

Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice: An  
Exploration of the Relationship between  
Representations of Femininity and Different  
Depictions of Baking, Cake, and Sweet  
Food in Contemporary Australian  
Cookbooks

**Carmel Cedro**

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## **Abstract:**

Cookbooks are widely published, highly consumed products that have been largely overlooked as contextual and influential objects of material culture. Little scholarship has focused on a group of cookbooks from a particular region or time period to gain greater understanding of ideas and practices contained within. Nor has significant interrogation occurred around the complex cultural expectations that are deeply embedded in published cookbooks focused on cake, baking practice, and sweet food.

This thesis examines how contemporary Australian cookbooks are shaped by cultural context, audience, and dominant gender conceptions to encapsulate specific performances around the baking and consumption of sweet food. Research questions were devised to investigate the relationship between the cultural conceptions of femininity and representations of baking and cake in contemporary Australian Cookbooks; and probe the symbolic meanings that were attributed to the baking, performance and consumption of sweet food. Using a thematic analysis, contemporary Australian cookbooks were chosen that allowed for a critical look at cultural conceptions of contemporary femininity and baking culture, as well as intersections of identity, sensuality, nostalgia, indulgence and appetite. Analysis of the cookbooks reveals how ideologies of feminine practice and performance are shaped by baking culture, notions of expected feminine labour and historical legacies; how sweet food constructs sensuality and feminine sexuality to be consumed amid contradictions and tensions; and how indulgence is framed to shape appetite, contain pleasure, control feminine expressions, and eating via constant self-surveillance, expectation, and evaluation.

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## **Attestation of Authorship:**

*I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.*

*Signed:*

8/02/2019

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# 1 Introduction

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The purpose of this dedicated study is a critical examination of representations of cake, sweet food, and baking in Australian cookbooks to find correlations to wider conceptions of contemporary femininity. The particulars formed around interests stimulated during an internship as part of my master's program, where I worked at a culinary archive, helping to catalogue and conduct research on a large and precious collection of Australian cookbooks. Curiosity in the scholarly aspect of cookbooks prompted me to explore depictions of femininity in my dissertation, focused on baking and cakes in books published over the last 100 years, which then also formed an exhibition of materials and conceptual ideas. The appeal of the subject remained strong and impelled further inquiry to refine ideas, discover wider connections, and more closely interrogate representations of femininity in cookbooks. I became fascinated with the idea that cookbooks could not only contribute to histories of women, but reveal current conceptions of 'being feminine', with all the pressures, inconsistencies, and contrary definitions, as well as progressions and shifts. How much does baking and domesticity matter in conceptions of contemporary femininity? What roles or associations do the making of a cake, or the eating of sweet food play in understanding cultural messages and expectations in how women interact and shape their identities? More research was needed to explore the topic and uncover some answers.

Fundamentally, the project facilitates an examination of contemporary Australian society through a lens not often used to critically analyse—namely cookbooks. As ubiquitous objects of popular culture, inspecting cookbooks with more scrutiny allows for socio-political and historical concerns to be probed and for Australian cultural and contextual ideas to be critically understood and confronted. Specifically, closer

investigation enables a critical look at baking and cookbooks not just as part of food or eating, but also as components of material culture and consumption able to inform and be informed by concepts of gender and femininity in wider contemporary Australian context.

## **1.1 Rationale of the study**

The thesis poses an original contribution to the field of food and popular culture studies, and a unique look at the intercultural and interpersonal interaction between media, society, and the indelible role that cake and sweet food plays in a western social context. It will add to an expansion in understanding of cultural practices and ideas, and the recurrent and iconic value of food within social narratives.

Currently, a gap exists in research that explores contemporary representations of baking, cake, and sweet food on a local, regional, and international scale. Studies focused on cookbooks provide articulated narratives about nationalism, culinary tastes, and legacies, yet scholarship has overlooked what can be revealed about conceptions of femininity. Specifically, the trend in cookbooks celebrating a ‘lost’ feminine performance signals how necessary it is to examine popular culture products to “look beyond... [to] consider the complex relationship between object and subject” (Attfield, 2000, p. 5), and how such impacts culturally informed ideas of femininity.

