water were required. Every home had big basins and ewers. Looking back I feel so sorry for the lack of privacy the women had for washing etc. at such times. I recall the joy in the home but also the amount of work that fell on myself as a 13 year old. My mother always had a young girl from the village to help her. We called these girls servants but they were more like a cross between au pairs and slaves. They worked all hours for their food and a little money - when one left another came to ask to be taken on - they remained our friends all our lives - there was no Social Security and no work then.
18. In England I heard of the churching of young mothers but not in Scottish churches. The only ‘kirk’ing’ in Lewis was on the first occasion that a married couple went to church together along with bridesmaids and bestman.
19. Same way as now, everyone who called had a drink and something nice to eat.
20. Joan MacDonald has my father’s name and both our mothers’ surname. Iain is named after John’s father; Anne after my mother and Donald Finlay after an unmarried uncle of each side. That was typical in perpetuating the family names.
21. A traumatic time. The first Free Church minister in London, Rev. Hector Cameron, refused to baptize Joan because we weren’t church members; same with
Ian 15 moths later. He was a friend of ours but had decided on this point of principle. Finally he offered to baptize them but I refused to take them to church. They were baptized at home with all our friends present. My dear mother-in-law heard of the refusal with, ‘Well, I don’t know why they refused you but I know there’s nothing John’s background to cause that.’ So much for faith. She attached great value to baptism and couldn’t understand my attitude that they wouldn’t suffer eternal harm.

3X. WILLINA (See 4K)

[Willina is a friend of one of my aunts and expressed a willingness to participate in the research having heard about it informally.]

Marital status Wife Date of birth 25.10.36
Birthplace Harris
List all the places in which you lived, in chronological order, and give the length of time that you stayed there.
Harris, 17 years, Northamptonshire, 4 yrs; Glenaffric, Cannich, 2 yrs; East Lothian, 2 years; Glenisla, Perthshire, 30 yrs; now retired and living near Dunkeld.
Father’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1903, Harris
Mother’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1911, Harris
Parents’ occupations Joiner and housewife
Sisters/brothers and their d.o.b.s 4 sisters, 5 brothers; third in family, one older sister and brother
How old were you when you left school? 15 years
What did you do directly after you left school? Stayed at home to help mother with all the work.
Please list the jobs which you have had and the areas in which you worked.
Housemaid, etc., Northamptonshire; waitressing, Inverness-shire and east Lothian.
Age at marriage 23 years, 7 mths.
Husband’s d.o.b. and place of origin 1927
Husband’s occupation Farm manager
Total number of children you have ever borne 3
Are any of your children married? Two
Do you have any grandchildren? Two
Religion: how would you describe yourself? Free Presbyterian
Parents’ religion Free Presbyterian
Husband’s religion Church of Scotland. All Christians I hope.

I. Language
1. Yes. 2. No. 3. Yes. 4. Husband has been learning for the last three years in the winters.

II. Family and Household
1. Sometimes seven, eight, or? Some away to school in Inverness at 12 years, before younger ones born. We had our own house.
2. After marriage in 1960 only my husband and I lived in our house, after six years, we had an aunt of my husband’s for eight years living with us - due to advanced years and not wanting her to be in a home.
3. Can’t say.

III. Growing up
1. Memories of childhood, long hot summers, working our hay with parents, beautiful warm sands and seas to wade in. Games playing at houses with bits of broken china and village girls at each others’ places. I don’t know if they were important people, but we looked up to the minister, school teachers, doctors, etc. etc. Work in the house fetching water from the well and filling up the white enamel buckets lined up at the end of the house, bags of peat, and as we got older scrubbing floors, polishing brass door knobs, windows, dishes, you name it, boiled the water on fuel fires and took all the waste water outside to get rid of it. School at five for me was in the mission house at Seilabost, school in one half and service on the Sabbath in the other. Fuel fire in the middle of the room - cocoa and two slices of white bread and jam at lunch time for those who had school lunches. We (our family) ran home barefoot all summer across the sands and a burn.
2. Mother was a very, very hard working lady, long hours, little sleep, but a happy, happy home, lots of laughs. We had a good relationship with parents because I think they trusted us - once they taught us right from wrong it was up to us then. Once we left home we were treated as mature folk, when we returned home on our first holiday!
3. Relationship with father likewise - but corporal punishment was dished out by father.
4. Husbands and wives were very close and happy and not in any sloppy way.
5. We were all a very close family, as we had twenty aunts and uncles on average and ended up with sixty-one first cousins, everyone knew each other and still do. I just remember my mother’s mother, but I do remember my father’s father very well, small man, white hair and moustache, ex-navy 1st war.
6. Father was head of the household, and had the say in most things - at least he hoped so. I think the case in most families.
7. Both disciplined us, very much so.
8. By both parents. Church twice on Sunday, Sunday school 3 p.m., family worship morning and evening, grace before and after meals. Morning prayers at school plus reading a chapter, right up till leaving school.
9. I would say that girls had the harder job at home - although the boys were taught to cut peats, cut hay and corn, tie it, plus, plus.
10. Yes, boys were given what chance parents could give - girls were just for housework, cleaning, ironing, etc., fit for the sink and bearing children.
11. No.
12. Only that life had to be easier than the island life - with some labour gadgets - all of which are now in use in every island home.
13. I wanted to leave the island, work on the mainland, after that came love, marriage and children. Most girls in my class did likewise and we could do any domestic work as long as we were safe and in good households.
14. At school girls played with girls and boys with their own kind.
15. I suppose mother’s life was slightly better than her mother’s life - because cash was available, that gave better diet, clothes, furniture, etc. etc.
16. Women and girls worked on a par with the men folk, each helping each other to get a job done, be that working at seaweed, planting potatoes, dipping sheep, slipping sheep or whatever. In our house a lot of work had to be done on Saturday (my father being away working during the week), cows, sheep, etc., to be seen to.

IV. Early Adulthood
1. Teenage years were spent at school, homework with paraffin lamps, overcrowded home at times, not much peace for anything, read what you managed to lay your hands on. Worked in the house as much as was required of us, ironing, cleaning, etc. Enjoyed it in parts, happy times and frustrated times as well.
2. A lot of help, both indoors and outside, milk cows, make butter and onto baking, etc., etc., as got older.
3. Relationship with parents was good, as we had to accept the rules of the house and if we did not then we had to accept the flak. We did rebel at times, but we were away from home and parents at about seventeen.
4. Spare time was spent visiting ceilidh houses with your knitting, knitting socks or whatever for your mother to sell for cash to help make ends meet. If you were lucky and had spare money maybe you would get to see the Film Guild Van when it arrived on the island for its monthly visit.
5. Boys and girls were always in groups. I had my first boyfriend at 16. Other girls were not as forward as I was.
6. A lot.
7. Not much.
8. Mostly about the Sabbath day and what we could and could not do. I don’t think the Good Lord would have worried too much if we washed the dinner dishes or not!
9. The Church shaped all of our lives in my time and young folk had to accept it. No ifs or buts.
10. 15 years or before.
11. About that age and parents gave you a dash good talking to. On your head be it, was the usual saying.
12a. Yes. b. Yes.
13. Courting was kept a secret if possible for a good time. Older folk were very happy for younger couples as long as the romance was on a strong footing.
14. Clic or suiridhe.
15. Unmarried relatives stayed that way because of the duty of looking after older parents and managed some part time work either in schools or domestic. b. No.
16. No, no, no.
Yes. Caithris na h-oidhche came about in my mother’s generation because young couples had only the byre or hayshed to do courting in or behind the peatstack. No. No.
17. Much the same apart from the pubs.

V. Engagement and Marriage
1. In some cases a long time especially if the girlfriend had to look after her elderly parents - some like my mother and numerous ones of her generation never had an engagement ring.
2. No I did not. Yes, I attended my first réiteach in 1946 or ’45. My aunt at Collan, east Harris to my uncle Ewen, Ardve, Stockinsh (my father’s sister and my mother’s brother). I was about 9 years.
3. I cannot remember any other way in which engagements were marked. Remember a *réiteach* was not to mark an engagement. It was (how can I put it) a duel when the groom’s friends set out on foot in those days for the bride-to-be’s house for the do and had to persuade her side and her father that the groom was a suitable husband-to-be - a lot of stories, chat, etc., then the spread of food, drink (which I remember my father concocting when drink was so dear and money scarce).

4. Yes.

5. No, behaved as before with no outward displays.

6. My own was 6 weeks.

7. Very little. It was not the done thing.

8. My own wedding was in Edinburgh, seen to and paid for by ourselves. Other folk in Harris, I’ll answer in q.11.

9. My mother-in-law and father-in-law were both dead.

10. A lot.

11. Yes numerous. *Banais taighe* our village worked very hard for two days before the *banais*, every household produced hens, cockerels and three or four wedder lambs (about 18 months - 2 years old). My mother and all the women, plucked, made soup, baked and set out food for sometimes 100 - all sitting down to three courses, while the bride and groom and best man and bridesmaid sat at the top of the table all night and right until morning, while the other rooms and outside were occupied by singing men and women and sometimes fiddle and bagpipes. *Banais* usually finished around 7a.m.

12. No, I don’t think so and I can’t think it has happened to us.

13. The folk I care very much about have not and will not change even if married, we are both in touch with all our friends and families.

14. Social life always changes, in place of gadding about comes home responsibilities, babies, etc., etc.

15. As above, and milking cows, feeding hens, working from 6.30 a.m. till bed time, cooking, cleaning, etc., but my relationship cemented a lot more - try to keep the romance in your married life.

16. When we first married we lived in a bungalow in East Lothian - comfortable, bright, warm, beside the sea. This was a tied house.

17. I don’t think women were expected to give up work and have children, even in ’60s it was our choice.

18. My opinion has not changed and I still think that mothers should be at home with their babies at least until they are at school - by that I mean a normal family unit where the father is the breadwinner.

19. Yes, in more ways than one.

**VI. Before Childbearing**

1. We learnt everything about life on the croft where calves came from and lambs. The bull belonged to the township so all our cows had to taken on a trip to be served!! Being the third oldest of ten, I was with my mother on three births.

2. Not in any detail - can’t think they ever had much time for such discussions.

3. As q.1. No myth. Real facts.

4. No, but I am sure they knew about the monthly cycle.

5. Yes, with my own husband.

6. I don’t know how things have changed, but I consider far too much is talked about it.
7. Yes, plenty. Heard about it when the girls arrived home from the mainland with ‘a bun in her oven’, or the older folk were very quick at noticing a change of colour etc. on a young lady. We were taught plenty signs.
8. Mostly with love and understanding; sometimes the church was very hard on young unmarried mothers. *Troimh* [sic; i.e. *trom*].
9. Yes - the female.
10a. Most certainly.
b. Yes, they were.
c. Yes, I do. (‘Keep you hands on your 1/2p.’ ‘Keep your legs crossed!!’)

**VII. Childbirth and Pregnancy**

1. A lot, learnt by our living in a close family environment and close to nature. Not a subject talked about a lot.
2. Not me, and I did not wish to know a thing before giving birth. I had seen it all and heard it before in our own home.
3a. Yes, my mother at 46 years old. b. Not a lot - felt like castrating my father.
5. Not a lot - it is not an illness. Nor much in Harris where I was born, they were too busy getting on with their work from morn till night.
6. Plain sailing.
7. What are normal activities? If you mean daily work, I was on the go, cleaning, cooking, etc. etc. till I left for the hospital seeing that food in the freezer, washing, etc. was up to date.
8. No.
9. All 3. One in Haddington, one in Alyth, one in Blaigmowie - all went fine.
10. I got home from hospital and got on with the job where I left off.
11. Immediately.
12. I'm sure I was adjusted long before I had mine. I had no one with me and no washing machines or whatever.
13. No.
14. Never, as long as they were whole, fit and healthy I did not mind.
15. As supportive as they usually are.
16a) No change. b) Never noticed. c) Can’t say I noticed any change in anyone.
17. Plenty of my mother’s age. Masses of good clean linen, plenty boiling water, masses of baby clothes, basque for umbilical cord tightened round the baby’s waist - a long barrie, long nightie, jackets, tiny nappies, muslin nappies, etc., etc. District nurse in attendance from first contractions till birth. My father ready and willing to remove from the nurse all bloody matters and afterbirths and bury same. Nurse away home and house returned to normal, mum in bed and baby sleeping soundly by the side in a cradle. Breast fed.
18. No, never.
19. The whole village and all the relations started arriving over the next month, during the day and at night to see the newly born and mum. Tea cakes, pancakes and the usual glass of port or sherry was dispensed.
20. In Harris, after all grandparents, then dead uncles and aunts, and finally if they had ten like us favourite great aunts! We gave the boys names we liked, to the disgust of my parents.
21. My boys were all baptised in the Church of Scotland, in East Lothian and two in Glenisla, celebrated with a glass of something after the service. As we were members and regular attenders we had no worries. Baptisms in Harris are a bit different.
Extracts from letters with correspondents who had answered the Questionnaire (Appendices 2 and 3), with questions I had asked in them in writing given in italics. Most of these letters were exchanged between myself and informants in the summer of 1996. For biographical data on informants, see relevant section of Appendix 3.

4A. ANNIE (See 3B)

1. What sort of relationships have you had with your children, and how was this different to your husband's?
I suppose the relationships I had with my children were stormy at times - especially as teenagers - when they were anxious to break away. Living on an island children are fairly sheltered, not streetwise. They always knew who the bad guys were and who they should avoid. So did we. My husband saw his children in a different way. He had more patience and they never really showed their awkward side to him - they never wanted to upset him. He was never a bully and never avoided his responsibilities. What I'm trying to say is children need stability, a role model - hopefully they found it. Yes, we are friends, well, I think we are. They seek us out more than we seek them. But that could be out of duty. Hopefully not.

2. What expectations do you remember having for each of your children as they were growing into adults?
Well, I wanted them to stay on at school, get those important qualifications. He wanted them to be fulfilled and happy, whether street-cleaning or whatever.

3. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?
Well, money was scarce, so not many new clothes, but I stayed slim, fortunately, and that helps to maintain appearances.

4. How old were you when you first became a grandmother and has it changed the way you see yourself in any respects?
Forty-one. No.

5. What differences did you notice in the relations between the sexes and in how they shared work and social life in London and Lewis and Orkney?
What adjustments did you have to make in how you thought or acted when you moved to a new community?
This is difficult. My father liked cooking so he cooked. I don't know much about other men although I seem to remember uncles helping in the kitchen. In Lewis - there was man's work and woman's work - on the whole I think maybe men were better off. Women also did a share of crofting, working on the crofts, cutting peats, looking after children and men. Women worked hard. In Orkney, couples seemed to share more, go out together more. But times are changing everywhere - women are more equal. In Lewis if a man drank the woman was always there for the children, always maintained a background, and if the man reformed as they frequently did - i.e. got
religion, the home was always there. I’ve heard it’s a different story now. Women also drink. Moving to Orkney was difficult. I loved Lewis and Lewis people. But Orcadians made us welcome. We learned never to criticize and always appreciate - and there’s much to like.

6. What new skills did you have to learn when you moved to the islands? None.

7. How were decisions made about domestic matters and your children? How did you and your husband share family responsibilities and tasks? For example, who dealt with discipline?
I like to think we shared.

8. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today? What changes have you witnessed in the islands in the relations between the sexes, and is the situation much different from the general one on the mainland? I think in some ways women are much better off - not the fearful pressure of having to get married, scared to be ‘left on the shelf’. But I don’t honestly see how a woman can do a full-time job and look after children, husband and home. She feels guilty whatever decision to make.

9. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?
I don’t know. I please myself.

10. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?
We’ve had them all a) death of my father, which improved our lives as we left London and bombs and went to live with a beloved sister in Lewis - Heaven!; b) surviving the war; c) getting married, having children. Learning to accept them as they are and NOT as I wanted them to be - a hard lesson but a good one; d) the death of a grandchild; e) my mother at 87 deciding to move out and go it alone after living with us for 39 years. That was and still is a wonderful, delightful memory; f) we’ve had suicide in the family - a brother-in-law - what a sad waste; g) death of my sister; h) passing my driving test; i) having some poems published.

11. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?
In Lewis only men went to the actual funeral at the graveside. When we lived there death seemed very dramatic. Wakes, coffin kept in house until funeral, more open expression of grief - which is maybe healthier. I don’t know. A great many widows wore black for years. However that’s passing.
In Orkney, coffin is put in church so it never returns to the house. Women go to the graveside.
In Lewis there’s a long procession of men all taking turns in carrying the coffin. In Orkney coffin goes to the hearse from church and there’s a service at the graveside. Grief is the same, sad and often bitter, depends on age.

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Maybe, although I don’t know, the Celts are more dramatic and could be inclined to enjoy wallowing but, as I said, open expression of grief could be healthier.

12. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?
(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch
a. Tough, macho, butch, muscles, strength.
b. Dainty, Laura Ashley, flowing scarves, pink, gentleness, willowy, pretty china, frilly lampshades.
c. An old woman dressed in black.
d. An old man, black capped. (Actually it’s what our kids call us!)
e. Caring person.
f. Same as e.
g. Same as f.
h. Ugly word, dry, unhappy, school marmish.
i. Carefree.
j. Tall, pointed hat, pointed nose, black cat, cunning, Halloween, creepy fun.

13. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?
Apart from giving birth, no.

14. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?
I was always aware there could be drunken violence in the islands, i.e. what is reported in the press.
I have only just discovered there are safe houses for women in Stromness which on the surface is a very peaceful place.

15. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community?
Women are playing a big part in the religious and spiritual life in Orkney. We have many very good women ministers and elders - this is a fairly recent development. Men on the whole seem a bit effete - especially some ministers.
I think in Lewis women are more in the background - as far as I know, no women ministers or church elders.

16. What relations did you have with other married or unmarried women once you were bringing up a family? Where would you meet, spend time together, and what sort of things would you talk about?
I had plenty of married and unmarried friends - met in each others’ houses, we talked about everything and everybody.

17. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands?
I honestly don’t know the answer to this question. I suppose it depends on the ability, health and outlook of the person. One person comes to mind, my husband’s unmarried aunt - she was a real terror. Thank goodness being unmarried is no longer a stigma.
1. What sort of relationships have you had with your children, and how was this different to your husband’s?
I had a very loveable relationship with my children. The relationship with my husband was respect and love.

2. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?
No, I did not change my appearance in any way when I married.

3. How were decisions made about domestic matters and your children? How did you and your husband share family responsibilities and tasks. For example, who dealt with discipline?
Decisions were made between the two of us, also the same regarding the children’s welfare. We both shared the family responsibilities and my husband dealt more with discipline.

4. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?
Women today are more independent than years ago. Women years ago were kept down and their duty was to be at home for husband and children. The relations between both sexes are the same. Maybe long ago the island folk were not so open with one another.

5. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?
Respect is shown very much as one gets older. Neighbours and relations are very supportive.

6. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?
The worst event that effected me in my life was the loss of a baby boy. Lived for 36 hours. It’s very sad when someone tells you your baby had died.

7. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?
No, in our young days we were not aware of any violence in the islands. The community did not need to deal with it.

8. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?
Depends on the relationship of the deceased. Men and women in the islands are more reserved. They [women] show their grief more.
9. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community?
I believe that women have to play in the spiritual health of the island community by teaching the children in the home from knee high and to know what’s good or bad.

10. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands?
The single older people are treated just the same as the married ones. No difference.

11. Was there any idea of what it meant to be feminine when you were growing up, and was there much pressure to conform to this? How was this expressed to you?
No pressure put on us growing up. Just to respect people and no blemish on our character.

12. Why do you think some people felt it was better to have a boy than a girl? Did both men and women have such opinions?
I never felt that way. Some like boys [better] to girls. I don’t think men felt that way. Once the baby was born I think it was forgotten.

13. Could you tell me more about your own réiteach and other people’s ones?
 Everybody at our réiteach had a good time something like a wedding but on a small scale. Plenty of stories and laughs from old characters. Plenty drinks and dancing well into the morning. We never felt tired or bored.

14. As a nurse, did you attend many home births and what do you remember about these?
No, I did not work in the community but in the hospital. We had many good laughs with the mums to be.

4C. CATHERINE (See 3F)

1. What sort of relationships have you had with your children, and did you husband have with them? Would you say that you are also friends with any of your children? Did you ever miss having more female company, especially as you had grown up with sisters?
I had a good relationship with my sons. There were ups and downs, of course. Some of them did not like my politics - they were either Liberal or Tory or nothing at all. One of them said recently, ‘I knew I could always come to you if I were in trouble.’ My husband was very good with the boys when they were small, entered into their fanciful world. He was not so good when they were teenagers, a hard taskmaster to those who worked at home. It is not uncommon with farmers to be jealous of the young growing up. I am still on friendly terms with them. Three live on Skye and the rest have scattered but come home from time to time.
No, I never missed female companionship although I was glad to visit my sisters.

2. How old were you when you first became a grandmother and has it changed the way you see yourself in any respects?
I was fifty-one when I became a grandmother. I had never thought about it but then I
harboured a fear that I would not get on with them. I am not demonstrative and some
thought that I did not like children. I was suitably dashed and was afraid they would
not like me. In the event we did get on very well. I did not have to entertain them.
They joined in with whatever I was doing, baking, churning, milking cows and
driving them to the hill. There was always the swing and pushes, rigorously adhered
to and turn about. Later we explored the burns together and bathed in a pool. It all
gave my heart another youth. It was a happy time. They are mostly married and away
now but some still write or visit.

3. What differences did you notice in the relations between the sexes in the various
places you have lived?
What adjustments did you have to make in how you thought or acted?
I did not make any adjustments.

4. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they
lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?
I don’t know. There are advantages and disadvantages. I am glad that jobs are open
to women and that they can use their talents but the idea that children, housework,
home making are looked on as inferior employment saddens me. I think mothers
should be close to their children at least until they are five and preferably longer. Of
course I understand that arrangements can be made so that the child is not neglected
but I also feel that the mother misses a great deal of the child’s development if she is
busy with outside work. What I think is unfair is the way daughters rely on their
mothers for childcare.

5. How were decisions made about domestic matters and your children? How did
you and your husband share family responsibilities and tasks. For example, who
dealt with discipline?
To begin with my husband and I agreed pretty well over domestic matters and the
children. I allowed myself to be exploited and did not insist on a fairer share of
duties.

6. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring
to your mind?
(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g)
father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch
a. Fascination, exploitation.
b. Comfort, understanding.
c. One who has battled through.
d. One who rests on his oars.
e. Kindness.
f. Kindness and goodness.
g. Fascinating but not to be trusted.
h. An old fashioned term, often a strong willed woman.
i. Afraid of strong emotions and swimming in an emotional sea.
j. A woman with insight.

7. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals
in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?
As men are supernumeraries at birth, to make up they have taken over funerals. Of course when it was a question of having to carry a coffin for miles they were most suited. No, I don’t expect that they suffer grief differently. Perhaps women give way more openly, men tend to bury theirs.

8. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?
Yes, of course, women are not as physically strong as men. It was perhaps more so in times past. Men rowed in storms and bad weather. Now there are outboard engines that women can manage. Men ploughed, cut peats which women threw out.

9. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?
There probably was domestic violence but it was seldom publicised.

10. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community?
In a way women were not so much dominated by thoughts of eternal punishment, more concerned about the next meal and where it was to come from, but elderly women could become quite fanatic and follow preachers from place to place and the more hellfire the better. That applies more to the past than the present day.

11. How did becoming a widow change your life in the community and how you see your relations with other people? Has it changed your relationships with your sons? With other married women and widows?
No, I don’t think becoming a widow has changed my relationships with my sons. I began by interfering too much but realised my mistake and left it to themselves and the wives to steer their own canoe. I remember people were surprised that being a grandmother I could still swim.

12. What roles have there been for older single people in Skye crofting and fishing communities, especially before the last decade or so?
Single women were almost as good as a man in looking after stock or croft. Many were hardy and kept going very well. They took their part in fanks and helped in potato planting etc.

4D. DOLINA (See 3H)

1. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?
No, I didn’t change my appearance. There was no reason to do so.

2. How were decisions made about domestic matters?
We discussed things between us e.g. buying items for the house or hols or decorating, but the main money matters my husband controlled.
3. Do you feel the society puts pressure, and, indeed, expects, married couples to have children? Did you ever come up against this yourself? I haven’t come across anyone who complained of being pressurised to have children.

4. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today? What changes have you witnessed in the islands in the relations between the sexes, and is the situation much different from the general one on the mainland? Women have never had it so good, so many careers open to them and the chance of top posts. All very well if one is single, but it can put a strain on marriage. Children also suffer, left to nannies and helpers and only seeing their mother at weekends. The changes in the islands are the same as on the mainland. Young people take on heavy mortgages with the result that the wife has to work, and when they start a family the onus of bringing them up is left to the grandmother.

5. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life? As she grows older she has to or is expected to keep to the straight and narrow. Attendances at concerts and ceilidhs are out. This is not the case in some villages, they are able to be more outgoing.

6. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories? I spent 3½ years in the W.A.A.F.S. and for two of those years the War was still on and I found it quite a strain travelling home from the south of Devon. Life was hard but we had good times too. The training I got in the R.A.F. hospital was excellent and prepared me for further training on my discharge. Family bereavement and especially the unexpected death of my husband changed my life.

7. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?
   (a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch
   a. A manly-looking man. Nothing to do with stature. I’ve met six-footers who were decidedly effeminate.
   c. An old woman dressed in black.
   d. An old man with a long beard smoking a pipe (your great-grandfather).
   e. The village nurse comes to mind and of course babies.
   f. Home. Hot meals to come home to, baking, lessons on knitting.
   g. The boss. Returning from fishing with a good catch which was then distributed to known invalids round about. Story-telling.
   h. N.a.

15. As a nurse, did you attend many home births and what do you remember about these? As a midwife in training I had to deliver 15 babies in district but that was greatly added to before any time was up. The difference in housing was what amazed me most. It was after the War and housing was scarce. Many couples lived in one room in their parent’s home - there was hardly room to turn around and only the bare
necessities to work with. The next could be a villa, beautifully appointed and the very best in readiness for the new baby. Some houses were really filthy and others, although there wasn’t much in the way of furniture or flooring, were well scrubbed and clean - the woman probably doing so before our arrival.

16. Can you imagine what your life would have been like had you not made a career for yourself? Probably in hotel work or domestic service like so many others from the islands. Hopefully I would have got married.

17. What do you remember about réitichean you attended? Do you recall any verbal contests or playing between people? I have only been to one réiteach and that was your great aunt Oighrig Bheag’s. Both families were present and close neighbours. The table was set, but I can’t remember what there was to eat. The ladies got a glass of fion [wine] and someone was singing. Going up to town to give notice of their forthcoming marriage was the first time the couple were seen together. They celebrated the occasion by having a family party at the bride’s home. The War years put an end to all that and wedding receptions in hotels became the norm.

18. Can you remember your own or a sister’s first period? Were there any beliefs about menstruation that might have been passed around, such as old superstitions about not bathing or not letting menstruating women handle other people’s food in many Scottish communities? I was living in the girls’ hostel at the time, surrounded by girls, 13-18 yr olds, so we had an idea what to expect. There was always one with period pains! I was given a packet of S.T.s with no explanation a year before they were needed. I hadn’t heard of those superstitions myself but I’m sure they existed. I know that after we washed our hair we daren’t leave the fireside until it was dry for if one got a cold in the head one was prone to all sorts of ills.

4E. ISHBEL (See 3K)

1. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today? What changes have you witnessed in the islands in the relations between the sexes, and is the situation much different from the general one on the mainland? The range of choices for women today are very good. What is bad about it is that women today have their priorities wrong. For example if women are career oriented, they should give up the idea of marriage until the time come when they are ready to give up their career for marriage and childrearing. It is very sad to see babies and young children handed over to childminders and others while the parents go out to work. If a child is not worth this sacrifice (and of course it should be no sacrifice) then they should not have this child. What is good about the situation today is all the mod cons making life so much easier than it was for our parents and grandparents.
The greatest change in the relationship between the sexes is openness and sad to say freedom. So called women today especially if they are in employment think they are entitled to a ‘night out’. And this includes socialising with whoever, the socialising leads on to relationships, and the relationships lead on to broken marriages. The islands, alas, are no different to the mainland.

2. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?
I don’t know if society’s expectation of women does alter. I suppose one would expect more wisdom, and in one Gaelic word tür [sense, understanding, sagacity], from an older person.

3. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?
I consider my life to have been pretty uneventful. The loss of parents leave one with strong memories, losing a father at the age of thirteen left its mark. Conversion and making a public confession of my faith of course is a wonderful event in anyone’s life. Going to the Nicolson Institute was a big thing in those days and one felt some pride in achieving this.
Being a midwife certainly has left me with strong and very happy memories, a joyous period in my life.

4. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?
(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch
a. A real man, e.g. as to physique, strength of character, etc.
b. A Victorian lady - pretty, frilly, well groomed, gentle.
c. Cailleach brings to mind an image of the old ladies I knew clothed in black with the skirts pleated and down to their ankles, maybe with a shawl over their shoulders and their heads covered either with a beannag or a knitted curac, sitting at the side of the fireplace, and always with a welcoming smile of their face.
d. The bodach something similar, with cap, pipe and braces showing. The beards had gone before my time.
e. The nurse. It is the district nurse of long ago that springs to mind. Ever busy, ever cheerful and always pretty with lovely skin. An important person in those days.
f. Mother was the one who was always there and if she wasn’t the question was asked where is mother? The one that loved, and saw to our needs, the one who comforted. Mother makes the home what it should be - a haven.
g. Father is the one who makes the rules and expects them to be carried out. A divided household does not make for good enrichment in bringing up children. father was the provider or was in former times.
h. Spinster was the one who gave up employment albeit prematurely to look after elderly parents and some even sacrificed marriage for this. The unmarried one was expected by the rest of the family to care for the parents.
i. Bachelor - the man who spent his life at sea, maybe, and who is shyer in his position.
j. Witch - an evil character, whom the Bible condemns.
5. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other? There are not many things nowadays that either cannot do because of equal opportunities, or so they would like to think. I am very glad that the male midwife never caught on although it was tried. That is certainly natural to the woman.

6. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it, if at all? If there was domestic violence in years gone by it was kept within the family. I don’t think it as there. Today drink and drugs are the bottom of it, in those days drugs were unheard of and the money was not there for drink. It was not a problem.

7. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways? Women of course do not take part in funerals in the islands apart from attending the funeral service. We are told in the Bible to mourn with them that mourn. Mainlanders find our funeral processions very impressive and sober. And long may that continue. Yes, I believe that we experience grief in a different way and again our beliefs come to play here. Of course there is the natural loss but those who do not believe in an afterlife are not going to mourn like those who do. There is mourning indeed for someone who has led a careless life and went to the grave unprepared. What of the soul?

8. Men often share stories of when and how they became born again, but I’m not so aware of women doing that. Do women describe this to one another, and do you think that typically women’s experiences of being born again and professing are different to most men’s? If so, why do you think that is? Women also share their converting experiences with one another and also with men. Like in most things, we can confide better with some, even among christians, than with others. We can follow the experience of some and not of others. the Lord has different ways of bringing souls to Christ but the end result is the same, closing in with Christ and here all christians must meet. Being born again does not differ between man and woman. Where duties are expected of the man, i.e. public duties, which are not expected of the woman as laid down in the Bible. What is true of society today - equal opportunities - is creeping into the church as well now.

9. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community? Is there anything else women could give to the churches in terms of being part of their organisation? If you mean by women, christian women, I would refer you to 1st Timothy ch.2 v.9-13 then ch.3 v.11. We are also told not to be busybodies in other men’s or other people’s lives. What we can do as christians and what would go a long way to having a healthy and spiritual environment is prayer - private secret prayer for our families, friends, acquaintances and worldwide.

10. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands, compared to married people and their part in the community? Do you think married and single women have different relations with the various people in a village and were you ever aware of being treated in a particular way because you had chosen to stay single?
I don’t think the roles of single and married women differed in any way. Be it in relation to elderly parents or young children, the role consisted of housework, feeding, baking, etc.

More is expected of the single woman albeit she is in full time employment. She is the one who has to work at keeping up friendships, she is the one who supposedly has more spare time for visiting. I loved visiting and did not find this a chore at all and because I did I formed very close and precious relationships with other christians in the village and not so old.

I was not aware of being treated differently because I was single. I did not choose to stay single. We do not choose these things. Our Creator has laid out a plan for each one of us and whatever happens in our lives, the dark threads as well as the golden, is necessary and is according to that pattern and all will blend at last.

I did not choose to stay single until this time in my life. I was as keen on marriage as the next person but I could not put into the plan what wasn’t there and neither could I, nor can I, take anything out of it. ‘God hath ordained whatsoever comes to pass.’

11. Was there any idea of what it meant to be feminine when you were growing up, and was there much pressure to conform to this? How was this expressed to you?

To be feminine was, as I mentioned earlier, very much to do with attire. Wearing of trousers was most certainly frowned upon as being first and foremost unscriptural, and then uncomely for a woman to wear man’s attire. Then the teaching of the Bible was preached to us. I can remember the first girl I saw in slacks and she was thought of as an undesirable character, brazen, etc.

12. As a nurse, did you attend many home births and what do you remember about these?

As part of my midwifery training I had to have a certain amount of home confinements and always with an experienced midwife. This was in the east end of Greenock, a deprived area then. I remember they were mostly R.C.s and the homes were poor. The cases always seemed to come in the middle of the night! But as far as I can remember they were all uneventful. When the district in Wick I twisted the G.P.’s arm to let me have one home confinement. The mother was keen to stay at home, she had one previous child. I suppose I was apprehensive, so much can go wrong, but all went well and James arrived safely.

13. Can you imagine what your life would have been like if you had not made a career for yourself?

Putting aside the plan in one’s lives I mentioned earlier, no, I can’t imagine what life would have been like. If I had got married, I doubt if I would have been looking forward today to my wedding day. Marriage was something I had always hoped would happen (and I am talking now about former rather than latter years) therefore my career was no deterrent. I would gladly have given that up for marriage and family.

14. Can you remember your own or a sister’s first period? Were there any beliefs about menstruation that might have been passed around, such as old superstitions about not bathing or not letting menstruating women handle other people’s food in many Scottish communities?

I can well remember my first period. Apart from talking about it amongst friends, nothing was explained to me by my mother or sisters. We weren’t aware of any
beliefs of superstitions regarding it. What was happening or why is was happening we were ignorant of, only that it happened. But if I was ever thereafter feeling under the weather my mother would ask if my periods were alright and that was about it.

15. Do you think being active in the church has also been important to you as a way of getting to know people you would otherwise not have come into much contact with?
We have often spoken in church circles regarding this fact that we would be unknown to one another if it wasn’t for the Gospel and our meetings together in connection with it. Communion seasons are precious seasons when we gather together to commemorate the death of our Lord, renew old acquaintances and make new ones. I have met lovely people and have made lasting friendships in this way, not only in the islands but also on the mainland. And Fiona it is a life to be recommended where real joy is to be experienced.

4F. KATY-ANN (See 3M)

1. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?
YES! I used to have long hair, use eyeshadow and mascara, etc. and wear everything from bell-bottoms to mini-skirts. Once I married in Scalpay, I stopped using make-up, cut my hair and dressed less trendily. This wasn’t my husband’s doing. The community at large frowned upon anything ‘trendy’ - especially for married women. I remember my brother-in-law commenting unfavourably on the colour of my tights! I soon learned to conform if only to avoid hurtful comments. It wasn’t just grown women who had to conform. One of my husband’s nieces who had just moved from Raasay to Scalpay was given a talking-to by the Rev. James Morrison because she was wearing trousers. The niece was about 10 at the time and the incident upset her. The Rev. Morrison was on holiday in Scalpay at the time.
I’m glad to say Scalpay in the 90s is much improved on Scalpay in the 70s. I was over there at a ‘do’ recently and the girls’ and women’s fashions were very trendy. A lot of women my age dye their hair too - they’d have been tarred and feathered if they’d tried that in the early 70s.

2. How were decisions made about domestic matters and your children? How did you and your husband share family responsibilities and tasks. For example, who dealt with discipline?
I’m a bossy boots so most people outside the immediate family think I initiate all the decisions affecting the home and family. I think a lot of families in the islands give this impression to outsiders but really the menfolk in their own quiet – and often stubborn – way have as much to do with family decisions as the women. In our house, I look after the inside, my husband the outside, the cars and the garden.

3. Was there any idea of what it meant to be feminine when you were growing up, and was there much pressure to conform to this? How was this expressed to you?
Being ‘feminine’ had to do with your appearance or behaviour and your ‘duties’. My sister and I, and most of our friends, were prodded and coached by parents, relatives
and close neighbours towards the 'ideal'. I don’t think any of us reached it even when we were young and were willing to be shaped. The glorious little rebellions of the late teens put paid to all their efforts in the superficial matters like dress, hairstyle, language, etc. Our parents’ idea of being feminine was mid to long hair. Short hair was too boyish. I never wore trousers until I earned enough money to buy a pair - my parents felt they were manly and went against Free Church ideology. At mealtimes my brother and father were waited on by us and of course we helped prepare meals, wash dishes, etc. The males of the family were not expected to share in these duties or any housework or shopping etc. My sister and I even had to take turns at making/ changing my brother’s bed! If any decisions were to be made we were not expected to have much input - at least not vociferous input. Girls who were quiet and not garrulous were often praised and held up as role models. I found this hurtful because I was garrulous by nature and although I did try to ‘train’ myself to be ‘wise and silent’ I never managed it and gave up trying eventually. The previous generation’s idea about what feminine meant was an average girl of average build, height and intelligence who had a placid nature, would not use ‘rough’ language and certainly not argue with her siblings, parents, etc. Smoking and drinking were beyond the Pale. She would help her mother in the home to look after the males in the household and even help bachelor relatives with shopping and cleaning. I often had to walk 2 miles to fill bobbins for an uncle. My brother had more important things to do - like playing football on the machair. The female was regarded as ‘soft’ - you had to cry at funerals, show concern for sick relatives. I’m sure other girls had as much of a job as I did at times trying to produce tears when required.

You were told frequently when you were not living up to the feminine ideal, sometimes very harshly. Ridicule or comparison with others was very effective too. One of my friends was not allowed after 6p.m. - even in summertime. Only ‘disrespectful’ or ‘loose’ girls did that as far as her father frequently told her groups of friends. We were 13 years old at the time. This girl’s father went on to become something of an ‘ayatollah’ and she was much wilder in her late teens than the rest of us by far!

4. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?

In Lewis, women are relegated to the kitchen at wakes and the garden gate at funerals. In Scalpay, the women are allowed to follow the male procession and they lay a hand on the coffin before it is placed in the hearse. The men stand in a respectful semi-circle while the procession of women do this. Having been at funerals in both places, I think the women in Scalpay are allowed more leeway. Men and women feel grief similarly but the women are expected to show it, the men to hide it. This puts an awful strain on both. Many men have to bottle their feelings up tightly. Many women feel callous if they can’t produce the requisite tears, or demeaned that they are expected to.

4G. LENA (See 3N)

1. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?
No, I just continued as before as far as finances would allow. I was never too bothered by fashion. I was however more interested in saving up to buy a house.

2. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?
I think today’s woman is more on an equal footing with her husband. I feel this was just beginning to happen in the sixties. I think that it is very important to have choice for myself. I as an individual would probably do my own thing anyway as I am a very independent person. At other times it is important to discuss/share things with your husband/partner, the latter a relatively new expression. The village folk would expect that as I moved from my thirties to my forties that I would be expected to start going to church regularly as this appears to be the norm.

3. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?
I do believe that different areas have different expectations. On the island I still would not go into a pub for a drink unless escorted by a man/friend as it would be thought of as common, whereas I now live in Surrey [and] again I would not do it myself but nobody would comment if I did. The first being due to the small community where I came from and there is always somebody who would see me and tell my family how awful it was to see me leaving a public house whether escorted or not.

4. What differences did you notice in the relations between the sexes when you moved away from Lewis? How did you adapt and react to these?
I noticed that like myself many of my friends and colleagues were free from family pressures for the first time and we would mix more freely and talk more openly about sex and relationships. I suppose working in psychiatry made it easier for me, initially I was quite shy when discussing such matters.

5. What does you daughter think about women’s place in the islands?
My daughter is an independent woman of the nineties and would not want to be brought up as I was a generation back. She was born in Surrey and does not really understand the ways of the island people.

6. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?
When I was 18 years old I went home for my first holiday 6 months after leaving home, on the day I was due to fly back to London my dad had a heart attack and died in my arms. It was the first time I had dealt with death and it stayed with me for a very long time. I was also very angry at being deprived of a father at an early age. I adored my father.

7. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?
(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch
a. A big muscular man, preferably with a hairy chest.
b. My old aunt Johanna who was in her nineties when she died. All her life she was the dearest person I know, I loved her with all my heart. She had the most beautiful skin and never seemed to age despite her years.
c. An old lady dressed in black and a black headscarf and a black knitted shawl.
d. An old man dressed in black with a black or dark blue knitted jersey.
e. The district nurse dressed in her dark blue uniform.
f. A homely plump lady always cooking by the stove and being there when you needed someone to talk to.
g. Father always there to listen to my troubles and give me a hug when I needed one.
h. Aunt Johanna as she was unmarried.
i. A single man living with his parents who was often a sailor.
j. An old lady with a pointed nose dressed in black riding on a broomstick.

8. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?
In years gone by the tasks seemed to have been divided but today I think both sexes cross over to jobs only done by either sex. I decorate inside and outside of my house, in earlier years when I first started doing this some of my neighbours got rather cross that as a woman I should be doing this. I could not afford to pay a painter to do this so I did it and I feel I made as good a job as he would have done. Yes, only if the person feels so. I am quite happy to attempt jobs such as servicing the car, although men generally do it.

9. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?
The only violence I saw was if someone was drunk and the family dealt with it.

10. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?
I suppose I was brought up the way the women stayed at home after the funeral and did not go to the cemetery. I just accepted this as the norm so I was taken aback when in Surrey it was a different scene. I also accepted their way. I do believe that we all deal with grief in different ways. The fortunate ones can grieve as they go along; I have difficulty doing this and tend to relieve my grief away from others such as during the dark hours of the night and when by myself. Sadly, this will often lead others to believe that you are hard and have no feelings. I believe that it is the island upbringing.

11. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community?
I do believe that it is expected for them to go to church and take part in the religious way of life once they are well settled into married life. It was always up to mothers to ensure that the children attended Sunday school and learnt the psalms for the Bible class in school.

12. Has widowhood changed the way you see yourself and the relationships you have with people on the island at all?
Yes, I feel I have to be careful when meeting men by myself as the tongues will often start wagging. The other side to the coin is that you do not get many invites to married household gatherings as you are by yourself. It is also fair to say that it
happens where I now live, but the minute you get a new partner things change again, there does not appear to be the same threat by the women folk. This is not only my experience but also that of other widows too.

13. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands, compared to married people and their part in the community? They usually help the younger families with the children, cooking and any other jobs requiring to be done.

14. Was there any idea of what it meant to be feminine when you were growing up, and was there much pressure to conform to this? How was this expressed to you? The one thing that I remember was that I was not able to wear trousers as ‘They were not for girls, they were for boys.’ The boys did not have to help with the housework; I used to get very angry about this as I was one girl with three boys.

15. Do you remember any beliefs about menstruation that might have been passed around, such as old superstitions about not bathing or not letting menstruating women handle other people’s food that were found, at one time, in many Scottish communities? Yes, we were told we should not bath but you obviously had to wash daily, otherwise I do not remember anything else.

4H. MAIREAD (See 30)

1. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?
   My marriage, my parents’ death, and my brother dying and, of course, my husband dying.

2. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?
   Yes, there are some things more natural to man and woman.

3. What changes have you witnessed in the islands in the relations between the sexes, and is the situation much different from the general one on the mainland?
   The men and women in the Islands share the croft work but that is less now. For example women do not go to the fanks to shear sheep, etc. - they just go with tea to the menfolk. In my young days not many went out socially as a couple, except to church. That has changed nowadays.

4. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?
   The choices for women nowadays are good, but discipline in the home suffers when both parents are working full-time and they have less time for their children. The relationship between the sexes is much more open and not so secretive as in my young days and not so different from the mainland.
5. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?
As a woman grows older she is expected to lead a less social life and stay at home with her family.

6. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands?
Single people looked after their parents.

7. Was there any idea of what it meant to be feminine when you were growing up, and was there much pressure to conform to this? How was this expressed to you?
Girls had less freedom than boys when they were growing up. Dress, hair and general appearance was impressed upon us.

8. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?
(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) mother; (f) father; (g) spinster; (h) bachelor; (i) witch
a) Someone strong with a deep voice.
b) Someone gentle and helpless.
c) An old lady sitting at the fire with a shawl.
d) A frail old man with a stick.
e) Someone who is kind and helpful.
f) Stern and treated with respect.
g) Someone prim and proper.
h) Set in his ways.
i) Wearing long black clothes.

9. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?
Women traditionally only go to the funeral service and not the cemetery.

10. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?
I have not come across domestic violence although I have heard rumours of it. The community used to ignore it but now they are readier to report any incidents.

11. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community?
Women do not have a major role in religion as traditionally it was the man’s role.
41. MURDINA (See 3S and 5D)

1. You mentioned living with your father-in-law and his family before your own house was complete... What was it like for you, in a new household? Was it easy to settle in, share the work and have your own space?

We lived in my father-in-law’s house for one year and six months. My mother-in-law died one month before we were married. My husband’s two brothers and sister lived with us. I got on well with them all and we did our own jobs both inside and outside, getting to know one another and learning through our mistakes, bearing in mind that they had to accept me into their home. I never fell out with any of them and am still on a sisterly friendship with them all, keeping in touch by visiting those in the neighbourhood and writing to those who are away from the Island. Maybe others weren’t as fortunate as I was and I have no regret about moving in with them. Having written that, it’s not a situation I would want our family to go into. If at all possible a young couple should have the freedom and privacy of getting to know and live with each other without the added burden of in-laws.

2. Have you ever had to care for any elderly or sick relatives or in-laws?

I helped my mother to look after my father before he died and I also helped to look after my father-in-law but both periods of caring were short.

3. What do you remember about your own rêiteach? Who was there and what room was it held in? Was there any special ‘negotiation’ between your father and your husband-to-be, or any other men, as had once been the custom in the old days? What were your feelings and thoughts at this gathering?

Our rêiteach was a very quite and simple affair held in my mother’s house, those who could be present of both families were there. My husband had been coming to the house so it was all very informal. My father had died two years before all this took place. My thoughts and feelings were full of happiness and excitement.

4. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?

I think it’s a good thing that young married [women] can go out to work and not be tied up to either inside/outside unless it’s their own choice. What I do not approve of is mothers leaving their babies and young children to be cared for by others. A child needs a mother’s love and assurance and protection as they grow up and it’s not something one can catch up on later, parents’ love is something very special.

5. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?

Losing my parents and later on my sisters and brothers left me with a deep sense of loss but time is a great healer and God gives strength and grace in time of need. Illness left its mark too, but again as I enjoy good health now I can look back on that period as a blessing from the Lord.

6. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?

(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch

a. A handsome, well dressed, mannerly and caring person.
b. Elegant, tastefully dressed, matching accessories, hair well groomed, perfect make-up, nails, etc.
c. An old lady, ankle length skirt, fitted bodice with an old fashioned brooch, laced-up boots, black stockings, hair dressed-up and held with combs and pins.
d. A well-dressed old man, wearing serge trousers, button-up waistcoat and jacket, shirt and tie or collarless, cap and boots.
e. Memories of the village nurse in my day, always tidy and clean, wearing a blue dress and apron, navy hat and coat, black shoes and stockings, a bag with all her bits and pieces. Always friendly and kind and ready to help and please.
f and g. Very special people, loving and caring and always ready to listen and advise and scold if and when necessary.
h and i. I think I can describe both as being a bit stiff and disapproving of the young and their ideas and behaviour.
j. There is little I can write about as regards witches though we have heard plenty about them. If you go back to the beginning of the Bible we read there that the Devil was very active from the beginning of time. It’s as true now as it was then, his evil ways and thoughts are still active among us and throughout the world. We read about different cults and idol worship etc. and though we have nothing like that in our midst, the devil is ever present with all his wiles and temptations.

7. **What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?**

Men and women play their own particular part in funerals, both in their own way, they both grieve, men try to hide their emotion, why I don’t know, it’s no shame to shed tears over the loss of loved ones. Women on the other hand do not hide their tears but I believe that the man’s grief is as deep as the woman’s. On the mainland women go to the graveyard but it was never the custom here but we must not condemn those who do go.

8. **Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?**

The way we were brought up ‘boys were boys and girls were girls’ as far as dress was concerned but nowadays it’s difficult to distinguish one from the other. I am all for equality of politics, sport, manual jobs and any career as long as both sexes can do the job they set out to do. As for me I would rather stick to living in a woman’s world.

9. **What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community? Have you spoken to many other women about their experiences of becoming born again and do you think there any differences between these and male experiences of this, or in the way they talk about it?**

In our churches on the Island as you know women play a very small part in the church, visiting and attending means of grace and talking about each other’s spiritual experiences. A man’s role is very different, they preach, pray and give lectures in church, meetings and funerals but that doesn’t mean that their spiritual experiences differ. We must not forget the number of women who do such a wonderful work both at home and abroad among the poor and homeless, orphanages, etc. - they are worth their weight in gold. But we must remember that the spiritual awakening comes from God to both male and female though it doesn’t always follow the same pattern. The
Lord leads His people in His way and believing in Him is all important, there is no other way.

4. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?  
In the past a woman was expected to become more sedate and circumspect as she got older - and to age graciously. Not so today, like most women world-wide they cling to looking young. It is seldom one sees a real ‘cailleach’; nowadays.

5. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories? 

4J. NAN (See 3T and 5C)

1. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?  
No. In those days it was considered improper for a young woman over eighteen years of age to let her hair hang loose, if it was long. To this day I still dislike to see this.

2. How were decisions made about domestic matters and your children?  
When the children were young, all decisions were made jointly by my husband and myself, but when the boys got older - teenagers - they were included in all decisions.

3. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?  
What changes have you witnessed in the islands in the relations between the sexes, and is the situation much different from the general one on the mainland?  
The range of choices women have has greatly increased in the last twenty years. When my children were born I left a well paid professional post to look after them, I have never regretted the thirteen years I spent at home caring for them. We could not afford luxuries, but we had precious times, love and lots of time together, things that money cannot buy. We have all become so materialistic I think it is more difficult for young women to stay at home. I know many women fifty to sixty years old, whose husbands are in highly paid jobs, and they are holding well paid professional posts and intend working until they are sixty-five years. I have heard these same people commiserating with young people who are unable to find employment!  
Over the years island men have become more like their mainland counterparts. Not so many years ago, the men here were the breadwinners while the women had full responsibility for the home and family. In my grandmother’s time, the women were more hardworking e.g. at the peatcutting season, the women walked home carrying a creel of peats on their back and usually knitting a sock, as they walked, while the men sauntered along, smoking or with their hands in their pockets - quite carefree.

4. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?  
In the past a woman was expected to become more sedate and circumspect as she got older - and to age graciously. Not so today, like most women world-wide they cling to looking young. It is seldom one sees a real ‘cailleach’; nowadays.

5. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?  
6. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?
   (a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch
   a. Strong, fit, aftershave, man.
   b. Dainty, frilly, floral dresses and skirts, woman.
   c. Old woman, black clothes, shawl, hair in bun.
   d. Old man, bent back, walking stick.
   e. Uniform, tenderness, thermometer, patients and beds.
   f. Baby, plump woman, nursing children, kissing them goodnight.
   g. Kind but stern man, provider.
   h. Thin, sharp-featured, unbending old lady.
   i. Carefree, wealthy man, usually looks as if he needs someone to look after him.
   j. High black pointed hat, black cat, broomstick, North Tolsta.

7. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?
   Apart from the obvious differences like childbearing and breast feeding, it is more natural for women to care for the family and aged parents. It is more natural for men to play physical games, like rugby, football and boxing.

8. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?
   My first experience in hospital, in 1964, of a battered wife was a shock, I had no idea what caused her extensive bruising, I had never heard of it before. People nowadays are more aware of the problem and in Stornoway there is a refuge for battered wives, but to my knowledge it is not a big problem on the island.

9. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?
   Personally, possibly because of tradition, I like the way Lewis funerals are undertaken. It is not considered manly for a male to weep, but I think both sexes grieve equally. Women, by crying, can ease their heartbreak and can speak more openly about their sorrow, while men conceal their emotions. This is probably why men who are not Christians turn to strong drink for solace - forgetting that sorrows can swim.

10. Men often describe how they came to be born again, but I'm not so aware of women relating similar accounts. (a) Have you discussed how and when you realised you were converted with other women? (b) Do you think there are any general differences between male and female experiences of becoming born again and, if so, why do you think this might be?
    a. I have often discussed my conversion with other woman - and other men in scripture unions and church fellowships.
    b. Apart from the past when many converted men had been heavy drinkers before their conversion, there is no difference. It is the same faith in the same Christ. Just as everyone has different fingerprints, no two conversions are exactly alike.

11. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community?
Women have a very important part in island religion, by their private prayer life, example, in instructing the young Christians and visiting the house-bound and hospital patients, teaching in Sabbath schools and serving the Lord by helping with hospitality, communion in the homes and at church inductions.

12. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands, compared to married people and their part in the community?
Older single women have been able to continue their chosen occupations, and many have attained to high offices, although there is probably no difference today between single and married women at work, with maternity leave, childminders, playgroups, creches, etc.

13. Was there any idea of what it meant to be feminine when you were growing up, and was there much pressure to conform to this? How was this expressed to you?
We were constantly reminded of our femininity, as we grew up. It would have been anathema to wear trousers or have a boy’s hairstyle, or to wear any clothing that appeared masculine. I remember my younger sister once played football in a nearby park with a group of young boys and several neighbours came to complain to my parents of the ‘disgrace’.

14. You mentioned the abuse of alcohol that has been a feature of life for many island men (and women to a lesser extent). (a) Why do you think this has been a problem for so long and where did it originally come from? (b) What might be changed in the culture to help this situation? (c) How does it affect relations between the sexes, especially within close relationships and families?

a. I think the problem of alcohol abuse arose from the fact that the public houses were the only places where men could socialise if they were not Christians or teetotal.
b. If there were more meeting-places, e.g. indoor bowling, a cinema, coffee houses and fruit juice bars open late especially on Friday nights. To close down every social venue except public houses in the area will not cure the drink problem.
c. Drunkenness is a great problem in families, waste of money; it also brings its own vile talk and swearing. It causes family quarrels and alarms children. It is a curse in a home.

15. As a nurse, did you attend many home births and what do you remember about these?
I attended many home births, the adrenalin flowed as soon as the call came, you never knew what to expect. My memories are of fathers - who were banned from the bedroom - pacing up and down the living room, chain smoking. Kettles and pans of boiling water, little baby clothes warming by the fireside, the miracle of childbirth, the first appearance and the first cry which never failed to thrill me, and the joy in the home.

16. You wrote about women trying to foretell the sex of a baby. What methods do you remember them using and what women would do this?
Do you know any other beliefs about pregnancy, for example taboos about what a woman should or should not eat?
The predicting of a baby’s sex was usually done in hospital ante-natal wards where a group of expectant mothers were together (or, as the obstetricians usually called
them, my ladies-in-waiting'). One method was to hold a pencil suspended on a piece of string above the patient's abdomen. If the pencil swung to the right it was to be a girl - to the left, a boy. If the woman's abdomen was very 'big' - it was to be a girl, if she was neat and not so obviously pregnant - it was to be a boy. If the baby kicked a lot in the womb, definitely a boy. The older women believed a woman should not appear in public gatherings during the last three months of pregnancy.

17. Were there any beliefs about menstruation that might have been passed around, such as old superstitions about not bathing or not letting menstruating women handle other people's food that were found, at one time, in many Scottish communities? How much did women understand about what happened to their bodies as they went through life?

To wash your hair or have a bath when menstruating shocked my parents' generation. We were considered to be 'ill' during this period. Up until my generation, women were very ignorant of their body changes. When I endeavoured to explain the 'facts of life' to my sister, nine years my junior, I was shocked at her knowledge of her body, its functions, sex and childbearing. She - and her peers - knew more about these matters than I did when I started nursing. She had got literature at school explaining bodily functions and biology had come into the curriculum.

18. I am interested in the opposition that your relatives put up when you first decided to be a nurse. You referred to an aunt who seemed to think it was not suitable for a young woman to be dealing with men's bodies. What do you think about modesty and people's attitudes to the human body in the islands, especially considering the career you chose?

The modesty and attitudes to the human body in the islands has changed dramatically, suffice to say a male nurse would not have been tolerated in a female ward thirty years ago, whereas today they bath, shower and attend to female patients, just as female nurses do, without any objections from patients.

4K. WILLINA (See 3X)

1. What sort of relationships have you had with your children, and how was this different to your husband's? Would you say that you are also friends with any of your children? What expectations do you remember having for each of your children as they were growing into adults?

A very good relationship - 'iron fist in a velvet glove'. Relationship with their father was similar, although I was the one at home most of the day while hubby worked on the farm, later and older rugby, swimming, football, hill climbing etc. was taken care of by Dad. We are great friends with the children simply because we treated them as grown up from thirteen years on (when they left home for schooling). Our combined expectations was for healthy boys, to be considerate to others and make the most of their education with good satisfactory jobs.

2. Can you remember changing your appearance in any way when you became married?

Not in the slightest.
3. How old were you when you first became a grandmother and has it changed the way you see yourself in any respects?
53 years of age - no I’m afraid not, I feel exactly as I did forty years ago! Get on and go and thankful for great good health.

4. What differences did you notice in the relations between the sexes and how they shared work and social life in the various places you have lived?
What adjustments did you have to make in how you thought or acted when you moved to a new community?
a) In the farming world a great difference in life styles - men out on the land working, women at home doing the usual outside chores, and outside work when needed.
b) In this new community now, we are a retired couple so life is different, but we soon made acquaintances, found a new church, got going again, golf, visiting, having lots of folk and doing a lot of caring for the elderly (we’re heading that way ourselves).

5. What do you think of the range of choices women have these days for how they lead their lives? What is good or bad about the situation of women today?
What changes have you witnessed in the islands in the relations between the sexes, and is the situation much different from the general one on the mainland?
a) Women today have numerous choices but most of them are bored out of their minds with too much time on their hands.
b) The freedom to dictate their wishes and some get on and do two jobs very well, a career and a home, but remember at the end of the day a home is a good or bad home because of the presence of a mum (not very well put).
c) Left Harris in ’53 so can’t say. Wives at home now don’t know they are ‘living in clover’, washing machines, freezers, etc. etc. etc., no cows, no peats, no seaweed in creels!!!

6. How were decisions made about domestic matters and your children? How did you and your husband share family responsibilities and tasks?
By both us. I saw to the inner person and all domestic affairs, father to their hobbies, etc.

7. How do society’s expectations of a woman alter as she grows older and her roles change in island life?
Can’t say.

8. What events (good or bad) in your life have had the most effect on you and left you with the strongest memories?
Events good or bad - they all seem very good, looking back. a) A very happy home, crowded, noisy, lots of laughs, not a lot of money, plenty good food, our own meat, fish, eggs, chickens, milk, butter, cream, scones, bannocks, pancakes, dumplings, etc. - and not a fish finger in sight. b) Everything in its place on Saturday night and church two or three times on the Sabbath day. These are the two things I remember and white sands and blue waters.
9. What do you think about the ways in which men and women take part in funerals in the islands? Do you think they experience grief in different ways?

a) Funerals on the islands are changing but much slower than elsewhere. The folk need a 'good greet' so let's leave them to it. b) I don't think they suffer grief any differently to anyone else who cares greatly for his or her own when death finally comes. I would rather have an island funeral any time - than one I attended in Yorkshire not so long ago, when after the rest room, the hearse left with the coffin and all retired to the pub for sandwiches and tea - no one but no one went to the crematorium - not done.

10. In your own words, what images, thoughts and words do the following terms bring to your mind?

(a) masculine; (b) feminine; (c) cailleach; (d) bodach; (e) nurse; (f) mother; (g) father; (h) spinster; (i) bachelor; (j) witch

a) A dark good looking chap.

b) A bonnie Hearrach [person from Harris].

c) A bonnie Hearrach, turned grey and 3 stone heavier.

d) My dark chap now grey, still as slim as the day he married.

e) Leverburgh nurses in the house all day, waiting on the next Maclennan arriving.

f) Homely, rosy cheeked, clean house and smelling of new baking.

g) Spry, fleet of foot and wood shavings all round.

h) and j) Go together in the islands.

i) In my younger days at home someone today who would be in jail for sexual harassment!

11. Do you think there are things that a woman or man cannot do because of their sex, and that some things are natural to one and not to the other?

Most certainly there are some things men and women can't do because of their sex. For goodness sake! b) Yes.

12. Were you aware of domestic violence in the islands? If so, how did the community deal with it?

Never. Plenty verbal from both sides but over and done with very quickly.

13. What part do you think women have to play in the religious and spiritual health of an island community? How does this compare to your mainland experiences?

A great deal - but shared by both. a) Much more than on the mainland. b) Having lived in a rural community, church, school, and pub have played a great part in the life of that community, but it was usually the mums that took the kids to church - but being married to a church-going husband we have always been there together and children.

14. What relations did you have with other married or unmarried women once you were bringing up a family? Where would you meet, spend time together things would you talk about?

a) When I had the boys there were 33 children at the Glen school, so we met at school dos, church hall, W.R.I. Guild, whist drives, dances, badminton, bowls, keep fit classes, weddings, parties, etc., etc. b) Nothing in great depth, general, all doing our bit for the community in which we lived.
15. What roles have there been for older single people in the islands? 
Roles for older people single or not, Lord knows.

16. You mentioned an element of verbal duelling in your comments on the rèiteach. 
Do you remember anything else about this, such as who took part, what they said and why it was done?

a) Rèiteachs were always at the bride-to-be’s home. The groom’s friends or spokesperson would go there with two or three young men in mind amongst all the others and bring them forward and speak up about all their good features, looks, sound in limb and elsewhere, etc., etc. and he would be rejected and so on to the next one and the next one and finally the groom-to-be would be brought forward and received with great shouts and cheers - same for the bride and some girls were ‘ribbed off’, no bust, too much bust, etc. etc. b) Once for the fun of it and a tradition which has gone by the way and remember we were walking miles for dos like this. Go to Harris to Donald MacDonald of Horgabost before it’s all lost in the mists of time.
APPENDIX 5

Apart from 5A, these letter-extracts are generally concerned with women’s appearance and religious experience.

5A. MAGGIE ANN

Maggie-Ann is a nurse from my home village. I do not know her personally and had written to her because I was interested in the experiences of rural nurses and midwives before my research became focused on death.

13 February 1996

I began nursing as a mature student in 1963. I was 25. I had a notion for nursing for some years but some how or other did not do so.

I did my training at Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Staffed at Lewis Hospital for 18 months. Midwifery training at Raigmore Hospital 1968-69. For State registration in those days, training consisted of 2 periods of 6 months, Part I and Part II, two lots of exams, written and oral.

District Training - Castle Terrace, Edinburgh, 3 months. Queen’s Certificate had just been replaced by a National Certificate. I did District at Balallan for 1 year - replacing the nurse there who was away doing a Health Visitor’s Course.

I then went to Cross, Ness, for three years. Tolsta district became vacant. I had no desire to leave Ness, where I was very happy, but my parents were becoming frail, so to Tolsta I went in ’1973.

Although it was home, I was very happy in and out of the various homes. Being at home did not present a problem. In the early 1970s there was a consultant paediatrician in the Lewis Hospital. For the post to be viable there had to be close on 100% hospital confinement.

My work involved ante-natal care for the expectant mothers, monthly until confinement. If an expectant mother went into labour at home I accompanied her to the hospital - at Ness at any rate - it was further from hosp. I visited mother and baby postnatally until 10th day and then until the child was school age. Health visitor’s had not come on the scene at that time - not in rural Lewis anyway. I delivered ONE baby at Ness. It came in a hurry! I delivered NONE at Tolsta.

Most of my patients knew something at any rate about periods and pregnancy. Maybe there is an element of ignorance in every walk of life!

Personally, I was rather ‘green’. Mothers in my youth were very reticent about personal affairs. My mother was no different. I did not have an older sister, so it was really at school, from the other girls, I learned the basics (such as they were).

On District I don’t remember being asked much apart from ante-natal visits when such affairs were discussed without embarrassment. Possibly mothers in the 1970s were more ‘enlightened’ than their counterparts even 30 yrs before.

Did being so naive really do us any harm? I don’t really think it did. It was another way of life. There doesn’t seem to be anything sacred or private any more. You probably won’t agree with that! There still is/was something good about the old days. Relationships (community) have become less kindly and less personal. We have changed with the times. I had no idea where babies came from as a youngster. Did the District Nurse bring them in her bag? J.D. Williams’ catalogue had loads of lovely babies in it. I could never understand why my mother could not send for one!
Looking back, we were very green, but I still don't think it left us lacking on reaching maturity.
I can go back 50 yrs, as your own parents can - life was different, more difficult in many ways - we didn’t have the mod-cons of today. Standards of hygiene varied much more than today - could be poor or could be excellent. The resources were not there.
There was more regard for morality - I am not saying there was no immorality - but people had more regard for God’s Law. The Ten Commandments were a rule of life. Vandalism existed but was less - life of the unborn child, the child and adult was more precious.
5B. LETTER TO NAN

This is part of a letter I sent to Nan, included here as an example of the letters which generated responses 5B-F.

I’ve been considering the way that women dress in the islands, the various reasons that people have for dressing the way they do. Obviously, there are usually a lot of different factors involved - practicality, personal preference, the cost of clothing etc. - but one of the things that is particularly interesting lies in those things that are perhaps a bit more distinctively ‘island’.

1. Firstly, I was wondering about mourning wear. Far fewer people go into long periods of wearing black or other dark colours when they have been seriously bereaved than used to, although some still choose to do so. What do you think about this and the changes that have occurred? I think this is especially to do with widows, the way they often went into black, or at least very dark colours, for years and even life after they lost their spouse. What do you think it means to wear particular clothes after a bereavement? How would you explain it to someone who had never seen the practice before, who was from a culture where this was not done?

2. Have you changed the way you dressed after any death in your family? How was this and how would you explain your actions to someone else?

3. Why do you think that the change made by widows in the personal appearance was more marked than for others? What does this say about widows?

4. Secondly, as you are a Christian, I wanted to ask you about the way in which personal appearance can relate to one’s degree of faith.

5. Hair: Can you tell me what your Church’s attitudes are to hair, and how you understand the rules about whether it should be long or short? Why do you think the Biblical rule about women having long hair and about covering their heads for worship has been so important in the churches, when perhaps other rules about personal conduct have not been given so much attention? What do you think about the different standards of other churches and is it important that the island churches continue to prefer long hair and the covering of heads?

6. Trousers: Other than the Biblical injunction against women wearing trousers, do you have other opinions as to why this should not be done? How would you respond if someone said that a kilt, a piece of men’s clothing, should not be worn by females?

7. Do the rules/preferences about hair and about trousers apply as much to young girls as they do to adult women? How much of a factor is a person’s dress when you meet them in deciding what sort of person they are? Would you say that you can make judgements about someone character from the way they choose to look, and is this different for women?

8. Given that the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church expect standards of appearance from their congregations that are often not found in other denominations,
how important do you think this is to the way these churches are perceived outside, and are the island churches stricter on the subject of attire? Do you feel it is important for church members to maintain a certain type of appearance and to set an example for others? How would you feel if someone who did not maintain the standards that are usually kept, for example if they wore trousers, wanted to become a member of your congregation and you knew you would have to interact with them on a regular basis? When you became converted, did you change your appearance in any way, even if the alteration was quite subtle?

9. I wanted to raise the question of how central are the tenets of the Church to the understandings members and other adherents have of masculine and feminine identity, how much does this spiritual shape what it is to be a man or a woman? This is very vague I know, but if you have any ideas at all about this, it would be really helpful.

10. What items or styles of dress and appearance do you find unattractive or offensive and why? This is just a general question.

11. Finally, what are the factors that you think influence the way that women in the islands have dressed in the past and the present, in both the town and the country?

I want to have your feelings and opinions on this topic because it’s something that’s often taken for granted and not given much thought although we all have immediate reactions to the way other people dress, etc., and we use these to make up ideas about that person. I’m also interested in the way people ‘know’ how to dress and how this is different in various communities within one culture, and the case of church members in the islands is one where there are subtle differences from the norms that are acceptable in say a mainland Church of Scotland congregation and I would like to understand this better.

5C. NAN’S REPLY TO 5B (See 3T and 4J)

September 28th 1997

1. Several old women who were patients told me, when I was nursing, that in previous generations the elderly did not wear black clothes so much. It was a habit that was acquired and continued from the time of the Iolaire disaster.
In my own younger days, all the widows wore black for life, following the death of one’s spouse. I particularly recall one elderly lady who dared to wear a grey cardigan and the neighbours called her the merry widow!
Incidentally, it was the practice for men to wear a black cloth diamond on the upper, outer left sleeve of jackets and coats following the death of a wife.
For myself, I was devastated when my mother died at the age of 57, two years after my father, also aged 57 years. My whole world went black, and supposing nobody else had ever worn it, I could not bear to dress in any other colour; after some months I felt my black clothing became an idol and I only wore them to show others my grief - not deriving any benefit from them myself.
Nowadays, I like to see widows dress in black for a short time, 1-3 months, and other members of a family to wear a black hat to church, and, e.g., a black jacket for a few weeks. I would have no problem explaining this custom to someone of a different culture. Grief is a universal 'language', and I would tell them it is worn as a sign of respect for the dead and an outward token of inner feeling of loss.

2. My change of dress following my mother's death, I have already explained. For other close relatives I have worn an item of black clothing for about a month.

3. It must be a specially traumatic time for widows, a completely different way of living. I remember one old lady who had a very happy and contented married life being comforted by somebody at her husband's funeral, "Well, you should be thankful for the long years you were together." Her reply was "It did not make the parting any easier."
I also think it is a sign when widows are dressed in mourning black that they are not ready to begin new relationships with men.

4. A Christian should be dressed soberly. In 1959, when I returned home, I had a dark red coloured coat which I was not permitted to wear to church as it was considered by my Christian superiors to be too bright! At that time I went to the Gaelic prayer meeting wearing cream coloured shoes and was severely reprimanded by the elder at the door, and advised not to wear them to church again. These were traditions which were wrong (not all traditions are good).
When I say soberly dressed, I mean avoiding extremes which attract harmful - to Christ's cause - attention, e.g. micro-mini skirts, t-shirts advertising worldly bands, even football strips brazenly sporting McEwan's lager. A Christian should pray for guidance in dress.

5. Our church has no rules about hair but the Bible makes it clear. Despite the clamour by so-called liberated women for equality - and even superiority to men, the Lord does not give them that place. Many people say it is not necessary to cover one's head in church, as hair is enough of a covering, does that mean man's hair is not a covering? (Read 1st Corinthians ch.11)
The covering of the head is a sign of submission to God, even the angels veil their faces before Him.
Personally, I think it is sad to see the little mops of permed white frizzy hair on old ladies. As someone remarked when standing behind a few of them, it is like looking on a tray of cauliflowers! It is sad when I remember the dignified coiffures of bygone days.
It was the permissiveness of the mid-'60s that permeated the church, and although many requirements were over strict, the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction.
Incidentally other rules about personal conduct are as equally important to a true Christian.
Our nation is in a backslidden condition, and Christians who do not adhere to the outward demands of scripture do not adhere to the inner demands for holiness.

6. Trousers are universally a sign of male dress, look for example at signs on public toilets. It is again a desire of the female species to dominate the males.
A kilt when worn correctly does not offend me as it is our traditional dress.
I think it is sad that many of our attractive young women have spent their years hidden in denim.

7. The rules about dressing decently and hairstyles apply to young and old alike. It is just as offensive to see ‘mutton dressed as lamb’.
I am impressed by good dress sense, but do not judge people merely by their outward appearances, some of the young people I know who appear to be ‘hard nuts’ turn out to have the softest centres. This applies equally to men and to women. Sad to say, many people who dress in a ‘way out’ fashion would put Christians to shame with their care and compassion for others.
It is not the F.P. or Free Church who made the way to heaven narrow. It is the Lord. These churches merely try to live as closely to the standards in scripture as possible. The Bible is our blueprint for life - not the church. I did change my appearance dramatically after conversion, not because of any outward pressure, but because of inward convictions. I wish time would permit me to expound more on that, but suffice to say, if anyone asks God for guidance, on their knees earnestly, He will guide them.
If a female wearing trousers requested membership in our church, she would - quite rightly - not receive it. She would be advised about her dress in the light of scripture.

9. Anyone who studies the Bible should have no difficulty in understanding the tenets of the church. The Lord did not shroud doctrine in mystery.
It is plainly stated that women should keep silent in church. Whoever (female) claim to have a call to preach, etc., most certainly did not get the call from God. That does not mean women have no role to play in Christianity, e.g. visiting the sick and housebound, praying at home and in silence in church, serving in Sabbath school, Campaigners, all temporal church functions, cleaning the church, etc., etc., etc.

10. Masculine clothes on women and vice versa offend me. Over exposure of the body in public places, e.g. micro-mini skirts, bare midriffs especially on schoolgirls, tattoos, body piercing (nose rings, etc.). Facial cosmetics, nail varnish, etc., on Christians. Shaved head (female) and flowing locks (male).

11. The factors in the past that influenced women’s dress were the weather, tradition and poverty, probably their life style, housework without modern day conveniences, cooking over hot stoves, peat cutting, milking cows, scrubbing floors, one could go on and on.
Today dress is probably governed by weather conditions and, in the main affluence, a different lifestyle; television has brought the world into our homes. Mail order catalogues have bridged the gap between city stores and country areas. Nowadays I do not derive the pleasure from mainland shopping I did in the past as the large catalogues have a wide variety of the same items.
In the past town women were supposedly better dressed, possibly because the drapers and tailors were within walking distance, whereas transport to town was irregular and expensive. This is certainly not the case today with easy access to shops and mail orders their dress code is no different.
5D. MURDINA (See 3S and 4I)

8 August 1997

1. I was 22 years old when my father died, up until then I had never given much thought to black clothes. I didn’t mind wearing it at first but I must admit the longer I wore it the more I came to detest it, in those days you couldn’t relieve it with any bright colours or even light coloured stockings. This went on for a year or two. Before that one was in mourning for five. I am sure my mother was, though after that period we made her wear something to brighten it up. Though people choose to wear black now but I doubt if they would if they had to wear it. On the other hand out of respect and custom I have worn black for every member of my family who have since died but only for a short period. It’s not a custom that’s particular to the islands, it’s worn in royal circles and in many areas and countries. Even now I would still wear black out of respect and no matter where people come from or culture they have their own way of dressing or reaction under these circumstances. I think that would be my explanation anyway. Widows are different, having lost their loved one they feel that they can never again wear the brighter colours that they were used to, but as I heard one widow say, “When does one stop mourning?” It has got nothing to do with what one wears. The Bible mentions the “widow’s mantle”, so with all respect let those who want to wear black, wear it, but it’s not my choice.