Furthermore, wider socio-political currents that have influenced dominant feminine performances are observable in cookbooks. Cookbooks provide insight into current tensions that surround contemporary notions of femininity demonstrated via cultural depictions of the home as a haven of protection. This can also be seen in broader social narratives that call for an embrace of post-feminist domesticity that presents itself as a

‘simpler’, sustainable, and more ‘meaningful way of life’; and goes towards providing a context for social trends and currents worthy of closer examination. A type of yearning is evoked in these representations for an old-fashioned and ‘quintessential’ Australian experience which contextualises the “re-appropriation and re-signification of a dominant coding of femininity” (Gillis & Munford, 2004, p. 169). These notions become ever more relevant to understanding evolving conceptions of gender, particularly in an Australian context where definitions and distinctions have lately become a political battleground.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The aim of this research is to look critically at different representations of cake and baking practice in cookbooks, and to identify and discuss the cultural, social, and deeper meanings behind these representations within an Australian context. It also seeks to analyse how ritualistic elements of cake and sweet food have complex implications in expressions of identity, trend, and articulations of gender, specifically linked to deep-rooted concepts and social ideals of femininity.

### **Primary Research Question**

What is the relationship between cultural conceptions of femininity and representations of baking and cake in contemporary Australian cookbooks?

### **Sub-question**

What symbolic meanings are attributed to the baking, performance, and consumption of sweet food?

The research questions provide the basis for a close scrutiny of cookbooks as consumable objects informed by wider social messages that are often tacitly yet pervasively communicated across broad media landscapes.

## 1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis structure works to ensure each part further articulates the focus and aims of the investigation. Chapters One through Four set up the background and give contextual and theoretical justification for the examination of the cookbooks and the way the research was conducted. Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight form the discussion and seek to analyse the data and findings to reflect on the intersecting themes and recurrent trends perceivable throughout the cookbooks.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the cultural and social context that the cookbooks have been constructed in. It frames the thesis contemporarily and justifies why such a context fits this investigation. It sets out to explain the norms and behavioural codes that tie together popular trends and conceptions of baking and cake culture and outlines significant factors to consider when approaching cookbooks as objects of material culture. The chapter establishes a solid background that strengthens and supports the discussion of findings.

Chapter Three reviews the literature and existing scholarship on food culture, gender, definitions of femininity, baking, nostalgia, and domesticity. It considers previous explorations of cookbooks and how they function to give insight into social patterns, ideas and make-up. The chapter scrutinises scholarship that has examined deeper meanings connected to cake and sweet food and highlights the gaps present that this thesis works to bridge and expound on.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology and explains the reasoning behind the use of a thematic analysis. It provides justification for the theoretical frameworks and methods used in the inquiry to categorise and code materials into workable themes to be discussed in-depth and analysed. The chapter also includes the research design and

shows an overview of the data gathered from a close reading of the cookbooks. It explains how the data was selected using involved and specific criteria and underlines the rationale for grouping concepts and representations found in the data, and how such progressed into themes to be discussed in the thesis.

Chapter Five examines historic links in the data, the depiction of a traditional pioneer baking in her bush kitchen and explores how deeply engrained the heritage of baking is in contemporary Australian practices. It investigates how baking is depicted as essential feminine performance in Australian cookbooks and how closely such connects to wider cultural conceptions of femininity. The chapter focuses on the ways a legacy of tradition, adaptation and invention, culinary nationalism and cultural identity are symbolised to depict dominant cultural notions of the Anzac myth, nostalgia, and commemoration in the cookbooks and construct fantasies of a stereotyped Australian femininity.

Chapter Six interrogates how the cookbooks reflect concepts of baking as practice and social perceptions of femininity, specifically looking at the qualities connected to the behaviour associated with being feminine. It explores how the cookbooks expose pervasive cultural notions that connect naturalness, baking, and feminine practice, and the significance of generational recipes to such conceptions. The chapter examines how the cookbooks symbolically promote the consumption of nostalgia through feminine pastiche and code domestic scenes as specifically feminine spaces to sustain hegemonic expressions of femininity.