2. Yes, I am a Christian, but I don’t think my way of dress can in any way relate to my degree of faith, if outward appearance is all that matters, where is faith? On the other hand, as my mother used to say, “Wherever you are going dress accordingly”: and to this day I follow that advice. I don’t like wearing anything that draws attention to myself yet I wouldn’t want to appear dowdy. Plain, simple and neat. My faith in the Lord is strong and I wouldn’t want to do anything to dishonour that or Him.

3. Hair. Our Church as far as I know have no strong views about women’s hair style. Without making any excuses, I never did have long hair and now through illness it’s very thin and always short, but I do envy those who have long hair. Again we can find references in the Bible as to that when the woman dried Jesus’ feet with her hair. Head covering in church or special occasions is I think very important. We were in London recently for the Queen and Duke’s wedding anniversary and one of the rules laid down for dress was a hat for the ladies. She herself wore one and so did all those women who were present. Surely if we dress to meet Royalty we should do the same when we go to any church service, wedding or funeral services. Again custom comes very much to the fore here as it does all over the country. We always go to church when we are away and there we see some who wear hats and some who don’t. Again it’s a matter of choice and custom but personally I think that if I’m going anywhere important a hat puts the finishing touch to a dress or suit. There are many short hair styles in our church but no-one seems to mind. What should be uppermost in our minds is - Why do we go to church, is it to listen to the gospel or to look around for faults?

4. Trousers. I never wore trousers except during the war years, and I never cared for them but I cannot say that I have any strong views about other women wearing them. In my young days we never wore them but it’s the done thing now. As kilts are made
for both men and women I don’t see anything wrong with women wearing it. I never thought of it as being a piece of men’s clothing.

5. Rules about hair style and trousers differ when it comes to comparing young girls and older women, young ones can get away with a lot and as we get older we are inclined to leave teen age styles behind us and be our age. Common sense leads us here not just custom or style. I think personal appearance makes a big impression on meeting someone for the first time. This applies to both men and women but we must be careful in judging by appearance only.

6. As I have already mentioned, we, when on holiday, go to different churches and I cannot say that their way of dress, etc., was any different to ours. I do think it’s very important that all members should maintain and set a good example to others in their way of dress. I would definitely say no to any woman coming to church in trousers far less wanting to become a member. When I was converted I cannot say that I changed my appearance or way of dress in any way. My main concern was my conversion and wondering if I was right in my way of thinking in being a christian.

7. I never gave the subject much thought and I don’t really know how to answer it. Our church members and Minister are very understanding and friendly with a close bond between female and male. Men have their own role to play and so have the women but I find that if I have any problems it’s always easy to approach any one of them to solve it. I don’t know if this puts any light on the subject . . .

8. Dresses that leave nothing to the imagination are both unattractive and offensive and should be scrapped. Modesty should be top of the list. Agreed!

9. I think the factors that influence women in the way they dress is money, after the war money was very scarce and clothing coupons more so, we just had to do with what we had or what we could afford. When we did get round to buying what we fancied or copied what other people wore, fashion changed so that now the Islander is as well dressed as anyone from the mainland. The only difference I notice in the mainland churches is that so many go to churches without hats and that would not be acceptable here in any of the churches. I wouldn’t want to see our church changed from its styles or appearance but as I am an old 75 year old granny you will forgive me.

5E. SEONAG (See 3W)

9 August 1997.
There are also comments in this letter from Seonag’s middle-aged daughter Rhoda.

Your letter reminded me of one Communion season in Tolsta, not that long ago. I had a visitor on Saturday afternoon. She had spent the previous night in Tigh Iain Lordy. At evening prayers, Bean Iain Lordy sat down at the last minute, forgetting to cover her head for the Bible-reading. My friend was sitting opposite her. She
suddenly whisked the lace cloth from the back of the armchair and put it on her head - apparently at a rakish angle which caused barely suppressed mirth.

None of the older women coming to the Golden Oldies wear deepest black and they wear far more brooches than I would ever dream of wearing. My mother, when she was widowed fifty years ago, wore black to church only and probably only till the first mourning wore out. She was very practical and was left with eight young children. Once walking from Lionel school to North Dell, shortly after the death of my father, a woman asked me in for a cup of tea - it must have been raining. She started to tell me how sorry she was my mother had not put me into black. I did not tell my mother. Perhaps others thought like her. I don’t think my mother ever worried about the opinions of others. She was a devout Christian with a mind of her own. My sister-in-law, Katie-Anne who was younger than I, went into black for each of her brothers who died in fairly recent times. I know it sounds unkind but I think she enjoyed the attention and sympathy extended to folk in deep mourning.

When in Yugoslavia, many years ago, I was struck by the similarity in dress to those in Lewis in my growing-up years. I have videos of a T.V. series called Heimat (German pre 1914-post 1945) and the dress of the women and other factors resembled old Lewis.

[Notes taken by Rhoda from her mother and her own observations:]-
1. Mam wore black on day of mother’s funeral to please sister-in-law resident in Stornoway (early 1980) in whose home death had occurred. No black hat bought and Mum and sisters vowed not do it again. Wore black not to offend and cause least friction with sister-in-law.
2 years ago Stornoway Minister F.C. (Murdo Alec MacLeod) died, widow did not go into black, unheard of 50 yrs ago.
Village widows go into black, if they do, for short periods. Consider not wearing black a good thing: difficult to keep clean, an extra expense at time of funeral, confusing for some that black became fashionable. Wearing black was a sign to others of widowhood, an outer expression of grief.
(Rhoda, 41 years old: Who doesn’t see black as associated with mourning? On the mainland, men wear black ties, most women wear black. Many foreign countries older women often seen in black because of widowhood, therefore, it isn’t a strange custom to most people.)
Jet jewellery, mourning rings and brooches common in Victorian times up to 1930s.
Mum’s childhood: long tradition of widow’s weeds: crepe on hats, sliver of white (see Dict.). Widowers wore black bands on Sunday suits and black cap.

As a Christian,
Rhoda: My mum frowned on my wearing jeans when I was a child because it was too similar to man’s apparel. Until I married in 1979 I didn’t wear trousers up here (Tolsta), still wear them much less here than home in Aberdeen.
Even today the Free Presbyterian would give a scarf to a woman entering Church without a hat. Dress has nothing to do with faith but opinion and offending or not offending older Christians. My trousers would have had to do up at the side or back - not the front like jeans.
Seonag: My Church (Free) no stipulations about hair at all, wear a hat not to offend others up here, not to do with faith, didn’t wear hats when living in London. F.P.s
still cover their heads for family worship. In Free Presbyterian Church have to cover one’s head, are refused communion/membership if you have short hair, not leading what they consider a godly life.

As to it’s being Biblical this could be that at the time, in Corinth, it would have been unseemly to have hair uncovered, but times have changed and attitudes.

Stornoway Church no longer demand long hair, only the Free Presbyterians demand long hair and covered heads. Bone of contention within the Church before A.P.C. split from them. A.P.C. on mainland and Stornoway you can be bare-headed and short-haired, minister’s wife has short hair.

Trousers: Golden Oldies, older women maybe not comfortable if Mam came wearing trousers.

Kilt - anyone should wear a kilt - ancient Celts wore kilts, long history and nothing wrong.

(Rhoda: Your questions seem to suggest that short hair or trousers are frowned on. I have holidayed here every year (at least once) in my 41 years and a lot of your ideas about dress seem antiquated and no longer relevant.)

To see a young girl up here with long hair in a bun, no make-up may guess she is F.P. but not possible to judge character. I don’t think you can judge someone by outward appearance, we are wrong to do so and unchristian.

So much of what you ask about does not apply and has not done so for a long time except for the F.P.

(Rhoda - My perception of the Free Church is that it has changed out of all proportion to your ideas, dress code is no longer an issue, both here and on the mainland.)

Women and young communicants do wear trousers away from church. Visitors attend church with trousers and bare-headed - no problem and it doesn’t cause offence in Free Church in Stornoway.

Conversion - a personal thing and nothing outward changed. Regularly seen bare-headed woman take communion in Free Church in Vincent Street.

Styles of dress/appearance offensive: Large women in Lycra (purely personal!). Hospital receptionist with crop top and bare midriff - wrong place for that mode of dress which would be acceptable elsewhere.

Re earlier factors: Young women moved into family homes when mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law were already ruling the roost. Really a matriarchal society - husband fishing or out working. The old traditional rules of dress, etc. had to be observed - conformity was universal. There were scarcely any outside influences.

5 F. DOLLAG (See 3I)

20 December 1997

Now to the questions you were asking me regarding the church. Most of the women don’t wear hats, it’s only the older women who wear them. I wear one but I think it’s because of tradition and being brought up in the Free Church. Trousers, no, I’ve
never seen any of the women wearing trousers but I’ve seen an odd teenager wearing them, but I suppose it’s only a matter of time before that’ll change as well, once our generation has gone, tradition will go as well. We are seeing it already in lots of things today, we do things today and allow things that my father’s generation would have been horrified at. I even see women with make-up and lipstick going to the communion tables which in my young days the ministers would have labelled them as Jezebels and banished them from the church.

Myself, personally I’m sorry to see a lot of the changes and don’t like a lot of them. I think people have gone to the other extreme too quickly. I might be old fashioned but things I see happening in the churches nowadays are certainly not for the better, strife, bickering, in our denomination anyway the church is split in half, you are frightened to open your mouth, you don’t know who you’re speaking to, people who were once great friends are now bitter enemies.

5G. KENNETH

Kenneth is my father’s younger brother and is in his fifties. He lives in Lewis with his family where he is a welder and part-time crofter; he is also an elder and the treasurer of the Free Church in North Tolsta. He is a deeply committed Christian, active in various church bodies, and has been a valuable source of insight for me into the philosophy and culture of the island Free Church.

26 August 1997

On dress codes for women in mourning, I have never approved much of the wearing of black. There is nothing in scripture as far as I know to justify it and it is most likely a practice left over from Roman Catholicism, I think.

On women’s dress in general the biblical command to women is that they dress tastefully without show or seeking to draw attention to themselves. I don’t believe by that that it means they have to be drab or colourless but they should avoid what is gaudy or flamboyant. 1 Timothy ch.2 v.9. Their beauty should be a spiritual and inward beauty making itself visible in the outward appearance and actions.

On the length of woman’s hair, whether it is regarded as her glory in our day or not that is what God speaks of it as being. I don’t think you can legislate on the length of hair in general but is should manifest and draw a line between the sexes so that a woman is easily identified as being just that; likewise a man by his somewhat short hair. What is becoming for a woman to me would be about shoulder length at least, but I do not believe you should enact laws to ban women being members on ground of their hair length, it would be far better just to gently advise and instruct rather than browbeat, etc.

On female attire the bible is plain enough, women should not wear men’s clothes. Again this can be taken to ridiculous extremes. I remember a friend who always harped on about it and when I would ask him if he would wear a pair of women’s
slacks he would be much offended at the thought of his wearing what he regarded as
dwomen's clothes but he still could not see his own prejudice. Again it is surely to do
with maintaining the difference between the sexes and anyone looking at the state of
our nation today, where sodomy is accepted so easily in society can see how things
small of themselves can influence the whole of society to the extent that it can eventually lead to God's judgement of us in wrath.

Women's heads should be covered at all times of worship as commanded by God
himself. Some say that the hair is the covering but this does not make sense as it goes
on to command men to bare their heads at worship so by that line of argument the
men should shave their heads for worship. All these things are plain enough in
scripture but the people of today are less obedient to God's command than they were
in the past; this is symptomatic of a lack of love toward God. "If you love me keep
my commandments."

All those things show what a woman's place should be in society before God. She
should be unobtrusive, not loud or clamorous, not seeking to rule over the man,
manifesting a quiet inward beauty of holiness to be seen of all of her life and lifestyle
be a rebuke to the ungodly, with the older women in the church setting an example
worthy to be followed by the young.

I do not differentiate between the old and the young women, to me this applies to
them all.
These interviews are held in the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, but access to them is restricted. 6A and 6B are verbatim transcriptions of interviews undertaken when I was interested in collecting some life stories from women whom I knew. I wanted to find out about particular life crises events, but I also wanted the interviewee to shape the form of her account, as much as possible.

Gaelic personal names and placenames are italicized along with other words. Recurrent Gaelic words and phrases:
- *ars’ mise* - I said
- *bean* - wife [of]
- *bodach* - old man
- *cailleach* - old woman
- *a ghràidh* - my dear
- *rèiteach* - traditional betrothal
- *shiorruidh, shiorruidhinn* - lit. eternity (shortened in ‘oh shior’) used as interjection
- *tigh* - house (often followed by personal name)

. . . . - indicates a pause in speech
[....] - indicates that part of the recording cannot be deciphered

**6A.**

**Verbatim transcript of interview between Mrs Jessie MacIver and Fiona MacDonald, 4 July 1995, North Tolsta.**

Recorded on DAT equipment. 110 mins.

Jessie is the widow of a relative and lives in North Tolsta. Our families have been quite close in various ways over the three living generations: I went to school and am good friends with her granddaughter, and my parents are friendly with her daughter and son-in-law. I usually visit Jessie whenever I am at home. She is a good source of information about life in the past and I have interviewed her on several occasions on a number of topics.

6A.1.

Tape 1: Side A.

Jessie MacIver: Gave me a line to go when I was well. The line maybe, the week I got the line to say a month off, I’d be fine then. And after that I got this line so that I didn’t have to get any more lines, just to go to school any day I was fit. So, anyway, I reached the age of fourteen and I was doing everything, feeling better then, really. And when I was sixteen I went to work in a bank house in Dornie.

Fiona MacDonald: In Sutherland?

JM: Aye, uh, not Dornoch, but Dornie; it’s outside Kyle, you know.

FM: Oh right, uh huh.

JM: And that was quite nice. There was a wee baby there (and I enjoyed that), that I was looking after. I, I was there probably a year, I think, and then my brother was getting married so I came home. And they told me I had to stay for the summer to be with my mother, so I stayed that summer at home. But when that, when that season
was over, one of my sisters came and replaced me and I went to Inverness then, and
started in a manse in Cameron, Reverend Kenneth Cameron's manse, Free Church
manse. And I was there for another year. And then I went to work in the hotels and I
was there all the time until I left to get married.

FM: And when was that?

JM: That was in '19, em, '39, 1939, when the War started. The War had started and
we didn't on, we didn't intend to marry so quick, you see, but then the War started so
Murdo was for putting it - he was in Kinlochleven at this, that time - so Murdo
wanted to bring it up forward seeing the War was on and we just didn't know what
was going to happen. So, we got married out there and, uh, I came home after that; I
was home during the War doing nothing. They didn't work then, the women didn't
work then, you see. But I'd have been better to be working away, I mean instead of
waiting, day-in, day-out, to hear the war news and what was happening 'cause it was
a very strenuous time. And, uh, anyway, when the war was over and Murdo was
released - well, he di ..., he wasn't released immediately because he (I think, he was a
year anyway), because he was a minesweeper and they had to sweep the mines, to
clear the channels. So....

FM: Where was he doing that?

JM: Uh?

FM: Where was he on the minesweeper and for how long?

JM: He was in, on the minesweeper for quite a while. He joined the minesweeper in
Canada and was then convoying ships across from Canada, from St. John's till, to
very near Lewis, I mean that bit, of course [the Atlantic west side of the island]. The
convoys were going down, right and left beside them and they couldn't do anything.
Anyway, he, he was in Iceland before that, but anyway that's it. And, uh, after that,
the War was, uh, over, he come at the end of the years of .... He, he, being on a
minesweeper, they had to clear the channels, seemingly, so he didn't get home with
the rest. But at least the War was over and you were thinking it was over. It was still
(I didn't realise it at the time), but it was the still the danger work they were doing,
lifting up, I mean, um, lifting up the mines at the bottom. That's what they were
doing, that's what they did when the invasion was on; they were blowing up the
mines to let the boats in to invade, yes, Normandy.

FM: So when did he come home eventually?

JM: Uh, was it 1955? I think. Anyway, he came, he was home then, and he started - I
was still at number twelve - he started on this house. One, one half of it was finished,
done before he went to war, but the other half, the room bit, was done after the War,
he did that. So, he was working up town then. He was there till he got sick and that
was it: he couldn't do anymore. He was, he was with your grandpa in every, I think,
in nearly every place.

FM: Yeah. How many children were in your family? How many brothers and sisters
did you have?

JM: Well, I had, there was eight of us all together, six girls and two boys.

FM: Are you the youngest?

JM: I'm the youngest.

FM: Do you know who you were named after?

JM: Yes, my auntie. She died in, she was married in Glasgow and she died there.

FM: Do you know who the rest of the family were named after as well?

JM: Oh well, not really. I think Catriona was named after, uh, a granny, on her
father's side, Bean Dhonnachaidh; and Seonag was after 'An Buidhe. And Iain was
after my other grandpa that was out at where 'igh Bhodsidh is. He died young as well
And, eh, who else was there? I think, I think the other Iain was after him. Ah, Mary was after a granny and Ciorstag was after. My grandfather had three wives and it was with the last wife he got the family.

FM: Really?
JM: Uh huh. And it was funny the way he put it. You see, he married the first one with the love of youth; and the second one was better for his soul; and the third one, all he got of this world’s joy was through the third one. So none of them was out of place. It was funny, the way he put it. I’ve never seen any of them, of course, except a granny who was out at tigh Bhodsidh. They’re all, in fact, they, they, ‘An Buidhe and his wife (that’s my father’s parents), they died when my father was young. He was in the ‘milishie’ [the militia], as they said then, sort of army stance somewhere on the mainland. And there was no word of getting home or anything but letters, and he got the death of the two of them in the one week. He had a sister, Bean Rodgain’s mother, and he was staying with them for a while but, uh, her father wasn’t good to him. So he left and went to his father’s house. Married after that, I think he was only twenty then. My mother was only twenty as well. So that’s the family history, as far as I can remember.

FM: Uh huh. And how did your grandfather’s, the first two wives die?
JM: Well, one, one of them, the first one died young. I think she had some fever, like meningitis or something like that because she didn’t know what she was doing. But she told them that she was going to leave them and that she had, she wouldn’t be, she wouldn’t have her sense leaving the world. Seemingly, she was a good woman. And, uh, I don’t know how the other one died now, I don’t know the other one died but it was some illness or other anyway. So my, my, his wife, my, my, my gran, she was bedridden and he was looking after her, but he was saying that the Lord had promised him that he wouldn’t be a widow three times. But she was very poorly. Anyway, a man from Ness came one day to visit him, and he was making candles - there was no lights or anything then, you see, everything was made by hand. And he says, “What are you doing?” “I’m making candles. One for my own funeral and one for Mary’s.” So he put himself first. “One for my own funeral and one for Mary’s.” And that’s how it was. Eh, it was funny, eh, the way, the way everything was understood by him, by them; they were just in contact with the Lord all the time, seemingly believed in everything like that.

FM: Did they have a big family?
JM: No, they had three: my father, his sister and another poor sister that wasn’t, she wasn’t poor, she was work... and everything, but, you know, gòrach, not, not all there, can, that’s how they’d say. And she used to have fits and she died in one of the fits. But she was doing a lot of work in that house. So they say anyway: she was doing a lot of work with the creel and that.

FM: Do you remember your other grandparents much?
JM: Well, I remember the granny. I, I don’t remember these ones because they were gone before my father was, my father married or anything. He wasn’t, he wasn’t more than eighteen, I think; I don’t think he was. And my other, I don’t remember my other grandfather either because he died when, when his own children weren’t very old. And, uh, my gran lived till she was eighty-four, so I was out seeing her with Annie-Mary in the pram. I think it was Annie-Mary; I’m not sure, maybe it was the other boy, the first son, but I think it was Annie-Mary, because my, my other son really wasn’t well. I, I think now that he must have been a ‘blue baby’, a hole in the heart. He took whooping cough when he was seven months old and that sort of brought it up and when the doctor came in he was a while examining him and then he
said, “I’m sorry but I’ve to tell you that his heart isn’t too good. This valve which generally closes at birth in his case hasn’t closed.” That’s how I’m thinking it was a hole in the heart. Nothing could be done for him then, then. And they couldn’t take him to hospital. A lovely wee boy. I, I never noticed there was anything wrong with him until he had this whooping cough and, of course, that worked the heart up more. And he died without Murdo ever seeing him: he was in Iceland at the time. I sent him a wire, it was a month before he got the wire. It was tough, it was tough.

FM: Had you chosen a name for him?
JM: He was John Murdo: it was my father and Murdo.
FM: And Annie Mary was after?
JM: My sister and my mother. That’s how it is.
FM: Were you married on the mainland then?
JM: Yes. I was married in, in Fort William.

FM: Were you in the hotels in Fort William then? [Thinks I am asking if she was married in a hotel.]
JM: No, uh, no, no. We had very, a very small wedding, you see, a ghràidh, because he had got word to go to the War and he was leaving the Monday and this was the Friday. There was no really, no chance of anything.

FM: Yeah, yeah. But where were you working then? Were you in, were you still working in hotels?
JM: I was, I was working in Inverness in the Albion Hotel. And I left that and came to, to Kinlochleven. He was working in Kinlochleven. And we got married in Fort William. And he went to war on the Monday and I came home. It was, oh, it was awful, it was awful coming home and meeting the people and, you know.... It was just awful, but anyway.

FM: Do you remember what you wore?
JM: Yes, I wore a blue costume. I didn’t wear a dress - of course, it wasn’t a, it was a very quiet thing - a, a light blue costume.

FM: Was it a new one or was it a special thing you...?
JM: It was a new one, it was a new one. A navy hat. That was it.

FM: Were you married in a, a church or the manse?
JM: I got, I, in the manse. I got a, a patent leather bag from the hotel people and a, I, I had that as well, and shoes to match it. So, sin agad e [There it is]. [laughs]

FM: were there any friends or relatives at your wedding?
JM: No, no, just Angus (you know the Kinlochleven unc... uncle Angus) and his wife, and the boys were young. That’s all.

FM: How long were you going out with Murdo before you married?
JM: Och, I can’t remember, probably a couple of years, couple of years. But I knew Murdo, of course, since I was that height [holds arm out]. We, we were always friendly - though not in that line, you see.

FM: So was it only when you went away that you started going out?
JM: No, I went away with him at a wedding here. [laughs]

FM: Whose wedding was that?
JM: I think it was my sister Seonag’s wedding, I’m sure, yes, yes; I think it was then. No, it was before that, somebody else before that, one of the Glassachs, I think.

FM: Eh huh.
JM: It’s hard to remember these things.

FM: When was Murdo born?
JM: Murdo born, was born in 1911 - is the same age as Seonag, my sister, the same age. Eh, eh, and you know we were always friendly with them, Jessie and him. His
uncle was beside us, Coinneach Mòr, when we were at number twelve, and they’d always be there. And so would we, so we got to know them very well, apart from being relatives - we’re relatives too (well his mother and I were second cousins).

FM: Did all of your brothers and sisters marry?

JM: I’d only one brother that... The older died in four, at four years, I think. He was married in Point to a girl from Tolsta, Màiri Tiffian, and they’re both dead now. That’s all. There’s two sons in Canada. Well, Iain’s in a wheelchair; he got a stroke. He was getting, he got four bypasses and before he recovered from that, he got a stroke which left him paralysed on the, but his speech is all right, that came back; and he, he understands and he talks, I mean, all right and everything like that. But he can’t walk, he can’t walk or anything like that. He can barely feed himself without help. It’s the one side of him has gone paralysed. he was a captain out there. And then, when he gave that up, he was a marine consultant and he would do that at home sometimes and if he got too sick that he couldn’t do it, wasn’t feeling well. And he had to give that up before he had the operation. I think that’s it. Murdo’s still a, he’s a, Murdo’s in Sarnia [???]; he’s in the Lakes, not on the lakes but in the rigs. And he sometimes, it would be as quick for him to come here as go home. He’s married to Nìghaen Thormoid Cathain, and they have four or five of a family anyway; I really don’t, that, I don’t remember, I think it’s four they have. Annie Mary was seeing them all when she was in Canada; she was staying with lain but she stayed with Murdo as well. Well, there was another son, a young one, but we’ve no trace of him, trace of him, not even before his parents died.

FM: Because of your own illnesses when you were younger, did you have to do much work around the house?

JM: I couldn’t, I couldn’t do much work. But when I got older I was able to do the peats and everything like that. But not cutting them; I was never cutting them until I was married. That’s when I started cutting them and I got a lot to do since! [laughs] I went away then, you see; by the time you start cutting the peats I was in the hotels and working in, on the mainland; and I never started. I think I did a little bit with my mother one day and, but that was all. And, and, eh, I used to work on the croft and all with them, little bits, little bits that I could do, and, like planting potatoes after the horse and things like that. But not with the spade: I couldn’t do these things then. And....

FM: Did you get more indoor chores to do than the other children, maybe more knitting and things?

JM: Well, I was knitting and I was baking and things like that. I was doing these things all right. But it’s Seonag always that got up in the mornings and did the fire and everything. But this morning, seemingly, I was in a good mood and I got up early. And I had the fire, a nice fire on, so I decided to bake scones. So, I baked, and when she got up she said, “What in the world is happening here?” [laughs] She got up at her usual time and I said, uh, “I got up early and made the food for the family.” [laughs]

FM: How old were you then?

JM: Och, I was old enough; I’d been away, I was just home on holiday, that’s it. Och, we had a great time, it was, it was nice. It was, there was, there was nothing like dances or anything like that. A lot, a lot went to dances on the road, you know, dancing on the road with the melodeon.