Chapter Seven focuses on contextualising elements of sensuality and sexuality through recipes, images, and descriptions; and how the 'pleasure of consumption' is exhibited within the cookbooks to bolster a specifically idealised fantasy of femininity. It probes

how images of food, representational elements of women, and feminine practice invite readers to participate voyeuristically to consume notions of fantasy and feminine identity. The chapter explores how wider cultural conceptions of femininity are reinforced in the cookbooks through promises of the pleasure of baking, both visually and experientially.

Chapter Eight examines how cultural notions of feminine appetite, excess, and desire are implicitly transmitted within the cookbooks. It investigates how narratives of indulgence are expressed through depictions of sweet food and scenes of eating. It examines indulgence connected to sharing, restraint and control, particularly when associated with expected feminine behaviour/s, and critically explores wider cultural narratives that depict feminine eating in certain ways. The chapter also discusses the connection of sweet food to culturally ‘feminised’ emotionality, and how this contributes to symbolically illicit associations.

Finally, Chapter Nine summarises the investigation by charting key conclusions of the study and highlights significant points of discussion and analysis, as identified in Chapters Five to Eight. It gives an overview of the aims and how the investigation was directed by the research questions. The chapter discusses the study’s contribution to scholarship, considers key limitations and suggests avenues for future research and further inquiry to be pursued.

## **1.4 Summary**

This chapter outlined the topic of the thesis, provided an overview of the research questions driving the inquiry, and explained the rationale behind the study. The introduction explained the inclusion of each section, and how the study fits together to

evaluate and critically examine a dataset of Australian cookbooks. Each chapter adds to and expands on the concepts to be explored, working to uncover the relationship between cultural conceptions of femininity and representations of baking, cake, and sweet food in cookbooks.

## **2 Contextualising contemporary baking culture and conceptions of femininity**

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### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the cultural, socio-political, and historical contexts that have shaped contemporary Australia. As this thesis focuses on a dataset of contemporary cookbooks from 2010 onwards, perceptions and social circumstances of the last decade need contextualisation and deeper scrutiny to understand the ways of thinking and social shifts that influenced their production. To understand the ‘present’, we must, as Bishop (2013) suggests, consider ‘multiple temporalities’ and how the past allows us to comprehend our current thought and conditions. Alongside this, interrogating the influences of cross-cultural and trans-national progressions, movements, ideas, and wider effects, and how they can be seen translated into localised Australian forms becomes essential to understanding context. Specifically, this chapter presents an overview of dominant social ideas in the last three decades from Britain and America, outlining trans-national similarities in actions, responses, causes and effects in shaping baking culture and concepts of femininity in contemporary Australia.

Lastly, the chapter identifies salient popular trends and leading ideas in wider media representations over the last three decades that connect to how femininity is perceived socially, and how such currents have come to influence and inform Australian cookbooks as objects of consumer culture.

## **2.2 Socio-political currents, movements, and consumer culture**

In order to understand the contextual elements that make up contemporary ideas in conceptions of baking and femininity, social upheavals and the shifting perceptions of a woman's place and space in society need to be examined carefully. This is important context to consider as femininity can be defined as the qualities, connected behaviours, and expectations of being feminine, which our society ties primarily to women, a "culturally enforced effect" (Butler, 1990, p. 9) due mostly to dominant narratives which bound sex and gender together [see chapter 3 for more academic discussion on gender and femininity]. By closely probing the cultural, social, and political meanings of femininity over time, and associations to women, certain indications of social capital and power become evident, how such notions define and affect how women are regarded in society and give insight into the certain expectations of how to 'be' in a masculinist culture (see de Beauvoir, 1949/1972; Butler, 1990). This allows for greater comprehension of how cookbooks can be a source of understanding femininity as they contain information informed by conditions, developments, and shifts in ideas of gender and femininity both in the domestic space and in wider culture.

Significantly, exploring the influence of feminist ideas and organisation on contemporary and cultural conceptions of femininity demonstrates the way society has come to view social structures and help shape institutions, policy, and law that consequently dictate dominant perceptions. In particular, how the social, economic and political transformations that arose from 'waves' of feminist thought and action during the twentieth century had lasting discursive and in/direct effects upon understandings of gender and femininity.

Initial ‘waves’ of feminist assembly and movement can be traced to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to organisations formed across the world with the aim to ‘emancipate’ women and support greater educational and employment opportunities for women and girls, as well as the right to vote (Sandell, 2015). In the Australian context, these ‘first wave’ movements gained a country-wide vote for women in 1901—although Aboriginal women had to wait decades longer—and opened paths for women to study at universities and enter a wider range of professions previously closed to them (Bulbeck, 2014). From these first gains, the tumultuous events of the first half of the twentieth century led to an urgent call for gender relations to be reconsidered, tied closely to labour rights—both paid and unpaid—issues like bodily autonomy, and more economic and educational freedoms (Bulbeck, 2014). To examine the current social conceptions where the cookbooks in this study were conceived and packaged, it is significant to consider shifts, progressions, and reverberations across the Western world and trans-national influences on Australia that came from the gains and re-evaluations of femininity that occurred throughout the twentieth century. The culmination of the energy, thought, and wish for change led to a ‘second wave’ of feminism—originating in the late 1960s—which claimed the phrase ‘personal is political’ as a central facet and aimed to break down stereotypes and further reveal “the impact of sexism and patriarchy on every aspect of women’s private lives and the wider belief that gender equality was an issue with just as much importance to men, as to women” (Munro, 2013, p. 1).

Dicker’s (2008) exploration of American 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist movements is instrumental to understanding the effects of this ‘Second Wave’ and represents one of many well-documented works that has parallels—if not in specific events, but in ideas, effects, and motivations—to similar happenings in Australia. One of the unifying trans-

cultural elements of the ‘second’ wave was a re-assessment of the values, expectations, and “investments” of femininity, which Hollows’ (2010) categorises as “passivity, submissiveness and dependence”, considered to be oppressive and restrictive (p. 10; see also Friedan, 1963). This led to a feeling in the 1970s and 1980s of optimism and a rise in opportunities and paths previously closed to women, attached to a myriad of lifestyle options and choice.

In the U.S., great strides were made in the visibility of women in public positions of power, with Supreme Court Judge Sandra Day O’Connor becoming the first female appointee in 1981; First Female Astronaut Sally Ride being sent into space in 1983; and EMILY’s List—an organisation founded to fundraise and promote more women involved in politics—aiding many women to become elected representatives (Dicker, 2008). With greater job opportunities, more women began to rise up the ‘corporate ladder’ and wield newly gained financial power and influence, not only in consumer influence, but also in the ability to weigh into and shift political and social issues and allow for greater public voice.

Social shifts of the 1980s—throughout the Western World—created vigorous capitalistic environments and the accumulation of previously unbeknownst or experienced wealth. An embrace of neoliberal principles valorised policies of free trade, privatisation, a dominance of ‘market-thinking’ and individual responsibility (Birch, 2017; Harvey, 2005). These shifts threatened the fundamental ideas, advancement, and credibility of the ‘second wave’, and the way that women related and applied it to their lives. Dicker (2008) categorises the decade as heavily influenced by the notion of competitive individualism, which “privileges the well-being of the individual over that of the community or collective” (p. 15). This began to impact the foundations of the movement, distorting the message into what Dicker (2008) summarises as, “forget the

political already, get back to the personal, which you might be able to do something about” (p. 15) to promote more focus on ‘self-development’ and on the right to become individuals, with less attention placed on civil rights for the benefit of all. Greater financial command through career focus was seen as the tools to effect social or political change; in Australia this was endorsed officially by a “massive expansion of publicly supported child care during the 1980s and early 1990s... aimed at facilitating women’s participation in paid employment” by successive Labor governments (Burke & Redmond, 2002, p. 1). However, though such helped women in full-time employment gain economic advantages, the effort to increase the benefits for working-mothers was minimal, as the cost of child-care began to rise concurrently, and other areas of policy were not reformed or restructured to properly support such implementation (Burke & Redmond, 2002).