FM: Do you remember that yourself?

JM: Well, I was never at one of them, but I passed them once, myself and, uh, Nìghaen a’, one of the Carabhaidh’s girls. She was in seeing me, so we decided, uh.
the lovely night like that, we’d take a walk right at Alain’s place where they used to
dance. It was very tempting not..., to stay, but we weren’t allowed to go to the dance
(I wasn’t allowed anyway). Anyway, eh, eh, one of the boys there he used to come to
our house, “I’ll tell you were at the dance.” This was him! Murchadh Tiffian, he was
a character, “I’m going, uh, in tomorrow and tell you were at the dance.” I was
saying, “You wouldn’t dare, because I wasn’t.” And there was no up town then you
see, no buses running or anything like that, but we were quite happy in our own way.
Everybody was the same, so that was just it.

FM: So did people generally have to wait for things like weddings before they started
going out with someone?

JM: Oh, it was usually at a wedding you’d meet somebody, oh aye, usually, usually a
wedding. And they say, ah, “An dh’fhuaire thu cliog a-raoir?” [Did you get a ‘click’
last night?] [laughs]

FM: “Cliog”?

JM: [laughs] I don’t, that one too, oh shior, is that...

FM: I haven’t heard that one before.

JM: Oh yes we had that one, a ghráidh.. I heard that one long ago from the older
ones and us, really.

FM: Do you remember any of the old, many of the weddings down in the village?

JM: Oh well, they were all really the same: dancing till nine o’clock in the morning.
We’d go there about ten or eleven and you’d be dancing. Well, you had your food, of
course. And table after table emptied and filled again; and you couldn’t have all the
people that was at the wedding at the one table or at a few of them. And, the ones
that were nearer, you know, the friends, were kept to the last table. This was where
the married couple would meet everybody before they went to bed, like. This was the
fashion. And, no, you’d be, you’d have to be special before you’d get to this one.
[laughs] So that was fun too. Now, I don’t remember seeing them be put to bed but
seemingly that was the fashion in the older days.

FM: Uh huh.

JM: But I, I don’t remember seeing anything like that. But, uh, everybody was very
reluctant to leave, even at nine o’clock. They’d be going in the road (the daylight was
coming then, you see, it was getting daylight) and, uh, everybody would see them.
And some of the boys, two at a time, would go with a cask between; there’d always
be four and a half, this was the beer; they’d buy that between the crowd of them and
when they’d be taking home the cask, they’d go from side to side of the road with the
cask between! [laughs] Oh, it was tough! But we enjoyed it all the same; we were
young and that was it.

FM: What had you heard about them putting the, putting the couple to bed?

JM: Oh, I didn’t, I don’t know really anything about them...

FM: But they used to do that?

JM: They used to do that, seemingly; seemingly, they used to do it, but I’ve never
seen it myself, no, no.

FM: Have you ever been a waitress at one of the weddings?

JM: Och aye, aye, a few, a good few of them. Aw, yes. Eh, I, I - oh it was good, we
were young. When Bean an Didedam married (she married in Alasdair Roag’s house)
and all the older waitress, waitresses were at the fishing in Yarmouth, so it was the
young and the like of those that were in service would get the, the job of doing the
table and the dinner, like. She had a dinner after coming from church. We had to
make soup the day before, ah, meat, and all the puddings and stuff. So we got that
job seeing we knew a bit about it, you see. [laughs] So, that was good.
FM: So, was that mostly chicken, the meat?
JM: The chicken and meat, there was chicken and there was meat, with all the trimmings and stuff.
FM: What kind of puddings did you have?
JM: Oh, I think it was trifles we had, if I remember right. And, uh the minister would be there at the first table, you know. It was just the first table that had a dinner, the crowd that would come from church; after that it was just meat, cold meat for everybody at the table.
FM: Uh huh. Do you remember music, who provided the music at the weddings for dancing?
JM: Aw, aw, there were, would be just the one or two with the accordions, that was it. Pipes, sometimes, a pipe, mm, ah, on with a pipe, would play the music as well. But I loved the accordions: I think they sounded nice then.
FM: Do you remember your sisters’ weddings?
JM: Aw, aye, I remember Catriona married in Inverness; Seonag was the only one I remember at home; Ciorstlag was before that - I was quite young when she got married. Och, yes, they were quite nice.
FM: Do you remember any, anybody’s réiteach?
JM: Well, Seonag’s réiteach was quite good, it was quite a crowd, you know, and, aw, the, the young lads, balaich Cathain and all them, they that were round about us, they all, they all came with fancy hats on, you know, paper hats. That was unusual, you know, just making fun. And my mother got the fright of her life: she, she thought it was invaders that come from some... [laughs] that come from somewhere! That was, that, that night was funny all right. And, uh, well, saying jokes to each other at the table and, uh, really comic things like that. Anything to make them laugh. And I remember Murchadh Harry, the young Murchadh Harry, and Aongas Crubaidh singing at a wedding there, “Patsy Fagan” [laughs] that song - I don’t know how it goes - but they were singing that. They were good: singing it at the table between them, you know. Some of them did that at times. Och, it was quite good; to us at the time it was great.
FM: Yeah.
JM: We enjoyed it then because there was nothing, we hadn’t seen anything but that. But supposing..., I don’t think anything, there’s anything to compare with these things; everybody was so carefree and relaxed, sort of.
FM: Yeah. What about céilidhs in people’s houses in the evenings?
JM: Well, that was, uh, it wasn’t a céilidh as such but, uh . . . . Seemingly tigh Cathain and our house too, they used to be, our friends, our friends would come - and the girls knitting and the boys, just was there for the fun of the thing. And then the girls would start singing. Ciorstlag, my, my sister, she was a great singer. And she would sing and sing and sing for long enough. And Bean Níceal, she’d be with her too and they’d be singing in our house, full-out.
FM: What things would they sing?
JM: Oh, just songs.
FM: Gaelic songs?
JM: Gaelic sings, oh, Gaelic songs all the time, yes, all the Gaelic songs.
FM: Do you remember any?
JM: Oh, no, no, I can’t remember the ones. It’s funny, my sister here knew all the songs till the last; she could, she could sing them. It was good songs she was singing, of course, lately, but she used to all, know all the songs. ’Cause she was a great singer herself. I wasn’t, so we didn’t bother with it.
FM: And what was it like when you first went away to work? Was it, were you very homesick?
JM: No, I never felt homesick at all, no. Well, when I first went to Kyle (it was to Kyle I went) and the man of the house was supposed to meet me at six o’clock in the morning at Kyle. It was ten o’clock before he came and I was alone in a strange place, in the waiting room. And the porter would come in and put some more coal on the fire and keep me warm until he came and drove me all the way there, to Dornie, across the ferry from Ardelve to Dornie. There’s a bridge now.
FM: And were you well-treated in that first house?
JM: Oh yes, they were quite nice, yes, they were quite nice, I must say. Uh, she was a minister’s daughter - he, her father was a minister in the Free Church (I can’t remember his name now), at..., och well, she had nothing of the manse about her at all. [laughs]
FM: And what did your work involve there? What was your typical day like?
JM: Pardon? Work?
FM: What kind of work, what was you work like?
JM: Just the housework and, uh, cooking, I was doing that as well.
FM: Were you the only...?
JM: I was the only one there, yes, I was the only one there. Uh, uh, occasionally she would help with the cooking, but in the end I was left to it, probably when I learnt something to do.
FM: Was it very different after having lived at home and ...?
JM: Och, well, yes, at times, at first.
FM: ...the cooking and things?
JM: It would be different.

End of Side A of Tape 1.

6A.2
Tape 1, Side B.

Jessie MacIver: In every way. But, you know, we weren’t ignorant, like; well, we knew, we knew what was before us, sort of. And, uh?
Fiona MacDonald: Had you sisters already... already been away?
JM: Oh yes. And we knew, I knew how to do things, food and that in the house, can, say, that’s it. But...
FM: Do you remember how much you were getting paid then?
JM: Aw, yes, a ghràidh, two pounds a month, a month, a month.
FM: And how much of that was going home?
JM: Oh, hee. It was great then. I got a coat and hat anyway, out of it. [laughs] oh, shioruidhinn. There wasn’t much wage.
FM: What about your days off, what did you get?
JM: Aw, I, huh, I, I, I just had one day off and part of Sunday. That’s, uh, that was the general rule, I think, in most of those private houses anyway. And I used to go across to Ardelve and Bella Laudaidh was working in a house there, so, that was company at least.
FM: Yeah.
JM: And we used to go to church there. It was quite a distance to walk. And I remember going over there one day, one night it was, and she had gone to church so, I, I was alone on the road. It was summer, of course, but these places, there was tramps everywhere, but they wouldn’t touch you, they were quite good. Until I reached the church, I didn’t know where the church was, just carried on till I’d come to it.

FM: Did the couple that you worked with, did they have Gaelic?

JM: Aw, no, no. No, they didn’t. I think she was from Kirkcaldy. But I think he had a scattering of it, a wee bit, but not much. But I remember one day I was in alone with the baby and I heard this knock at the door. There’s only lamps then. And I went to the door and I saw this black thing and then..., rags [?] he was wearing. So I just closed the door, put the chain on. I said, What do you want here anyway?” I was scared, but not too scared, not as scared as I’d be... Anyway, I was calling him, the man, Mr, Mr Matheson, and Mr Matheson. And when he saw that Mr Matheson wasn’t answering, he knew that he wasn’t there, he went away. But a short time after that he came and told me. And a second knock came again so I, I went, the bell rang, and I went to the door again. And this was a man, the one in the shop, I knew him. And he said, “I came to tell you not to be scared. I thought Mr Matheson was at home and I wanted to scare him.” He had a bearskin, with the head and all. I, I couldn’t see it in the bad light, fortunately. [laughs] He had, he was covered in a bearskin. “But don’t tell him I was here”, he said. “I’m coming again when they come back.” So he nearly went crazy, the bodach. [laughs] And, uh, anyway, I didn’t tell him anything, I didn’t tell him anything happened, and I went to bed. And I was hardly there when I heard the commotion downstairs; and I didn’t answer, I didn’t say anything, anyway. But she came to the bottom of the stairs where I was and, “Oh, can I come up?” “Yes, you can come up all right”, I said. And then she started to tell me about this bear. [laughs] And, uh, uh, that came for Mr Matheson. He was going to lock up when this animal came at him. And he took the stick from the hall and slashed the head with it. [laughs] Anyway, the man couldn’t hold himself so he just laughed in the end. And then was, then he said, “Your maid didn’t get scared.” “Ach, she’s used to seeing wild horses in Lewis”, he said. He was scared stiff, but I didn’t see the animal; if I had, I’d be scared. I thought it was just a tramp that was trying to get... It was a bank house, you see. The keys of the bank was just in the hall there. And I thought they were looking for the keys. But, fortunately, that wasn’t it. It was a homely place, you see: everybody knew everybody else, but there was the occasional tramp would come to the door, very often to ask for something.

FM: And where were you working after that?

JM: Inverness.

FM: Inverness. What was that like?

JM: I was in Cameron’s manse after that. Och, they were nice enough in their own ways, but, och shioruidhinn not that good. They were good enough, but not with the food, a wee bit stingy. But I didn’t realize it at the time; it was after that when I went to a better place, that I realized. Everything was locked, all the food was locked, except the sugar, and that’s after she found out that I wasn’t taking it.

FM: And were you the only girl in service there?

JM: Yes, yes. There was a girl from Lochs before me. She was, she was just leaving when I went there. And I was there at a communion and there used to, a cook used to come in at the communion. But this, this Friday of a communion... That’s when we used to have the men, the men that would be on the question day, you know, for their
dinner. And the minister’s wife was bedridden: you see her heart was bad. And word came from the cook that she couldn’t come, she was sick or something. So poor Joe Soap had to do all the cooking that day alone, for all the men and the ministers that was there. And, uh, they were, och, they were very helpful, they were very nice. Anyway, I managed it, anyway, and there was piles and piles of dishes and nobody to clear them. And the minister’s son (he was a minister in, um, where was he now? Was it Ardesier, somewhere there, or near Nairn it was?), he came to offer to, to help me with the dishes, after, after he had eaten. And I said no, I could manage. I wasn’t, I wasn’t getting to church anyway with her being ill. So, I just did it; I would rather do it on my own than have a minister beside me. [laughs] But he was a very nice person, that boy, the only boy they had. That was my life, that.
FM: And what were your jobs in the hotels?
JM: I was a waitress. I was a housemaid too, in one of them. I was in the Columba Hotel as an undercook, in the kitchen, a season. And I was in a boarding house for a few years. And it was just summer seasons and I was getting home in the winter: that suited me fine, ’cause Seonag was at the fishing then and that was it. And, uh, they were nice, they were really nice. The girls, one of the girls was with me all the time: she was doing the cooking, I was doing the housework and the tables and it was quite nice there. Oh, she used to write me funny letters when I was at home.
FM: Did you miss working when you got married and came home?
JM: Well, yes, yes. You like to be among the crowd a bit, but it would have been all right if I hadn’t been alone, if Murdo had been there. It was different. But when you’re alone and you worry about what’s going on in the war and all that, it was a very strenuous time.
FM: It must have been very, very difficult.
JM: And sometimes I just say it couldn’t have been me that went through all that. And that’s how you felt, you see. Hearing every day, somebody killed or somebody drowned and it was just horrifying. And it’s wonderful how you got through it. To think of it now, you wonder how you did manage to work and do the housework, and the croft, and the peats, and all that. And myself and Seonag was at home all the time, then, doing that, ’cause she was married too and we were both at ‘12’.
FM: And how old were your parents when they died?
JM: Well, my mother, you know, was, eh, ninety-five; she was the last. Well, my father he was only two years older than myself when he died. he came home from the War, the First World War, with, uh, poison in his throat and he never, they couldn’t do anything for him - he was discharged, it was incurable. Seemingly, they were scraping the paint off the ship and some of that must have lodged somewhere near the windpipe. Probably developed into cancer or something; I don’t know how it was, they di..., they just didn’t know. But they sent him home and he died at home shortly after. I was only two years old.
FM: How old were the rest of the family then?
JM: Well, Màiri and Ciorstag, ay, were sixteen or eighteen; and they did the croft on their own that year. Catriona was younger - well, probably she was doing a little help as well. But they did the (it was all spadework then), that’s from the gil at the aird to behind the house there, the whole croft. You see, you see, the way they did it, everybody was doing it. And, and they were sort of watching each other who would be first.
FM: That kept them going, the competition.
JM: And that kept them going, yes, the competition. And then Catriona started, probably when she went into her teens as well, started with them and when... 

*Ciorstasg* was a, was a goer, you know; she was tough and when she’d see they getting slack, she’d say something to them to make them angry, you know, something funny, and, “You’re like this”, or, “You’re like that”, or they’d be wild and working away, and, when that bit, she was thinking of - “You can stop now. It’s all right we’ve finished that bit.” You finished, you finished that bit quicker because you were angry. That’s how it went.

FM: So did your mother have a Widow’s Pension?

JM: Yes, my mother had a War Widow’s Pension, yes. I was sick and, uh, you know, seeing as I told you. And, of course, we got a paper with every six months, I think, to sign (this was in the pension book, I think) - how the family was and was everybody attending school. And it, the teacher, one of the teachers used to come to the house and she used to sign (she was from Tong) for my mother. And she was saying, “Well, I’m going to put Christina down as being unwell, so that she’ll get the pension after leaving school.” And my mother wouldn’t hear of it in case anybody would come to the house. No. So, I that left me without anything. Now, other girls like, like that... I know a girl from Back and her parents died, I think her mother died before she was old enough to work; she got the pension all the time, even when she reached eighteen, I think. They asked her if there was any work she wanted to do and she wanted to do a children’s nurse, so they paid for her in Inverness. A very nice girl. And they, they paid that for her. And, and she was getting part of the pension along with it, you know, to keep her going. So that was good. But I didn’t get the chance because my mother was too nervous that somebody... and she had no English, you see, that was probably the drawback. The girl died during the War; she died at home; she died of TB, I think.

She went down to England after that. She was working in Inverness. I used to pal in with her, a nice girl and we used to go, on a day out, you see. *Iseabail Uilleagan*’s house it was. She was living in the Maud Lawson Hall, supposed to look after it as a caretaker. And a lot of scouts used to come in the summer, you know, to parts of the hall. Not to where she was, same parts. So Katy Belle was living there too and this day, anyway, she made up with one of the scouts there. He was from Glasgow and he was a chemist. He used to say the four, in fact the first - I used to read his letters when they came, oh *cruthaich a’ bhàsàich!* My sins! Every one that came! - and he said he was the fourth generation of chemists, seemingly, that was in the family. Anyway, she was going with this fellow all the time and he was really good to her. And then she went down to England, and went back, when the war started, went back to Glasgow. And started as an air raid warden (a wee flip of a girl, a beautiful, a nice looking girl), and I think that that’s where she got the trouble, that. Anyway, she finished with, *tha*, the boy and, oh, he was really crazy about her. She says, “He’s not my kind.” She became religious about this time. And she was saying, “He’s not my kind.” So, she had to end it. And he seemed to be very, very sorry about it all. Oh we used to laugh about that. She, she was really nice.

FM: Were the rest of your family ever ill when you were growing up?

JM: No.

FM: There was nobody in your family ever in the sanatorium or anything?

JM: Oh no, they were all very healthy except me. [laughs]

FM: The baby.

JM: The baby, uh huh. All very healthy.
FM: Were the neighbours quite good when...?
JM: Oh, the neighbours were beautiful then, lovely neighbours everywhere. You know you didn’t need to need anything then: if, if you hadn’t the thing in the house, you just went to your neighbour for it, that’s how everybody was, there was nothing then but sharing. It was really great. I remember Bean Cathain, beside us, and she’d come in, uh, for, and she’d go to the cupboard for it, to see if it was there. Oh, nehr, nobody seemed to bother; they were really friendly. And they were in and out morning, night and... you could go any time of the day, any time of the day. As often as you wanted, nobody would think anything of it.

FM: How many rooms were in your house when you were growing up?
JM: Well, I grew up in the one there at number 12. There was just the four: three bedrooms and the kitchen cum sitting room.

FM: So how many of you shared a bed?
JM: Well, I had a bed of my own anyway. [laughs] Well, I suppose when the family was together, uh, there’d be two, there’d be two in the bed. Iain had a room of his own but he wasn’t very often at home either. Oh, we were quite good that way, there was nothing, nothing... The family wasn’t too big; we weren’t all together: you see, the older ones, well, some had died of them, and it was only just what was left - Iain and Seonag and myself and Catriona and that’s it. The others had died before I grew up. I, I can’t remember them, except Mary, she was married to Sharraidh. I remember her, she died with the first child.

FM: Did, did she die in childbirth?
JM: Yes, she died in childbirth.

FM: Do you remember any other women in the village who died in childbirth or soon after it?
JM: Uh, uh, well, yes, Bean Whistle, the first wife he had, she died, she died in, well, she was taken to hospital with fever. But it was, uh, when the baby was born that she died. My, my auntie, Bean a' Mhic Citheach, the first wife Dòmhnaill a' Mhic Citheach had, she died in her first... I can’t remember it at all, I can’t remember her at all, I was too young, be only a couple of years by that, whatever it was. And she died in childbirth. And the way it was, a doctor wouldn’t come, they were very reluctant to come then and they were being sent for and nobody came and the nurse was just at the end of her tether. She couldn’t do anything for her. So she, the baby was delivered, the baby was dead and she died with the baby, so the two coffins were together, the wee one and her, on the, on the bier.

[Break in the recording - another childbirth story.]

FM: Did the baby survive?
JM: Oh yes, he’s away somewhere in London. We don’t hear from him either, no, not since his father died, well, he was home since his father died, but no.

FM: Did his father remarry?
JM: Oh aye. He was married to Aonghas Alasdair’s Ruairidh’s sister, Máiri Alasdair Ruairidh.

FM: What about women helping out at births? Do you remember local women having to help out?
JM: Well, I don’t, well, if on was stuck, uh, that they had nobody to wash or dry or anything like that, wash or clean, they would do that, anybody around. Many’s a time I and Seonag were in Iridh’s helping out, you know.
FM: Yeah.
JM: And I remember when Iseabail Ididh was born. He was dying for a girl. And I was with the nurse upstairs. And Iseabail was born and I came down and I said to him, “Ah, now there you are, you have a girl now.” “Breugan! [Lies!]“ [laughs] He couldn’t believe it, he couldn’t believe it, he thought I was telling lies.
FM: How many boys did he have already?
JM: Well, he had, eh, three, no two boys, two boys already. Couldn’t believe he’d got a girl, ’cause they were mad for a girl.
FM: Really.
JM: Aye. It was boys, it was only one girl that - well, they had two girls in their family but one died young, in school like - but the other one, there was only the one. She was married to a man from Fraserburgh in Stornoway, well, and died, she was old, two of a family, a boy and a girl, they’re in Canada.
FM: Quite a lot of people were the other way, they wanted, they wanted boys more than girls.
JM: Yes, but he wanted. There were so many boys in the family, you see: I think they had eight boys (they had a big family), and I think it's eight boys and two girls. And he, he was desperate for a girl in his own family. But he wouldn’t believe when I came down, I remember that. Now, Rogair’s family, well, Seonag was mostly at home there and she was there all the time helping with that. So that’s how they, how it was done. Bean Rogair had nobody but us, you see, and we’re first cousins of hers, we were helping them. And, well, we grew up together, beside each other, so they’re, they’re more like first cousins of ours now, that family. And, uh, we’re the only relatives really they have, well, no, not really because they have muinnitir Bhigidh, balaich Bhigidh [Bhidgid’s people, boys], they’re first cousins of their father (we’re first cousins of their mother), but we lived next door. And I remember my mother when pans, pans of soup would be left, you know, the family, our family being small by that time. Aw, she wouldn’t dream of putting it away or anything. Gabhail a-steach dh-an a’ chlann bhochd sin leis - going into Ruaraidh’s house with the soup and with anything that would be done. So probably they remember this and they’d be coming in, they used to call my mother their auntie and, eh, they’d be coming in every day. And I remember Alasdair used to come every Sunday for the Sunday soup. And they’d have soup themselves but seemingly ours was better. [laughs] I thought so, maybe when you get it in somebody else’s house. Aw, yes, they were so nice; but they were a, were a lovely family, there was hardly any quarrel among them at all as a group of boys; I always admired them for that, they were really very peaceful among themselves. And Rogair was as strict; oh, he was a funny sort of person. One whistle and they’d come from any part of the village: that’s how he got them home, he would whistle outside the house and they would hear the whistle and off, they would come.
Oh yes.
FM: Was it difficult, um, seeing as your father died when you were quite young, did you miss having a man around the house?
JM: Well, ah, I hadn’t much sense, you see. It’s your mum you miss most - me, anyway. My older sister missed my father, Ciorstag always talked about my father, you see. But I didn’t know him to miss him, I was too young, too young to miss him. Seonag kno... Seonag recollects him very well, but I was, I was younger, so I didn’t remember him at all. At two years, you see, you don’t know what’s happening, no.
FM: But just for things around the house and the croft, you know, that men would usually do.
JM: Well, he did all of that of course, but I don’t remember it, you see. Ciorstag remembered all of that, she used to, she’ld always talk about my father, my father and all he did.

FM: And who looked after you mother when she was old?
JM: Seonag, she was with Seonag. Well, you see, Seonag stayed with my mother at number twelve long after I left and they built up that house and my mother was, went with them. So number twelve was left to Iain and then he sold it to Bean Aileagan. He never came to live here himself, what he should have done, by rights.

FM: Do you feel you know losing the family home is something...?
JM: It’s very sad, it’s very sad, it was at first; now, I don’t think of it, but it was very sad to see somebody else in it, the family home.

FM: Uh huh. And how did you get this croft?
JM: Well, we came here with Murdo’s father, Murdo’s.... When I came here there was three of them: Murdo’s uncle and, uh, his mother and father, there was three of them here. Seonag was here but she had gone to the Castle Grounds then to get a, they got huts there before they got houses, you see. And Murdo was asking me would I rather get that, that he would get a hut there and, ach, no, I didn’t fancy going up town.

FM: So you were living with your par...., your in-laws when you got married?
JM: I was living for, for over twenty years.

FM: Was that difficult at all?
JM: Not really. You know Cairstiona, Murdo’s mother, was a really nice person. she was a very easy person to live with. Can’t say his father was that good: it’s not what he’d say, but what he didn’t say that bothered me [laugh], you know, you sensed there was something wrong and you didn’t know what it was.

FM: You nursed him until he died.
JM: Oh, I did. He was easier then than when he was working. Well, maybe I did things he didn’t like and maybe he did things I didn’t like, and that’s how it was, but we never, we never had a word, no, I never said anything to any of them. And Iain, oh, poor Iain was so nice too. I nursed him as well: he had cancer. And it was a job. You couldn’t, you know he didn’t get thin with it, he was very heavy because it was in the bowel and the bowel was out. Started in the toe and, uh, he was very heavy and when Murdo would be working, the days he’d be working.... He asked one day Seamus Mòr, one day, to go in and lift him so I could get dry sheets under him: he couldn’t move him and yet Murdo was lifting him up from the bed. You couldn’t turn him, like, to get the sheets, because he was, he was in pain if you turned him on his side. But he was easy, he was easy, a dear soul. Sometimes I’d be “Nurse, nurse, I want this or that”, when he didn’t remember. Oh the bodach didn’t remember, he didn’t have a clue, for quite a while, no.

FM: And how long were you looking after them?
JM: Aw well, I don’t think it was very long really. Iain had the toe cut at the hospital, at the hospital, and he came home in the summer and I think it was the next February or something that he died; no, it was the next August after that, a year or something like that. And the bodach, well, the bodach was a couple of years, I think. He was all right at first, he’d get up, and then he was incontinent so you couldn’t do anything with him. He couldn’t remember, couldn’t remember, so when he stayed, when he stayed in bed he was easier; and when he’d get up and wet everything and every bit that was on him and all that, that was, oh, difficult to do, but we managed.

FM: And what other help did you get?
JM: No help.
FM: Nothing at all.
JM: No help, no help. I remember, well, Murdo used to go to the peats when he’d come home from work. I wasn’t doing peats or any outside work - I couldn’t. And I remember going out - we had oats or corn or something down the croft - I, eh, I remember one day and your father, your grandfather had finished stacking it, making wee stacks on the croft. It was great. Oh he was a ... and he didn’t even come in. I knew it was him because nobody else would do it but him. Then he went out one day to the peats, but Murdo had finished it the night before and, so, he didn’t know this; he went out to see them and there was nothing for him to do. I don’t think there was any, anything for him to do that night and he was disappointed. Oh, he was good, good: just like your father, the very, very sort of nature, yes, just like your father.
FM: And was you mother-in-law, did you nurse her as well?
JM: She really didn’t need much nursing. She, she was getting up every day. And Iain died, no, not Iain. Iain had died before her but I had Coinneach Mòr; he was.... I didn’t have him, he was in the hospital with a stroke - and it was, hum, here he came, the remains came here, you know, ’cause you couldn’t put him to the house ’cause there was nobody there, you know, the wee black house he was in, and it was here he came. And that was a Thursday and we had his wake here on a Thursday.

6A.3
Tape 2: Side A.

JM: And Cairstiona was up and talking to everybody. She wasn’t well, granted, she wasn’t well all the time. But well enough to get up and, eh, that was in the room. We had to put them upstairs to the other room and she wasn’t well that night. But they never said anything, or anything, but we were hearing them up and down. You couldn’t say, you couldn’t say was there anything wrong or they wouldn’t like it, probably. Aye, the Thursday, Coinneach’s remains came here, the funeral was to be on the Friday, ’cause he had died in hospital the night before, two night before (I think it was two nights off that, I remember) and, eh, the next Thursday she died. She wasn’t well through the night and he told me she wasn’t well. And I had to change the bed because she had diarrhoea, and she told me that, before she could get out of bed. So I had to change the bed and washed that, and he could go to church if he wanted to, she’d be all right. So she was. She came down here and she was sitting in the chair, quite the thing. I did the washing down there and, ah, that was all right, eh,... I told her, when they came from church, I said to her, “I’ll send up your dinner to you.” “No, I’d rather come down with you to the kitchen.” So we had our dinner in the kitchen. He went out after dinner and I was just washing the dishes at the sink there and I heard “zzzhhh”, sort of. I looked up and here she was in this chair over there and “zzzhhh” - got the fright of my life. And I went up to her and said, “Dé tha ceàrr?" [What is wrong] “Oh, chan eil cail ceàrr orms’.” [Oh, there’s nothing wrong with me.] I said, “Come and sit in the chair beside me where you were before. You’ll be better there.” And she did come to the chair, sat in the chair, and another one came. I went down and got some water and washed her face with it. He came in by this time, he sort of heard something and she started saying to him, “Dad’ tha ceàrr ormi?” [What’s wrong with me?] “Oh, cha robh cail ceàrr ort.” [Oh, there was
nothing wrong with you.] Anyway, I had her clothes there to change her. I was changing her into her clothes, for the bed, like, a nightie. Anyway, and, uh, she went [mimics slumping]. He, he said he would go up with her himself. She went into the toilet and she collapsed in the toilet, and he asked me to come and lift her up and I couldn’t. She was heavy and he was on the, on the upper side, and I couldn’t even move her legs. So I went for Murchadh Iain and they put her to bed and she was conscious all right then, and then, and then, ach... Murchadh Iain came over, so, I don’t think we moved her, we just left her, and Bean Murchadh Iain was seeing to her and then we saw another one coming, as if the face got sort of white, and she just went like that, that was it. There was no... I came up here and told him that she was.... He told me that when I took her up, “You’re not to send for the doctor.” “Yes,” I said, “I’ve sent for the doctor and he’s coming.” “She’ll not go to hospital.” Think of it! Oh shìor, he had a crazy idea, he had crazy ideas. I didn’t like that at all, and, anyway, she didn’t need the hospital, she was dead when the doctor came. Ah, the doctor, uh, just signed the certificate. She had a massive coronary. Anyway, Katy Anne, Anne a’ Charnain and Bean Dhólaidh, was going out here to, uh, Alec Dan’s wake. He had died that day. And, of course, they saw the commotion and they came in. And here she was dead. So poor Annie didn’t get past that, a truaighan [poor soul], and then Katy Anne was in Dólaídh’s and I asked her, “Oh, Katy Anne, will you go up and give her the kiss of life and see if can come....” She went up and “Aw, no,” she says. “She’s gone.” It was really a shock and, em, Murdo was working. Funny enough, uh ,he had gone to, ay, he wasn’t long.... After the summer holidays they had just gone to work, I think, that day and, uh, he was just telling your father [means my grandfather] that his mother wasn’t well through the night. And Dólaídh Green went up for him and they both came home, himself and your father, your grandfather rather. So it was quite a shock.

FM: Was Annie-Mary born then?

JM: Oh aye. Annie-Mary was in Glasgow then.

FM: Oh, was she!

JM: Yes, yes, Annie-Mary was working in the Albion.

FM: Uh huh. What year was Annie-Mary born in?

JM: In 1943.

FM: ’53?

JM: ’43. Is it? Yes. We married in 1939 and the boy was born in 1941. She was born in 1943. She’s 53 or ’4.

FM: Uh huh. I didn’t think she was that old.

JM: Oh yes, a ghràidh, she is, she is.

FM: And was she born...? Where was she born?

JM: In Tolsta, in, in number twelve, at number twelve, during the War.

FM: What was that like? Do you remember?

JM: Oh, well... it was, it was quick that birth; it wasn’t long, it didn’t take long. The doctor was there and we got on fine. But I got pneumonia after it. Oh, I was a truaighan. [laughs] And, ah, the, the weather was terrible, the snow - no, that couldn’t have been - that was the boy. It couldn’t have been Annie-Mary, because Annie-Mary was in April. This was January; and I’m getting mixed. Anyway, we were all right that time, I think, we were all right. She was in a wee cot, a doll’s cot that I had, a doll’s cot that I got from Canada from my sister Catriona when she was there. With wheels on it, and it would just take a baby when it would be a month old. And Alec John was in it first and she was in it again [laughs] until I got the pram and, ay, a proper cot for her. Oh, aye.

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FM: And they used to sleep with the babies in the bed with them. Did you sleep with Annie-Mary in bed with you until she was...?
JM: I, I had her in bed for a while. Couldn’t leave her in that wee thing, so - I don’t know how long, not very long.
FM: Yeah. And how long were you kept in bed after you’d ...?
JM: Oh, shiorruidh. You had to stay in bed a fortnight probably then: that was the rules, wouldn’t let you up.
FM: And who came in to do your work?
JM: Oh, Seonag was there at the time. And she had Alec John as a baby then too; he was six months, or something, older than Annie-Mary. I don’t know if he was six, but he was... five.
FM: And the nurse would come in everyday?
JM: Nurse would come in everyday, and bath her everyday, and bath me, sponge me, and all, yes. These nurses were kept busy during the war, the district nurses, because nobody went to hospital then. Everybody - unless there was serious case - everybody had the baby at home.
FM: What preparations were made before you had a baby?
JM: Oh, you had... you had to have everything: the baby’s clothes, and the clothes for the bed, and the powders and whatever, the ointments and whatever you need. We had to have all that. the nurse was giving you a list of what to get before the baby was born - just as it is now, if you’re getting one, I don’t know. Oh, they were very well looked after then. Our Annie-Mary was quite good; she was a quiet baby, very. But she was... she grew a bit older and big. Laura, there, she was very puny looking, you know then, because she wouldn’t eat; she was, it was very hard to get her to eat proper food, a proper meal anyway, even, even when she was in school. And it still is. Anyway, I’d put it that way. But it didn’t seem to do her any harm.
FM: Did you get lots of advice from, like, your older sisters, your mother about what it would be like once you became a mother yourself?
JM: No, my mother never mentioned it. Och, you sort of knew what you had to go through anyway.
FM: You just learnt from....
JM: There was no use exaggerating or anything like that, and, uh, they wouldn’t tell you anything to frighten you, they wouldn’t tell... to upset you in any way.
FM: Was Blastan at home when Annie-Mary was born?
JM: No!, nor.... She was a month old before he came home and it was coming back from Normandy, I think. Anyway, it was on that coast, anyway, it was coming back from there. ‘Cause I wasn’t getting letters for a while and they came to Aultbea with the boat and it’s there he got the letters and Alasdair was there too, and he knew so he came home from there, he come home from there then. But he didn’t see the first boy at all.
FM: And what did people do to celebrate a new-born baby?
JM: Och, just a glass of whisky and that’s it, wine and whisky, and that was it.
FM: Uh huh. Did you use the word urstan [toast for a new baby]?
JM: Urstan? Yes, yes, urstan, that was it.
FM: Did you get any presents?
JM: Och, yes, quite a lot of presents.
FM: What sort of things?
JM: Well, ay, matinee jackets, and, uh, frocks and stuff like that for a girl, just, ay, more or less the same.
FM: Did people stick at all to the idea of pink for girls, and blue for boys?
JM: They still do, they still do.
FM: Did they do it then as well?
JM: Yes, yes. And white, to be sure. I remember a woman from Stornoway, and I didn't even know her, she sent me a matinee jacket - she was a friend of the Crocketts - crocheted; it was beautiful, it was really nice - it was sort of strange then. And, uh, it was nice, and I didn't even know the woman at all.
FM: Did the mother get any presents, or were they all sort of things for the baby? You didn't get anything yourself?
JM: Oh, shee, no, no, I didn't get anything myself; it was enough to give it to the baby without giving it to me, yes. No.
FM: Do you remember Annie-Mary's christening?
JM: Yes, she was very good and we came home for our dinner from church and the crying started then. She started to get sleepy and, and, when she sort of couldn't sleep with the noise and the talking, she just went beserk with the crying and... she was hardly ever crying. And, of course, the old folk were saying, “Is there anything wrong with her”, and I was saying, “No, it's just sleep.” Anyway, after dinner we went home with her and she slept all the way in the road: that was her. I knew fine that it was sleep that was upsetting her, but she was good in church, at the christening. Mr Gillies, the minister that was in Stornoway then, christened her.
FM: Was anyone else christened that day?
JM: Yes, Catriona Chromartaidh, who died last year, not last year, six years ago. Yes, they were both christened together. And Cromartaidh was mad, because Murdo had, Murdo was the first baby and he had to say this catechism and he's.... Cromartaidh said, “I've never said it in my life; if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have to say anything.” How he'd got off with it before, I don't know. He was a funny man. He used to say this to Murdo: “If it wasn't for you I wouldn't have to say anything.” The christening. Would be like Alec John when Duncan MacLean was questioning him at the christening, eh, oh, with the twins, and he said, “I won't say any of the catechism in Gaelic, eh, in English. I don't know it; I'll say it in Gaelic.” And Duncan MacLean hadn't a Gaelic catechism in church but, anyway, he answered a few and that was it. “You're better than me,” he said, “because I hadn't the Gaelic ones, just the English ones.” So that was it.
FM: Were you nervous when Annie-Mary was getting christened?
JM: Yes, nervous in case she'd start crying. Oh, yes, a ghraidh. No word about the vows, the christening vows, or anything like that... no, no. It's when you hear other people going under the vows that you wonder, “Did I, did I hear that myself?” But you do, you do, you vow to bring up the child in the - how does it go? - “nurture of the Lord, care and nurture of the Lord”.
FM: Do you think you spoil Annie-Mary, as an only child?
JM: I was trying not to; I was afraid she would be spoilt. It was her father who spoilt her more than me. But I, I can't say she was really spoilt at all, no.
FM: Are you glad that she chose to build a house next door to you?
JM: Yes, it was great. I said to Murdo, well, when he started to get ill, “Would you ask them to come here and build a house?” I wouldn't ask them to come here with me because they wouldn't be happy and I'd gone through that myself; nobody would be happy and we're both happy this way: I can stay in my wee corner and they can stay in their house. So, I wrote and asked and I, I was just, I didn't know. “Yes. I think that's what we should do, if they'll come, but I doubt it.” And they were set in Glasgow and they were thinking of buying another house, you see, in Glasgow, and, uh, I wrote. And Annie-Mary wasn't sure at first, but Murdo was for it; he liked
Tolsta, and he would come here. So that was it, it was decided: signed the croft over to him.

FM: I always thought it was unusual that Murdo is known as ‘Murdo Bhalstan’.

JM: Yes, because they don’t know him by any other name.

FM: Yeah.

JM: Seeing as he was in Blastan’s house he was ‘Murdo Bhalstan’, but in Stornoway he’s ‘Murdo Box’, Box’s son.

FM: Uh huh.

JM: But not here, not here.

FM: What did it feel like when you first became a granny?

JM: Oh well, I can’t remember really. I was pleased naturally, I was pleased. I was out, I went out to Glasgow then, but the baby was born before I went. And she was in hospital - or supposed to be in hospital - and when - it was just two days before that she had the baby - and when I went out, you know, I was a bit dazed, I think, with the strangeness of everything. And this woman was sitting with a baby in her arms, and I sort of, not, looked at her and she said, “A chruthaidheachd [oh, Creator], are you not going to speak to me?” I was that dazed, and I didn’t know her. I went on my own and Murdo was meeting me at the station and he didn’t tell me that she had been home so that I’d get a surprise and I sure did; I thought it was somebody else. I didn’t look twice at her that was why and here she was with the baby in her arms, a bhronaig [woman]. It was good.

6A.4

Tape 2: Side B

FM: Did it make you feel old, being a granny?

JM: No, I didn’t feel any older, no. Och I was young enough then.

FM: And when was it that Murdo became…, started to get poorly and had to give up work?

JM: I can’t remember even the year.

FM: But it was quite a while before?

JM: It was quite a while. You know, he was at home; he was made redundant at work and he was at home, and he wasn’t saying anything and he, um, he wasn’t looking for work. I don’t think he was anyway, but I never said anything, I was quite happy. But I, I noticed in some things that he wasn’t himself. He was turfing out at Seonag’s one day, a few years before that, and I noticed him stopping a few times, and I didn’t know what it was, I didn’t suspect really anything, thought he was tired or something. But this year I saw him asking Domhnall Ruairidh Steic to put the lambs out to the Beinn there, to (points). And, “Why didn’t you go yourself?”. And I still didn’t think there was anything wrong; I noticed that he wasn’t too well but I never thought it was like that. Then Domhnall Giomanach died and he was a friend of his and I asked him was he going to the funeral tomorrow? “No,” he said, and I looked at him, “Why?” “I’m not feeling well: I’ve this pain in my chest ever since…”...about a fortnight or so before he was, he went fishing, rock-fishing down at Domhnall Thormoid’s place there, and this stab in the chest. And he had to stop, himself and Alec John. When he stopped, now, of course, naturally, it, the pain went away and he carried on. But he was getting it so often since and I said, “You must go
to the doctor.” “Yes, I’m going today.” And that was strange. And then he came back from the doctor. “Och, everything’s all right. He just told me to take things easy, that I was all right; just to take things easy and, eh, not to do too much work and that I’ll be all right. Not to worry.” He didn’t say what it was or what else he said to him. Anyway, that same doctor was at Murchedh lain’s house next day and I went over. And when he came down I asked him. “Did he not tell you? He’s got angina.” “No,” ars’ mise. “Oh, typical. That’s how they all are.” “No,” ars’ mise, “he didn’t.” “He’ll be all right if he’ll do, if he does what he’s told.” And I came back and I said - I think I went down that day to see your Papa [F.M.’s grandfather] and she showed me the tablets he had - Indorin was it? I think it was, pink ones. And that’s the very same he got. And I said, “You didn’t tell me that you had angina.” “Who told you?” “I asked the doctor and he told me, and you have the same tablets as Kenneth, your uncle. So don’t pretend to me. I know fine what’s wrong with you and you’re going to do what you’re told.” So, he carried on like that, but he had to do what he was told at times but he tried to do things that he shouldn’t. But it’s, it’s after that, I think it’s after that he had the haemorrhage in the stomach that he went real down. he was saying this every..., he couldn’t eat anything. we were over at Annie Mary’s: she was working late and Murdo was Inverness at the time and, uh, he went, he got up to the bathroom this night and, oh, I heard a thump and I got up and he had fallen to the floor. “Aw, I don’t know what came over me but I just fell.” Now, he got up himself, he got up himself, came to bed and that was it. Anyway, the next day, he said he couldn’t eat, he couldn’t eat anything and that was his artery. I noticed when he was getting up to the toilet on the Sunday - we were over here then because Annie Mary was at home - and when we were getting up on the Sunday... he would get up to the bathroom, but he sort of had a hold of the furniture going all the way. Still, I didn’t really think it was as bad as that. Anyway, in the morning he couldn’t eat anything and that was that; he couldn’t eat anything at dinner-time, not even a cup of tea. And so, and the outside was just covered with snow and you couldn’t see a thing. the snow was everywhere: no traffic, nothing at all. the, the gritters came: that’s the first time they were ever here on a Sunday, in the morning, and did a wee bit of clearing for the traffic. that was in the morning. But.... Before they went to church at night, I said to him, “I’m going to make a little porridge,” and he didn’t say anything, he said, “All right.” And I had the porridge on. he got, eh, I was just taking it off when he said, he shouted to me. He went up, came up to the bathroom and he couldn’t get up, collapsed there and then. He, he called me, “I can’t get up. You’d better come and help.” I helped him stand, but not a step could he take, not a step. He’d vomited quite a lot the day before. [...] I couldn’t get him up, I couldn’t move him an inch and he collapsed on me there and then on the floor. I tried to let him down slowly and I had to.... It was in the bathroom and it’s so small, and I couldn’t even get anything to go underneath him, I had to let him down on the floor as he was because he was out. I thought he was dead, as a matter of fact. I tried to shout Annie Mary and she couldn’t hear me. So, I went over there, among the snow and everything, and she was in the sitting room and I shouted from the kitchen. And, oh, they all came down in a rush and I told her to come. And then she sent for Alec John - he wasn’t in church; wouldn’t be in church anyway - to, uh, to lift him up with her. Anyway they got him to church, to bed and, uh, I was, I was opening the front door and, “You’re not going to send for the doctor. I’m all right now.” Once he was lying down, of course he was all right. But Annie Mary said, “You don’t need to bother. I’ve sent for the doctor already.” That was all right and the doctor came. Every time the doctor would turn him that was him - off again. he had no blood left, no blood left at all. And I said
then to him, "What was it you put up yesterday? What kind of thing?" "Oh, it was black." It was blood, that's what it was, so he was practically drained of it. If he had, if he'd been left to the Monday, the doctor said he wouldn't have made it. Anyway, I don't think he was well after that, although he got on after that. he got eight pints of blood at the hospital but, eh, he wasn't really too good after that and then his chest started - wheezing and wheezing and, aw, in the end he couldn't go to bed at all, we'd be up here from one o'clock, one in each chair all night. He couldn't go to bed at all until the last week. That's all, I think, he was in bed. That's it, a ghràidh.

FM: He was very stubborn?
JM: The doctor was to Annie Mary, "Will you tell him that I've to take him to hospital?" "No," she says, "you tell him." And, eh, "Well, Murdo," he said, "I'm afraid we'll have to take you up." "Oh, that's all right." Oh, he wouldn't go against anything; he was really good that way, anything like that anyone wanted; he was very easy.

FM: He used to go out on fishing boats as well from the cladach?
JM: Och, yes, he's.... He was always at the fishing boats, and the rock fishing, and all the fishing that was going.

FM: Could you tell me again about how you used to go down to the cladach to meet the boats?
JM: Me?
FM: Yeah.
JM: I just went down, straight down the road.
FM: With a creel?
JM: With the creel on my back for the fish. That was it - wait there till the boat would come in and they'd put up the fish and then share it out.
FM: Did many other women still go down then with the creel to meet the boats?
JM: No, not lately, not in the latter part. At first there used to be one for every man, but not..., there was nobody to go except me then. Used to be alone there, morning especially; maybe at night you'd get somebody with you, depending on who would be out.
FM: And when did you stop going down?
JM: When he stopped fishing.
FM: And when was that?
JM: I can't tell you, a ghràidh. When there was no boat, probably; when Ailean stopped and that.
FM: Uh huh.
JM: I, I remember one night he went out with - oh, I was worried that night too - he was, he was well then. They went out with a trawl to Gress in Ailean's boat to get salmon. And they cut it on a wreck that was in at the end of the river, or something that was in where they were hauling away and hawling away, thinking they had a load. And they did have a load but they all got out through the cut that was in the net. Aw, well, I was pleased so they wouldn't try it again. That's it.

End of Recording
Sina lives near my parents and is a cousin of my mother’s. As with Jessie, her household and ours has been connected over the years by different generations, socially and through communal labour.

**6B.1**

Tape 1: Side A.

Fiona MacDonald: What year were you born in?
Sina Morrison: 1927.
FM: In Tolsta?
SM: In Tolsta, and went to school there, and lived there until I left the island, maybe 18 or 19. And went down to Cambridge, which was a shock to the system, I can tell you, coming from Lewis, down to Cambridge. And I was there for a couple of years. And there was no-one who spoke Gaelic; I mean I spoke English all the time, so by the time I came back I was practising to myself [laughs], “I wonder if I can speak that, I wonder if I can speak that language.” And then I went to Glasgow and I was there, oh, for a good many years until I got married in about 19... 1954. Lived there for another five years, had three of a family there. And moved up to Tolsta and the rest of the family were born here and we’re here to this day. Since I married I didn’t work. I never worked after that, that was it.
FM: What were you doing before then?
SM: I was, eh, working in a nursing home on the south side of Glasgow. And after I married that was it, I didn’t do, I didn’t work ever [laughs] again. I worked hard, I can tell you but not...
FM: Paid work.
SM: ... paid. So life here has been very uneventful, I can tell you. [laughs] I didn’t like it here when I came back from Glasgow. Even to this day, I sometimes feel, ay, that I would like to go back there, I liked it. I’ve a soft spot for Glasgow. And, um, as I say, the rest of the family were born here, four, four of them, two boys and two girls were born here - Alec John, Iain, Donna and Lily.
FM: And what were you doing in Cambridge?
SM: Oh, I was in a hospital there, an infectious diseases hospital. It was this Dr Cameron who used to come here on holiday every year that took me there in the first place. And, oh, I enjoyed that. It was really nice, it was a nice place and I really liked it. But, oh shior, in those days - which was oh '50 - it seemed a long way off. But, um, I met my husband, my husband Murdo then, and he used to sail in and out of Glasgow, so I went to work in Glasgow because of that more than anything else. [laughs] And that’s where we got married.
FM: How old were you when you left school?
SM: Fourteen.
FM: And what did you do then?
SM: Most people.... You were just at home - fourteen then. You didn’t do any secondary education, or higher education - very few did anyway, ay, because if your parents didn’t have the money you just didn’t get the education. And maybe one or two in the class would get a bursary and that was the real, the real clever ones. The
rest they were just left. And I’m sure there were plenty people who would have made something of their lives had they had the opportunity that people are getting today.

FM: It’s such a waste.

SM: Mm, it’s such a waste. There was a lot of clever people and some of them got on in spite of the fact that they didn’t get further education - they just made something of themselves. But we certainly didn’t have the opportunities that children of today have - no, nor anything like it.

FM: How many children were in your own family?

SM: Our own family . . . [long pause as counts] ten.

FM: Ten.

SM: Ten of a family. And of that I was the oldest and with that there was a lot expected of me, you know, about the house and looking after the rest of the family, yes. And, uh, people weren’t as well off as they are today and having a big family was quite a struggle. But we never went hungry; we always had something to eat and clothes to put on, but, ay, things were very - what shall I say? - times were hard. Yes, times were hard. I mean, I have a life of luxury compared to my parents, certainly.

FM: Did you ever have old relatives living with you - your grandparents?

SM: No, no, no. I had no-one, but I had my own parents, well, I had my mother living with me and I looked after my father until he died. But, they had no old relatives staying with them.

FM: No. And both your parents were from Tolsta?

SM: Both my parents were from Tolsta and they lived to a ripe old age. My father was 88, my mother was 84 when they died.

FM: Did you have quite a lot... I mean you were sort of saying as the eldest of a big family - a lot of responsibility? Did you ever find that boys or girls had more or less work to do around the place?

SM: Well, I think the girls had . . ., well, I think that the boys were, eh, pampered more than the girls, certainly. I think the girls, the girls had to do all the work. Whereas the boys were . . . I don’t know why. I think that is a, a trait in Lewis - maybe not today - but in those days, certainly, that the male of the species was treated differently [laughs], whereas the females they had to get on with the work.

FM: How many brothers did you have?

SM: Three, three brothers. But they were younger than me, so, I, uh . . . The boys were the youngest in the family and, so, I . . . they were quite young when I was that wee bit older, so they were really children when I left home.

FM: Who were you named after, do you know?

SM: I, my father was married before he married my mother and his wife died, so when he married, re-married, I was called after his first wife.

FM: Do you know who the rest of the family were named after?

SM: Mary, she was named after a stepsister. And, a shior, I don’t know . . . Rhoda was called after my grandfather (like your mother). The rest, I don’t know really.

FM: Mm huh. What about your own children?

SM: Ah, my own children. Well, Anne is called after her grandmother, her paternal grandmother; and Christine is called after my own mother. Murdo Angus, he’s called after the two grandfathers - no, I’m wrong there, he’s called after his own father and his grandfather on his father’s side. Alec John is called after two uncles on his father’s side. Iain’s called after my own father. Lilian’s called after an aunt and my grandmother, and Donna, oh, I don’t know who Donna’s called after. I think it was just a name . . . That’s it.

FM: Who chose the names?
SM: Uh, I think they were jointly chosen really, I think so. Well, my, my mother, when I was expecting Lily, she said to me, uh, ‘If it’s a girl I’d like you to call it after Lily,’ because, ay, she died. I think she was forty-two when she died and nobody had been called after her. She had an adopted daughter of her own who was called Rhoda, and, em, I didn’t like Lily on its own so I called her Lilian after my aunt and my grandmother, my grandmother on my mother’s side.

FM: You were saying you looked after your mother, in her old age.

SM: Mm huh, I did, I did.

FM: Did you ever have her living in your house with you?

SM: Mm huh.

FM: What about the rest of the family, did...?

SM: Well, the rest of the family was away by then, of course. But the two girls were still at home and it was quite a struggle because she had to have a room of her own. And, um, although they loved her dearly and she wasn’t too much trouble, but still at times they resented her. She.... They felt they were restricted in some of the things they could do, like watching telly. And she didn’t care for some of the things they watched on the telly and she’d tell them, ‘Put that thing off.’ That sort of thing. And they felt that there was a lot of restrictions on them that there wouldn’t be if Granny wasn’t here.

FM: Did you feel you shared the responsibility with your sisters and your brothers? Did you feel as the eldest again that...?

SM: Oh yes, oh yes, I felt as, uh, it was expected of me, that I was just doing my duty and after all I was the only... no, there was another daughter in the village right enough. But, eh, I felt that I was the one who had the responsibility and that I should be the one, you know, to look after her.

FM: How old were you when your mother became dependent on you?

SM: Uhh, I was fifty.

FM: And when did she...?

SM: She died, she was 84 when she died. She wasn’t a great deal of trouble, I have to admit. She and, ay, but, uh.... What am I searching for? She did cause some resentment in the house. And I felt that, that the resentment was of me for having her, you see, that I was put in a very difficult position, sort of trying to please the family and at the same time as a duty to my mother. And, well, I mean where else could she go? And, I mean, I couldn’t let her go into a home after bringing up a large family, that she would have to go to a hospital or a home. No, I couldn’t have, I couldn’t have done that, no.

FM: How was Murdo? How did he...?

SM: Oh, he was okay, he was okay. He never, he never resented having her. On the contrary. I remember once when I let her..., she went back to my sister’s... and, um, she wasn’t very happy there at all. And, em, he said to me, “I think you should..., we’ll have to take Granny back out.” No, no, he never resented it, but, then it wasn’t him who was doing all the work.

FM: Did you expect to have such a large family?

SM: Mmm. No, no, not when I got married first, no, I didn’t. Or before even I got married, I didn’t think I’d have such a large family. But, aw, I don’t know: they just came along. And in those days, I have to admit, in those days, we didn’t have the benefit of the, all the information that people have today. We were brought up in Lewis in our day and there was no television, there was no paper and - well, there was the odd paper, but you wouldn’t read anything in the paper except the news.
And, ay, I mean discussion about sex or anything like that was taboo. You weren't told anything; absolutely taboo.

FM: What about childbirth and pregnancy? Did you, did you know what you had let yourself in for when you...?

SM: Well, we sort of knew second-hand. We weren't, we certainly weren't prepared when we left, in my generation and generations before, when we left the island. We were quite... ignorant in a lot of things.

FM: What year was your first child born in?

SM: 19-, we got married... Christine was born in 1955.

FM: Did your mother give you much advice?

SM: No, well, as it happened I wasn't at home, I was in Glasgow at the time. And it was just, you were going into the unknown, it was just, ay, something, you know, that had to be experienced before you really knew anything about it.

FM: Was she born at home or in the hospital?

SM: No, she was born in the hospital, Christine, and Murdo, but Alec John, he was born at home, here, in this very house.

FM: What was that like?

SM: Oh, it was an experience that I..., that I never repeated because there was complications and, um, the doctor and the nurse were here for hours and hours and hours. The reason, I had, the reason I decided to have the birth at home was I'd be with the other children, you know. I didn't want to..., you know, that I'd be there no matter what. But, em, I wouldn't have..., I didn't do it ever again because the hospital is the best place definitely because things can present themselves at a moment's notice. But, uh, as it happened, I got over that. It was what they call a 'face presentation' and the doctor that was there at the time, Dr Matheson, was very skilful. But, um, em, I wouldn't have recommended it to anybody again, ever. Although, before that, when my mother was having her children, they were all born at home. I mean, hospitals weren't heard of. Of course, there was no National Health Service then so they just had to have them at home. You had to pay to go into hospital; I think you even had to pay so much to the nurse who attended you or, or else they had an annual subscription or something like that, you know, that paid her, her wages or something like that. I remember them going round collecting, uh, money for the nurse anyway.

FM: Do you remember any of your mother's home births?

SM: No, no, strangely enough I don't, strangely enough, I don't. It's very strange. And, em, things were very kept, you know, so private. And, tha, this baby, God knows where he came from, out of the nurse's bag [laughs]. And sometimes they didn't even have doctors, it used to be somebody, a neighbour, a lady from next door, or next door again, that came and helped the nurse. There was a woman over there, Kate, she used to be with your grandmother down there, every.

FM: Iain Shiül's mother?

SM: Màthair Iain Shiül, mm huh. If she was with your granny down there, granny felt safe, yes. But, otherwise, oh dearie me, but then you must remember a lot of people died then, in childbirth.

FM: Do you remember any?

SM: The last person I remember dying in childbirth was a lady over at the, eh, New Tolsta. Herself and the baby died. Now, I... something went wrong obviously and they both died.

FM: What sort of things, complications?
SM: I think, uh huh, I think she must have haemorrhaged or something. And, of course, then people, I mean, you’re fourteen miles away from town and by the time help got to you, you... it was too late.

FM: What about babies, women miscarrying, and stillbirths?

SM: Ah, oh, there was a lot of that in, ay, ay, not in my generation but previous to that in my mother’s generation. There was lots of people had miscarriages and stillbirths because they didn’t have the ante-natal care that they have now.

FM: Did your mother have any?

SM: No, no, no.

FM: How, how good do you think the men were at looking after children then?

SM: I don’t think they were good at all. I don’t think it was expected of them. Not like today. When I see my own daughters and their husbands, ay, compared to what I would leave... Cause I didn’t expect him to, I did it myself, ay, but, ay, my sons-in-law, they’re very involved in every aspect, from birth, changing nappies, getting up during the night, all that. Nobody ever did that for me except myself.

FM: Did they take more interest in the boys though? I mean, they could..., presumably, they’d take the boys out fishing....

SM: Oh, yes! Oh yes, certainly, oh, yes, yes, things like that, yes. But when they were wee, no, when they were babies not so much, no, and they didn’t have so much... I think the men then expected when they married that the woman would look after them and take charge of everything. Because, I certain..., I’m sure your own mother.... I, that, well, Murdo was away most of the time anyway so that everything was left to me to see to. And when he did retire and stay at home, he just let me carry on as if he wasn’t there just, em, I paid the bills, I saw to everything, I made all the decisions. I doubt he made a decision about the house ever in his life: if I said it that was okay.

FM: What about handling, disciplining the children?

SM: Oh, I was the one! Oh, I was the one, I was the one; I was the bad one. And, eh, even when they grew up and they would be going out, and I would say to him - I would have given then a good talking-to before they would go - and as they were going out, I would say to him, “Are you going to say anything to those girls before they leave?” And he would say to me, “Oh, haven’t you said enough yourself?” And that was it, that was it!

FM: What about when you were growing up yourself, who was in charge?

SM: Oh! Oh! I think my father; my father was a strict disciplinarian. My mother to an extent, as well, but my father, yes.

FM: Were both your parents Free Church?

SM: Well, my mother was Free Church until she got married, but then she was Free Presbyterian. And my mother was brought up in a religious household, very strict religious household; and she was like that all her life. Ay, in their old age they were both very, very religious and frowned on anything, you now, just about everything, eh, very, aw, everything was, uh, you know, latterly to do with the church and, aw, anything like that was..., like telly and things like that, they were dead against, dead against. My mother’s Sunday almost started on Saturday at nine o’clock. She’d have to, everything had to be away, even when she was staying with me here. And I used to wash her hair and, uh, if it was quarter to nine, she’d be, “What time is it?” - you know, hearing the noise of the hairdryer. She was fine, she knew fine what time it was. As soon as it was nine o’clock, Sunday started then, uh huh, yes.

FM: Was that difficult growing up?
SM: Oh, very, very. Well, maybe, when we were younger not to so much because we didn’t know any better, but after being away and coming back to that it was quite difficult, mm huh. Sundays were, oh, non-days as far as we were concerned. [laughs] If there could have been a month without any Sundays in it; it was just..., it had to be got through, Sunday.

FM: What kind of work were you expected to do round the house when you were growing up?

SM: Oh well, there was, of course, there was no labour-saving devices so there was everything, like we had to carry water from the well, peats, sort of cleaning everything, had to be done, there was no help with the cleaning.

FM: Were you expected to look after the babies?

SM: Oh yes! And do our baking, oatcakes, and what have you, yes. Because there was a lot of outside work to be done then, you know, planted potatoes, and you had to do these things in their season. Yes, it was, it was quite hard work, quite hard. A lot was expected of you.

FM: And that had to be fitted round school as well?

SM: Oh, yes, yes. Maybe you’d... My mother would be waiting for me to get home from school so that she could get out to do whatever work she had to do so that I would look after the rest of the children and maybe we’d have to - especially in dry weather like this - we’d have to go and sit at a well for maybe an hour to get a pail of water. [laughs] Oh, when I think of the things! There was..., you had to carry water to do the washing and things; there was nothing.... Oh, dear God! And, on Saturday, of course, you had to take double the amount for, for Sunday.

FM: Do you remember your own grannies? What were they like?

SM: Yes, I remember both my grannies. My mother’s, my maternal grandmother we liked her better. We, we - I don’t know why, but she seemed to be kinder and the other granny, she was more, oh, I don’t know, more aloof and we didn’t look on her as a granny at all really, not the same way as we looked on our Granny MacKay, no.

FM: Did you spend a lot of time with them?

SM: Well, we used to stay with her when Uncle Roddy was away in the War; we used to take turns sleeping with her at night. Eh, I would do a week or two, then Mary would do another couple, and my sister Angusina was really the one who did most of the sleeping with her. She wouldn’t sleep on her own, she wouldn’t sleep alone, so on of us had to be with her.

FM: And your grandfathers?

SM: Now, I don’t remember either of my grandfathers, no, no. They died when we were still quite young. No, I don’t remember them at all.

FM: Did you always expect to get married when you were...?

SM: Uhh, teh, teh... I think so, I think so, at some stage. Well, it was the ..., it was expected of you in those days, if you weren’t married by a certain age you were an old spinster.

FM: Did all of your family marry?

SM: Yes, all of our family’s married, yes.

FM: Did you marry in Glasgow?

SM: Yes, we got married in Glasgow, yes.

FM: Uh huh. Do you remember being at weddings here?

SM: Oh yes. I remember being at weddings here. They were good: they used to go on for a, for a few days. Oh yes, I remember being at uncle Roddy’s and I can’t remember.... But I, I do remember weddings in the village right enough, when they used to go round the houses inviting people. But that’s the only one I remember
FM: What was courting like then, going out with people?
SM: Oh, God! Well, as it happened, I did most of my courting in Glasgow anyway. Well, I knew Murdo, uh uh, growing up and he used to come to our house on occasions but I must.... I must say I didn’t like him to begin with, no, not to begin with. But, uh, we met in Glasgow and, I don’t know, things got better as time went on and, em, well, he was, Murdo was at sea, so I only saw him when he came back to Glasgow and we, I think, we were going together for four years or more, then we got engaged and we were engaged for two, nearly two years. And then we got married!
FM: Do you remember caithris na h-oidhche [old courtship practice] at all?
SM: Oh, I remember such... - oh yes, I do indeed, when [mumbles]. Oh, yes, I remember that, I remember that. Erm. [mumbles and laughs] I remember caithris na h-oidhche. You weren’t seen with him during the day no matter what, so the only time he could come around was at night. [laughs].... It’s a wonder they did any courting at all. Aw, your mother will remember caithris na h-oidhche, yeah, hmm.
FM: Mm huh. And dans’ a rathaid [open-air dances]?
SM: Oh yes! I remember, oh yes! That was good, dans’ a rathaid, that was good, yes we used to.... And, now, we weren’t supposed to be going to that, you see, we weren’t supposed to. We used to, we’d pretend we’d go maybe visiting and we would take our knitting with us and, em, go to visit some friends, but then we would make our way to the dance and we used to, we used to pull the knitting to pretend we did such a lot. Heavens! I remember myself and Mary hiding our knitting in the..., there was a stone wall round the school then and we used to put our knitting in-between the stones there, and go to the dance down at the post office. But we weren’t supposed to be there. If we were...oh! my goodness, if we’d have been caught there we would have been flogged. Oh yes, indeed! [laughs] But it was, oh!, it was great! I don’t think the, the youngsters of today get the same enjoyment out of their teenage years anyway as we did. You see, everything was forbidden so it was that much better.
FM: Did you ever go to dances in town?
SM: Oh heavens, no! We wouldn’t be allowed to go to dances in town or a concert or anything like that. Oh no, no, no. You could cry your eyes out for a week and still wouldn’t be allowed to go.
FM: And what about after, when you’d left home and were coming home on holiday?
SM: Aw, aye, just sort of lived by the rules, then. You just didn’t rock the boat, you just, if you were home for a fortnight or a month, you just sort of “when in Rome do as the Romans do” sort of thing. But, ah, ay, I remember a friend I have in there, Nora, and she says, she was saying to me just the other day, she was talking about it, she’d been working away for a couple of years and she came home and there was a concert in Back and she wanted to go to the concert. And her parents just wouldn’t let her, and she was old enough and she had been away from home earning her living. And they just wouldn’t let her go. And we were inclined to tell lies, you know, to, if we were going somewhere, because we weren’t going to get there if we told the truth anyway, if we said we were going visiting and we were going to the dance, you see. So, we were inclined to lie so that we could get to where we were going because if we told the truth we weren’t going to get there anyway.
FM: Did you smoke?
SM: No, strangely enough I never smoked. Not because I was any better than anybody else but I never, never took one. And none of my family, none of the family smoke. I don’t know even if any of the boys - I know that William doesn’t and Iain doesn’t, and I don’t think Charlie does either.
FM: Did you ever argue with your parents about clothes and ...?
SM: Oh! Of course, of course! Of course, of course! Argued about everything! But there was no arguing with them, you see. They were right and you were wrong. Make-up was taboo, you know, lipstick and things like that - pheuw - absolutely.
FM: How do you compare the relationship you had with your daughters with...?
SM: Oh, completely different, completely different, completely. My daughters would... I would stay up for them to come home and uh, uh, listen to all they had to say, you know. Oh yes, completely different. I mean, I look on them as my friends as well as my daughters; my daughters particularly.

6B.2
Tape 1: Side B

Fiona MacDonald: Do you feel that you made a conscious effort to do that?
Sina Morrison: I think so.
FM: To be different, you know?
SM: I think so, I think so, I think so. I didn’t want them to be, um, sort of restricted in the way that I had been restricted myself.
FM: Yeah.
SM: And we resented it. I know that I did and most of my generation, especially once we had been away and come back to that environment again: it was difficult, very difficult.
FM: And how many grandchildren do you now have?
SM: I’ve got [counting under breath] eight, eight grandchildren.
FM: And who have they been named after?
SM: Oh, oh, they’ve been named after no-one in particular, just names. There’s Neil and Grant and Mark and Annette and Julie and Jennifer and Peter and Andrew; and they’re not named after anybody in particular, just names that their parents ....
FM: How do you feel about that?
SM: Oh, I, I think it’s great, ’cause....., I think so because, I mean, you will know yourself that, um, in a village like this there’s two or three people, names, that have the same name, like maybe two Johns and that in the one family, some, some families three. So, I think it’s nice too; I don’t really mind that no-one’s named after me, not really, no.
FM: Your daughters, as well, when they were having their own children, did you speak to them about?
SM: Well, the, the they’ve all been away from home, but I was very much, um, ay, involved with them from the time they told me they were pregnant until they had their children. With Donna, I, I was out in Inverness, I wasn’t out at the birth, but I was out the very next day. And, um totally different from what our own parents were towards us.
FM: Yes, my mother remembers her mother’s generation trying to hide it and that.
SM: Yes, yes, I mean, today, the, the girls of today will tell you straight away that they're pregnant, whereas in our day, and especially my mother's day, it was just . . . , probably they didn't tell the nurse until they had to, 'til they had to. I don't know why, why it was all private and taboo, I don't know.

FM: Did you have special maternity clothes yourself?

SM: Oh, yes, yes.

FM: How did your mother react?

SM: Oh well, it was just not discussed at all, it was just not discussed, whereas I can discuss, and I, with Donna now expecting her third baby any day, we can discuss it and sometimes make a laugh of it, in this hot weather [laughs], you know. And she told me straight away she was expecting, she told me long, long ago. Yes. Whereas we wouldn't, we just didn't. I don't know why that was, I don't know why that was. It's very strange, it was very strange when you think, you think about it: it was a natural, a natural event and why it was not discussed, I don't know, no.

FM: Going back to attitudes to boys and girls, do you feel that your mother's generation wanted sons more than daughters, and . . . ?

SM: Haaay, uh, I don't know. Well, the beginning of the family was all girls: there was myself, Mary, 'Sina and Cairstiona and Peigi, and I know when William, which was the first son, was born, aw, he was, now, the apple of her eye. He is to this, he was to her dying day. And, ah, the boys were special, yes, definitely, the boys were special.

FM: What about yourself and your children, would you have . . . ?

SM: Well, it wouldn't bother me and I can honestly say, to you, I wouldn't trade my girls for all the boys that I ever saw. They've been really good to me and, as I say, their my friends as well as my daughters, yes.

FM: Do you think there's a special relationship between a mother and a daughter?

SM: Oh, I think so, I think so, I think so. Yes, there is definitely, and, I would say so, mm huh.

FM: How do you see things changing with your own children, their, their relationships they have with their children?

SM: Oh well, their relationships with their children are, I think, even better again, because they, ah, I think they get such a lot of support through their husbands nowadays, the support I certainly didn't have because my husband was away most of the time anyway, and I had to, I had to bring them up on my own. I can say, I can honestly say that I brought them up on my own. But when I see my own daughters today, their husbands with them, you know, at every move - especially Donna and Christine - they don't know how lucky they are, they take it for granted. But, em . . . I don't know what life will bring to them in later years, but, em, they, I would say, Donna and Christine have the perfect husbands, perfect, absolutely. I couldn't fault them in any way.

FM: Were you lucky with your own children growing up that the elder ones helped?

SM: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, oh yes. I must say I, I have a special (though I love them all dearly), I have a special, um, affection for Anne, my oldest daughter because, ay, she was with me a lot, you know before Christine was born. There was just the two of us, Dad was away at sea and it was just her and me.

FM: How often would he be home then?

SM: Uh, well, then he would be, oh, oh, he'd be home a week in six; he'd be away down to the Mediterranean, Italy and Spain, for six weeks and back while they were discharging, um, whatever cargo they had and away again.

FM: And did you have many relations in Glasgow then to turn to, or friends?
FM: So it was easier in some ways coming back?

SM: Well, I honestly wouldn't have come back, only the house was empty, this house was empty and rather than it be sold, ay, I came to live here. And, uh, to begin with it was quite a struggle to settle down, for me, because when we came here, there was no, there was no toilet, there was no running water; the water was from a tap out there and, after coming from Glasgow, you know, these, the things, being deprived of them, it was quite awful, quite awful. We came here in August - was it August? Yes. Well, the first winter, oh, I'll never forget it, it was awful. And that pipe, that tap out there would be frozen and you'd have to boil water to unfreeze it to, em, get, get running water, so . . . . And, eh, that was the winter Alec John, and you know you had to wash nappies and do everything and you didn't have . . . , you had to heat water, to heat water.

FM: Was Murdo at home then?

SM: Yes, when Alec John was born, yes. Because I wasn't well for a wee while after it and he, eh, got to, sort of compassionate leave from the Merchant Navy, stayed at home for, stayed at home for a few months then and, em. But after that he was away most of the time, except just coming home on leave and, so, I can safely say that I brought the children up on my own.

FM: How did you cope after a birth, being on your own?

SM: Well, I had a friend (well, she was a relation of Murdo's right enough), she lived up on Maryhill Road, and when I came out of hospital after having Anne, I went to stay with her. Now, she was, she was good to me. So I coped like that until I was well enough to be on my own. But, uh, there was no help: you just had to get on with it. And when I see the way my own daughters are pampered now, you know, eh, it's a wonder that we survived.

FM: How do you feel about women working after they're married?

SM: Well, I don't mind women working after they're married, eh, providing, ay, that, ay, well, that they have to and if they aren't leaving children in the care . . . . 'Cause my own daughter-in-law, ay, they weren't, they waited four years before Jennifer was born. She goes out to work now, he goes out to work, and they put that wee soul to a childminder. Now, I don't like that and if it was my own daughter I would have said something, but as she was my daughter-in-law, I didn't. And I don't think it's fair on the child. Some mornings if she's going (she's nursing), if she's going early - I mean, like the rest of us we're in bed 'til the last minute - she gets up, gets herself ready, gets that baby ready, and away to a childminder. And then, maybe, if she's working 'til ten o'clock at night, Alec John will pick her up, and, of course, after a day's work he's not in the best of moods either. And he takes her home, gives her tea and she's away to bed. And I don't think that's fair on the child at all. And I don't think she gets the proper stimulation because that childminder's got other children as well. But she seems pretty well-adjusted for all that. The wee soul, she's lovely. But I don't like that. Anne goes out to work but her family's grown up; Christine goes out to work, but she does night-duty, but her husband's . . . and the boys are getting older now; Donna was working part-time in a chemist's shop as well but she was with the children: they weren't leaving the children with childminders or in nurseries, or anything like that. I think, providing that there is, that the children are properly looked after and . . . . But I think a mother's place is with the children, for all that, especially in their formative years, I think so. I don't think that I'd be able to leave mine, I don't think so.
FM: Do you think your brothers were, aa, given more encouragement for education and things?
SM: I don’t think so.
FM: Or there weren’t the opportunities?
SM: There were, the opportunities weren’t . . . , and as soon as they got, they were away and earned their living, I think, in that day and age.
FM: Were you contributing to your parents’ income while you were working?
SM: Oh yes, you had to: it was expected of us. Out of the little we got, we gave them some of it as well.
FM: Up until marrying?
SM: Up until marrying, yes, mm.
FM: And what did your sisters do, did they . . . ?
SM: Mary, Mary worked in a hotel, and ’Sina was on the trams in Glasgow for years. And, ay, the others: Cairstiona, she worked for Sir Alexander and Lady King out in Giffnock, which is a suburb of Glasgow; uh, Peigi, Peigi, she just worked in a shop in town; Rhoda, of course, she trained to be a nurse while she was, before she married. Then she picked it up later when, when her children, ay, well not grown-up, but when they were old enough to be left at night with their father, she did, she did night-duty. And she carried on nursing ‘til just a few months ago; she retired, she took early retirement. She was a . . . latterly she followed up patients being discharged from Gartnavel in Glasgow. She used to, eh, she used to follow their case after that, she used to visit them. She was like a, a psychiatric visitor, you know. I used to say to her, “You’ll be murdered one day”, ‘cause some of the houses she went into there was nobody but these people after being discharged. But she enjoyed it, she enjoyed her work.
FM: Do you ever think you’d have liked to work yourself?
SM: Well, ay, looking back it wasn’t expected in those days strangely enough. But, uh, I suppose, I suppose I would, but in those days when you got married that was like, you lost your identity and you were Mrs Whoever and that was it, and you were there to look after the home and the family.
FM: Did you feel that when you became married you suddenly became this?
SM: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I felt that my first duty was to my husband and the family and nothing, nothing, nothing took preference over that. I, I gave, I gave myself, heart and soul, to the marriage and the family, yes. And I do to this day.
FM: And did you notice people’s, the way people treated you changing when you did get married?
SM: Yes. Well, you were expected to act your age and act as a staid married woman. [laughs] Yes, indeed.
FM: Uh huh. Right from the beginning?
SM: Oh, right from the beginning, right from the beginning. You were, you know, you weren’t supposed to be anything but a dull married woman.
FM: And again when you had children, that was another change?
SM: Oh yes, then you were a mother, and you were . . . . Oh yes, definitely then, yes.
FM: Did it, do you think you became closer to your own mother when you had children yourself?
SM: No, I wouldn’t say so, no, no. No, well, maybe I understood what she went through herself then, you know, having us and that . . . , but closer, no, I wouldn’t say so. I, I don’t think that in that generation people had such a close relationship with their parents as the generation of today, like you, for instance, and I, my own, my own family.
FM: Do you think sisters and brothers had fairly close relationships, or . . . ?
SM: Och, I think, I think so, yes, yes.
FM: And what about other friends? Do you think your mother would ever have spoken to very close friends about being pregnant or . . . ?
SM: Uhh, I don’t . . . maybe, she, maybe, a neighbour that she, that she knew very well. I know that we did have one neighbour when we lived out there, that that woman, yes, but not, not many people. I don’t think so.
FM: Were you able to talk to your own sisters about, you know, things when you were growing up and then when they were pregnant and you’d had children already?
SM: Oh yes! Oh yes, certainly! Yes, and we used to talk among ourselves about things we heard, heard second-hand; whether they were right or wrong, we didn’t know; we just heard it and that was it. [laughs]
FM: And what was the care like when you were in Glasgow and having your own children?
SM: Oh, ay, well, the, the . . . when I had Anne, it was Oakbank Hospital; I don’t know if it’s still there or not. Oh, I found them very, very good, I found the care very good, very good.
FM: And how prepared were you beforehand?
SM: Oh, oh, very prepared: everything was, oh, yes. And they used - I - they probably were district nurses but they were called “Green Ladies”, that used to come around once you went to the doctor. And he probably got in touch, if it was the district nurse, but they were called the “Green Ladies” in those days, because they wore a green uniform. And they used to come and visit and they’d tell you about all the things you would need to have; they would give you a list of all the things you would need to have. And so that kept you right.
FM: Did you ever discuss the facts of life with your children?
SM: Maybe not Anne, the oldest one, because I remember her coming home with a note from school (she was in the Nicolson, Anne), and she came with a letter of, you know, if we were willing for them to have sex education.
FM: When was this?
SM: Oh, this was 19- (when did Donna leave school?) she was born in 1955, that would be 1961, ’62, I’m sure . . . ’62 or ’63. Now, I think it was very basic, I don’t think it was anything . . . . . And, ah, of course, I said “yes” so that I wouldn’t have to [laughing], I said “yes”. So we, we used to warn them, you know, about going out with boys and all this, laying, laying-down the law. And, but apart from that, no; but the rest of the family, yes. I think, I think I mellowed with age and experience. Yes.
FM: Did you ever wish your mother had been able to speak to you?
SM: Oh yes! Oh yes, how I wish! Yes, indeed, indeed, yes. We were so ignorant of the facts of life, you know, went out into the wide world, you know, in all our innocence, yes. And you just, you just . . . I don’t know, I don’t know how we survived at all. Oh, we, we were very ignorant going out into the world, yes. We weren’t prepared for the big wide world.
FM: Do you think there was a lot of fear put into you as well?
SM: Oh yes! The fear of God put into us about everything. Oh, yes, yes.
FM: Did you ever find yourself using that with your own children, though, you know, saying, “Don’t go with boys. Don’t do this”? 
SM: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, yes, often, often. Yes. Especially, the, the two oldest. Oh, Christine, Christine and Anne had a tough time of it with me; they were the oldest. And, oh, I, and not only just boys, about everything - drinking, smoking. Christine, shhh, Christine had long hair till she was, oh, seventeen, eighteen, and
she was on that late bus, she used to reek of cigarettes: you know, the smell used to go on her hair and . . . I remember her standing there in tears, me turning out her pockets, you know - “You were smoking!” and she, “No, I wasn’t.” [laughs] Turning out her pockets, and, and it was in her hair right enough. Yes. But the others, no, no. And they say themselves that, ay, when Anne and Christine were growing up I’m sure they weren’t allowed to go to, like that, they weren’t allowed to go up town, say, late on a Friday night or a Saturday night, definitely not. But when it came to Donna and Lily I had sort of learnt my lesson and, and the two older girls used to say that to me, “Oh we weren’t allowed that” and “we weren’t allowed that when we were their age, so why do you allow them?” And I remember Christine saying to me, “Well, we weren’t allowed to do that, so why are they? and “Well,” I said to her, “it didn’t do you any harm,” and she said, “It didn’t do me any good either.” [laughs]

FM: Do you think you were harder on the girls?
SM: Ah, I think so, I think so.
FM: Why do you think that?
SM: I don’t know. I think girls are more, more vulnerable, you know; boys can get themselves out of situation, whereas girls are different. I think so anyway, I think so.
FM: Do you not think sometimes there’s more, there’s more fears about girls, but they’re often less, they become less of a fact than they do with boys . . . ?
SM: Yes, yes, I think so, I think so.
FM: . . . girls are less problems?
SM: Yes, yes, I think so.
FM: And what about when your daughters were going out with people, would they be able to have a laugh about . . . ?
SM: Oh yes, indeed, indeed! Many a laugh we had, you know, after they came in, after they’d tell me stories. Oh yes. And I was quite interested in their . . . Anne, she got married quite young. Of that, I was quite peeved about that: I thought, you know, she would, she was working, she was working in the Bank of Scotland. I felt she had quite a, a career ahead of her. And I wasn’t at all happy when Anne got married, but it turned out okay, ah, in the end, and they’ve got a lovely home. And she’s, she is working, she works for Highland Regional Council. And, Christine, well, she was nursing and she knew the boy, she knew Duncan, she took him home. And Christine was about twenty-five when she married. Donna, well, she met Jamie and they were married, well, she was twenty-five as well. She was married, I think she knew him about a year and a half. And, well, Lily, I don’t think she’ll ever get married. I don’t think so: she’s too independent and she likes her independence. Mm huh, mm huh. But I could be wrong, I could be wrong. But I, uh, she’s getting old, she’ll be thirty next. So, if she’s going to get married, it’s high time she was thinking about it.

FM: Do you feel your, when you became a grandmother that, again, expectations of you changed, people’s expectations changed?
SM: Yeah, I resented it in the beginning. I resented being a grandmother, you know thinking of myself . . . I resented being old. I, I remember when I, when I came of pensionable age, I didn’t want to know about it and I wouldn’t go to the post office to get it, and I wouldn’t go half-fare on the bus, I paid the full fare on the bus. I would not admit. Talking about growing old disgracefully, well, that’s what I’m doing. And it took me a while to, you know, come to terms with growing old and being a grandmother. Oh, it was just the end.

FM: What about the menopause as well?
SM: Well, strangely enough I didn’t, I didn’t know I had the menopause; I just sailed through it, sailed through it. I don’t know did I have too much to do or what, didn’t
notice it or something. [laughs] But no, not really. I did get the, the odd hot flush when I’d been in a sweat, but apart from that, no, it never bothered me. Like, I hear other women have a difficult time, but no, I didn’t, it never bothered me.

FM: It didn’t change your, your perception of yourself, growing old and thinking, “Oh, I’m getting old now”?  
SM: Oh no, oh no, no, no, no. Until I came of pensionable age, I thought, I still thought I was . . . . Tolsta, um, say a woman of my age, I, there’s only maybe one or two of my age with short hair.

FM: Yeah.
SM: That’s, I mean, a woman of my age should have her hair up in a bun; I mean this is frowned on.

FM: It definitely makes a difference: that you seem younger than . . .
SM: Of course it does, uh huh. I hate, oh!, I don’t like my hair long anyway and I, if I had it drawn into a bun it would make me look so severe and awful. I don’t like it. But, oh, I mean it is, it is frowned on, especially in the church, it’s just . . .

FM: And what about the way women dress as well? I wouldn’t say that you dress like a lot of women of your age here, as well.
SM: No, no. Well, that’s me trying to, to keep old age at bay. [laughs]

FM: Quite right too!
SM: [laughs] Em, and the girls wouldn’t let me anyway. I mean they’re, I mean if I, if they come home and I’m having, if my hair is there, oh, “Why aren’t you having your hair done, and I gave you money Heaven knows when to go and have your hair done?” And, um, they, they sort me out as far as the way I dress as well. Oh, they would have none of it, no. So they keep me on my toes.

FM: But do you think it’s changing for women here?
SM: Oh, I think so, oh I think so. And, ah, changing for the best, mm huh. I think women were very, were very oppressed in, in - not my generation, because we were then beginning to sort of, we’d seen other parts of the world and, uh, things were changing - but my mother’s generation and generations before that, I think they were. They didn’t have much of a life, they couldn’t have. They all had big families and they were poor and, I mean, there were no state benefits in those days and, em, their living conditions, you know, their houses weren’t, well, I don’t know they must have been very overcrowded.

FM: Do you think that it was much better for men in any way; do you think they were freer?
SM: I think so, I think so. Ay, eh, the man, I think, the man he thought, you know, well he went out and earned a living: that was it, that was all that was expected of him.

FM: And what work did your father do?
SM: My father, well, he was a fisherman, except that he was in the War, of course, the last war; well, the First World War, he was interned in Holland and in the Second World War, well, he was in the Navy for a . . . . He retired in the end, he was retired because of poor eyesight before the War ended. And most of the men were fishermen in those days, that’s what, that’s what most of them did. So they were fishing, say, from Monday to Friday, or from Monday to Saturday, and that was them, that was it. Whereas the mothers were left to get on with life the best way they could. And, of course, if there was no fishing there was no money. And they worked the land, they had to do a lot of, and they did it by hard graft, spade, not even a tractor in those days - maybe some people had a horse and a plough, but some of them did it spadework. So they had a lot of work to do, hard work.
FM: Did women spend much time together, older women?
SM: I, I don’t know . . . , well, maybe they did, more than we do. I mean, I can go weeks without seeing your mother, ay, whereas then there was no radio or television to keep, keep them company, so they needed to have each other’s company. They’d probably go visiting each other. I remember that our neighbours when I was young, I remember, uh, a neighbour coming of an evening with her knitting or my mother would go to . . . . That’s how they passed the time.
FM: Do you think the telephone’s made a big change in women’s lives?
SM: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, I think so, I think so. You can pick up the telephone and, but, um, things have changed: people don’t visit each other like they used to and I think maybe the telly has a lot to do with it - maybe you’re afraid they’re watching something and you’ll interrupt them. And, not that I’m a great telly addict, but if there’s a special thing on that I want to see, something really special, and I’ll say, “Oh, I hope nobody’ll come tonight.” You know that, I think there’s a lot of that and, eh, you go to some houses and they won’t even turn off; no matter what I’d want to see, I would turn it off if somebody came in, but you can go to houses and they’ll just leave the telly on, maybe turn the sound down, but they’re watching and trying to keep a conversation. Now, that I don’t like.
FM: Do you see the generation-gap becoming greater? With your grandchildren as well?
SM: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, yes, yes, mm huh. Mind you, I wish, I wish I lived in this generation. I do, I honestly do. When I see the, eh . . . I wouldn’t in some ways, I wouldn’t change my life, I wouldn’t change not, you know, not be married and my family. But at the same time, sometimes I envy Lily, I envy Lilian: her, she loves her job and she comes and goes as she likes; she has her own flat and, you know, she seems to have plenty of money.

6B.3
Tape 2: Side A.

Sina Morrison: ...she’s got plenty of money to do with as she likes. And, eh, she, she was, the last few times she was home - she’s passed her driving test - and she hired a car both times she was home. She usually comes home on the plane and, you know, we couldn’t do these things, it was just not..., hardly any woman drivers in our day anyway. You know, women today can achieve anything almost. Don’t you think?
Fiona MacDonald: A lot more.
SM: Uh huh, I think so. And I think, I think a woman’s as good as any man. Well, uh huh, yes, I would say that as well, uh huh, oh yes, yes. I wish I lived in the generation - I mean there’s a lot of things in this generation that I don’t like, like drugs and that, I mean, these things were unheard of in our day. And even going into pubs, you know. I remember the first time I ever went into a pub, I thought it would, uh, go on fire over my head. [laughs] And, I mean, it wasn’t the done thing to, for girls to go into a pub.
FM: How do you feel about that sort of double standard?
SM: I think it was all wrong: I think it’s better today, to go in if there’s a boy and a girl. I think it’s much better to go in and sit and have a drink, instead of the man going in and the girl stay outside, I think that, I, I mean...
FM: Did that happen?
SM: Oh yes, we, we would have to, and he would say, “Oh well, I’ll see you maybe in an hour’s time”, and that. And you’d have to be wandering around somewhere until that hour was up, until he had his pint or whatever. Oh yes, yeah. But, em, in Glasgow, no, I mean in Glasgow I, I used to go in. I remember the first time I ever went in - I don’t know if that pub’s still there, it was under the bridge anyway at the Central Station, I remember that - and, oh God, I was, “I wonder if anybody will see me going in here”! But in the end it didn’t bother me and I would go into a pub in Stornoway, and many’s a time I have!
FM: Did, did you think your brothers had a far easier time then?
SM: Oh, of course, of course, of course. Nothing, no questions were asked about them and, or, their behaviour, eh, whereas we were, it was different with us altogether.
FM: What about going to church, was it more enforced for girls?
SM: Eh, no, not in our family anyway: it was more enforced on all of us really, it was expected of us and we were made to go whether we liked it or not. Yes.
FM: And were, were your brothers expected to marry as much as the girls were as well?
SM: I think so, I think so, I think so. But the church was a great part in their, my parents’ life and a lot of that generation, yes.
FM: And you’d have family worship as well.
SM: Oh yes, morning and evening, yes, uh huh. And many’s a time we had the Bible quoted, some bits of the Bible quoted at us, many’s a time that.... I remember myself and Mary going um - oh, I don’t know where we were going - and we must have been going somewhere special and, of course, we put lipstick on. Oh, you’d have thought we had done something dreadful! And I remember mother saying to us that Jezebel, in the Bible, Jezebel, that she put paints - I don’t know what sort of paints, but she painted her face anyway - obviously lipstick and rouge probably (blusher as it’s called now). And that, the, the dogs ate, ate her against a wall in Jerusalem!! [laughs] And Mary said, “Well, they’ll have a lot of bodies to eat, the dogs, if they’re going to eat everybody who’s putting lipstick on them.” [laughs] You know, daft things like that, things like that. And if we were going to church we were inspected in case we had lipstick on, going to church. Oh dear me! When I think of it today, it was, um, really. Oh, I wouldn’t like my own family to have been brought up the way, the way we were brought up at all, no.
FM: You were saying you think women were oppressed, ...
SM: Yes.
FM: ...do you think religion had anything to do with it?
SM: Oh yes, I think so, I think religion had a lot to do with it. Em, I don’t know if religion or if poverty was the main thing; it was both things. I think, I think our religion and poverty went hand in hand with the, with their oppression. I think so.
FM: I think it’s also relevant that, uh, in the churches, you know, the men have all the offices, all the official ones.
SM: Oh yes! Oh, women have no, women have no..., they shouldn’t be even, they shouldn’t be even heard in our, a church. Oh no, women have no say, oh no. And I think, ay, like, ay, these church people, you know like elders and deacons, I think they, they, they. I think they thought the wives should be subservient to them, you
know that they were lesser creatures, you see, than, than the man. I think so, uh huh.
I know if my mother thought, you know, if my father said it that was it; the father
was the ... never mind what... Now, we weren't supposed to have opinions of our
own or anything like that, you know. Uh huh.
FM: And that went for the mother as well?
SM: Oh yes, uh huh, yes, uh huh. And we often talk, myself and my friend over the
hill there, Joan MacKenzie, Bean Dolaídh a' Ghrein, we often speak about how
oppressed we were and if we, if we laughed, or if we, or if you, if your skirt was a
wee bit, maybe, you know, a bit short, "Oh spealar, ghloich". You know you were,
you know, kept down, kept down at every... uh huh.
FM: Uh huh. Do you think that's affected people's, you know, self-confidence....?
SM: I think so, I think so, I think so. We had no self-confidence, no self-confidence
at all, whereas I try to boost my own daughters in every way I can and you, I think
they, you didn't get any self-confidence, no, no, no.
FM: How did teachers treat you at school? Did you feel that boys got better
treatments?
SM: Aw well, I can't say that they did. Uh, the, the teachers that I had in school, they
were very fair, very fair. I don't think the boys had any preferential treatment. As far
as, no, no, they didn't, we were all taught, given the same chances to get on and
certainly if they thought there was somebody who was quite clever they would try
and, eh, help that person on his way. But, I, no they were very fair, the teachers we
had, yes.
FM: Mm. Do you remember what words or expressions were used for, oh, somebody
being pregnant?
SM: Oh, shior, "gun robh i trom": that's all. the word 'pregnant', cha robh fios ac'
dud' a bh'ann. [laughs] I remember our own Mary - I'll never forget it, I've told it so
many - I remember, uh, uh, my sister, Mary reading off a tin of Andrew's Liver
Salts, you know, what the Andrew's Liver Salts were good for. And, by this time I
knew what pregnant was and I remember her asking my father - she was reading that
it was good for this and that - and I remember her asking my father, "Dè bh'ann 'n
'pregnancy'?" ['What is 'pregnancy'?'] 'S thuirt e rithe [And he said to her]- this is,
this is how he said it -, " 'Tòirt dhachaoidh a moine le citabh." ['Taking the peats
home with a creel.'] [laughs] He dismissed her like, you know, he just, uh huh, as
much as to say, "You shouldn't know." She wasn't old enough to know what the
word meant, of course. But by this time I knew; I must have heard it of somebody!
[laughs] And I remember that as well as I can, and I found it, I often thought about it.
Mm huh, often thought about it. But, no, you never, you, we were just dismissed:
"You shouldn't know anything." And if, if, or if, you had to find out for yourself.
[laughs] Oh don't! Many's a time we spoke about that and we had a laugh about it.
But it, it really isn't a laughing matter. It's sad, very, mm.
FM: Did you ever see your parents displaying affection towards one another?
SM: No, never, no, no, no, no.
FM: And what about to yourselves?
SM: Oh yes, I mean, we, and even I mean there was some things I would never say
to my father. I remember our own girls, and Christine, I remember one particular
evening, Christine going out and she had a low-cut dress on (well, not too low-cut,
but) and I remember her, tha, standing and saying to her father, "Do you think I'm
showing too much?" Now, a, I mean we would never say that or if we were showing
anything we'd cover it up until we got outside. You know that sort of... it was a
different, different relationship, altogether different. We were, I mean, oh, totally
different and I think, I think I certainly made a conscious effort that they wouldn't be like we were brought up ourselves.

FM: My mother says the same as well.

SM: Mm huh, mm huh. I think I did make a conscious effort not to bring my own family like we were brought up.

FM: Did you have any aunties you could talk to?

SM: Well, your own granny, Auntie Margaret, was the only one really that, that I was close to; that was the only one really. My Auntie Jessie, over the hill there, on my father’s side: no, not really, we weren’t, not that close, really, although she was a nice enough soul. But, uh, Auntie Margaret was the only one really, that I was really close to, mm. The other, Auntie Lily, she died while we were, well, I had gone to work and that right enough, but she lived in the town. But apart from that there was no-one you could turn to really, no.
FM: How, how important do you think women are to teaching the Christian faith to their children and also their role in the Free Church, 'cause obviously they're not office-holders but they're....?
Rev. M: No, no, no. But the women are, I believe that the women are..., for instance, myself, if I didn’t have a wife, a Christian wife, I couldn’t give, tha, the attention to my children in that line, the way my wife could. Mothers have a great opportunity and, tha, tha, my work was on the Sabbath and for the week, my work had, had to, I had to, I had to give it all my attention, you know. I left that to my..., well, she was teaching Sabbath school too. And I think that that’s what generally happens: the wife that teaches the children: the children are nearer the wife, and the wife nearer the children. she has easy access to them, with them all the time, whereas the father isn’t. And in my case, oh, I would, I would admit that. That’s what my wife says very often: what she taught the children and other parents who never taught their children anything and their children are Christians, and our children aren’t! You know what I mean? Well, it’s out, you see, but we don’t know that, what will happen, you see, that’s how it is, uh huh.
FM: Do you think there would be a day when there were female deacons and elders?
Rev. M: Oh, well, I don’t think I’d see that in the Free Church; I don’t think so, no, I don’t think I’ll see that in the Free Church at all.
FM: Would you be against it?
Rev. M: Myself?
FM: Yeah.
Rev. M: Oh well, I think so, I think so, I think I would be against it. The woman’s place is in the home and they’re all right: I wouldn’t do, I wouldn’t do without my wife and that. Uh, and I sometimes say that, at, at the fellowship, at the deacons’, at the, the financial meeting, you know, when I think of it, that we see, women can see things that have to be done in the church and on the church that men can’t, uh huh, you know. That’s the case. I said, many a time I said to them, just, uh huh, that sometimes I think we should have women, women deacons [laughs], but saying it - you know what I mean? - but I would never say it. I think that the woman’s place is in the home, and, uh, of course, in the church too, but, uh, I think the home. And I don’t believe in women’s liberation, whether you agree with it or not [laughs], you know. Oh no, women’s liberation, no.
FM: You have female Sunday school teachers.
Rev. M: Oh, my wife, oh, yes, yes!
FM: Are there any others just now?
Rev. M: No, no, 'cause the Sabbath school has got that small. We used to have four teachers, and my wife says that two teachers could do now but, you see, there’s such a gap between the very young ones and, uh, you might have just, we have just two
leaving just now because they’re, they’ll be fourteen, thirteen, fourteen. You see, they leave the Sabbath school at fourteen.

FM: Um, the one thing I’ve been quite interested before in, women still here don’t go to gravesides, you know, at funerals. What do you think about that? I’ve been myself once.

Rev. M: Well, you know, that... But I’ll tell you something, you know, now. My sister’s husband died and he had one daughter - see I think when there’s one daughter (see and be thankful you have a sister too), ’cause that’s another thing that I maintain that I learnt, you know that one child in a family, they’re always, they seem to be very selfish, self-centred, you know what I mean? Have you discovered that? You’re too young yet: there’s a lot of things you’re going to discover, though you live to the age your granny lived, there’s a lot - oh, you’re learning all the time, learning all the time from experience. You can learn with your brains, your brains but, ah, you see, I learned a lot, and we should learn a lot from other people, you know and from their good points and from their bad points. Anyway what were you asking?

FM: About women going to the graveside.

Rev. M: Oh yes! Well, my niece, she said to me, she said she should like to go to her father’s grave. “Well,” ars’ mise, “if you want to go, there’s nothing to keep you from it.” And she went. And I never heard anyone say anything about it but recently, in my own village of ______, my next-door neighbour died and his, his only daughter she, she was in Aberdeen, and, of course, she was a psychiatric nurse - well, maybe that explains a lot. And I didn’t, I was going on the ferry, I was over in ______, and I’d booked the ferry the day of the funeral; I couldn’t stay, but I was at the wakes and that. But one of the elders came to me and said, “You know she came to me and she said she was going to the funeral.” “Well,” ars’ mise, “well,” I said to him, ah ah, I said to him, “Well, Angus, I think you should advise her because she’ll be the talk of the place, because of the custom. But,” ars’ mise, “if she wants to go, you can’t keep her.” You see, that’s a.... I think that she was at the end of the coffin - you know how the eldest son goes to the end of the coffin, and the youngest, or whatever - that she was there, and she went to the grave. And this is unheard of: she was taking pictures at the grave. So that happened in ______, my next-door neighbour; so that, that was uh..., but, uh, anything could happen. Anything else?

FM: Why do you think it started in the first place? Well, why do you think women didn’t go the graveside and still don’t, generally?

Rev. M: Well, you see, I think it had something to do with the mourning. You see, look at for instance, you hardly see a woman today in church - there are the exceptions to the rules - but there was, there was a day when you’d look out at the congregation: they were black, you know, widows and black clothes (now today black clothes come in) and, of course, and the black hats with the, a white sort of strand, a single strand or lone strand at the bottom of the hat itself - you won’t remember that. Maybe your granny had one. And, uh, uh, does that?

FM: Well, I’m interested because, I mean, men mourn as well, so....

Rev. M: Oh yes! But yes, but you see!

FM: Why are they different?

Rev. M: Yes, but men are harder, they’re harder, you see, they’re harder and they, and, tha, the women, you see, well, uh they’re mourning, you see them weeping. Used to - I, well, I think when people cry it’s a great release, you know. You have a
sudden death, you know, if your mother died suddenly, or your father died suddenly, well, if you can cry in that situation, it’s a great relief. But very often you can’t, but very often you can’t, you know, and it’s a, it’s a..., you feel as if you’re, *tha*, shell-shocked. You know, when people and other people who I try to prepare for coming days, women, especially women who are caring for an invalid for years, because you know, they’ll have a reaction that they’re not aware of. They’re taken up, they think they’re, that they’re, they’re they don’t think along these lines. But there they are, as if they don’t realise for a year or two, a number of years or longer, and then they wonder what’s happened; they’ll have a reaction to it. Yes.