Alongside this, new industries popularised during the 1980s—with trans-national similarities—influenced social goals to concentrate more on self-indulgence and urged the use of spare income to improve the ‘physical self’. Markets flourished by pushing the idea that a woman could be successful and independent while enhancing her ‘appeal’ to men through cosmetics, gym memberships and exercise equipment; aided by the abundance of women’s magazines that promoted particular ‘idealised’ images (Douglas, 1995). Adopting what Susan Douglas (1995) labels as “narcissism as liberation”, this ‘new’ perception of woman was influenced by media advertising to be in control of her choices, free to pursue the ideal of physical ‘perfection’ while exerting a kind of “materialistic feminism” which made any further collective community benefits difficult to achieve (p. 17).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal notions also encouraged a conservative backlash to rein in gains of the ‘Second Wave’. In the U.S. this formed through the rise

of a 'New Right', a movement made-up of religious groups, commentators and other powerful organisations which tried to halt, as Dicker (2008) suggests, what they saw as "the decline of society and culture" due to the popularity of secular values (p. 103). Through the steady promotion of 'family values', which consisted of a "breadwinning" father at the head, and a nurturing, domestic mother" (Dicker, 2008, p. 103), and standards which they considered to be in direct opposition to feminism; the 'New Right' set out to challenge and remove the threat that feminism posed to what they deemed as traditional gender roles (see also Douglas, 1995; Faludi, 1992).

These challenges formed part of what Susan Faludi (1992) labels "a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, a *backlash* [emphasis added], an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" (p. 12). Additionally, the idea of backlash and rejection of the need or relevance of feminism to the 1980/90s woman was evident within the media, with many popular forms reporting repeatedly that women were no longer interested in the goals of the movement. A 1982 *New York Times Magazine* cover-story by Susan Bolotin, observed that "[N]ot one woman I spoke to believes that women receive equal pay for equal or comparable work, but it does not occur to most of them to use the power of the feminist movement to improve their position" (cited in Dicker, 2008, p. 107). The popularity of 1980s individualism persistently underlined the idea that equality could not be achieved collectively but must be battled for individually, infiltrating the new generation, who were grateful for the victories of the women's movement, but no longer identified with it or as feminist. In a 1986 *Elle Magazine* article, journalist Paula Kamen found that women "no longer need to examine the whys and hows of sexism... All those ideals once held as absolute truths—sexual liberation, the women's movement, true equality—have been debunked or debased" (cited in Dicker, 2008, p. 107). Kamen

also reported of an ‘alienation’ between generations and that the label of ‘feminist’ itself incited connotations of “bra-burning, hairy-legged, amazon, castrating, militant-almost-anti-feminine, communist, Marxist, separatist, female skin-heads, female supremists, he-woman type, bunch-a-lesbians” from young women interviewed (cited in Dicker, 2008, p. 107). This widespread belief of an all-accomplished and therefore redundant movement with undesirable ramifications began to alter its reception in society, and many feminist organisations saw membership significantly diminish, relegating its focus to academic circles and taken up by communities of women of colour (Dicker, 2008).

The influence of neoliberal ideals and the growth of right-wing rhetoric had a trans-national impact on re-evaluations of gender relations, femininity, and a woman’s role in public/private domains; directly affecting hard fought gains and social policy, where reform was given less priority on an official scale. The 1990s also saw public discourses around the notion of ‘post-feminism’, where the need for interventionist and reformed social policy were regarded as unneeded, and concepts of individual empowerment became a promoted “strategy of resistance” (Brunskell-Evans, 2015, para. 6). This became of note in Australia, as throughout the 1980s and 1990s many women took positions in government bureaucracies to focus on “advancing the position of women in the wider society through the development of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination strategies for change” (Gaskell & Taylor, 2003, p. 2). As social discussions on policy and gender—as well as feminism and femininity—began to shift, programs funded by Australian governments that promoted equity and equality were cutback, and previously allocated monies to support women’s groups and initiatives were reduced significantly (Gaskell & Taylor, 2003).

This downturn in energy of the women's movement and change in outlook cultivated the roots of 'Third Wave' feminism—the origins of which are quite debateable yet related to events in the early 1990s—as a trans-national shift in energy, focus, and aims (Munro, 2013). In the U.S., it rose prompted by misogynistic language and controversy of Supreme Court Candidate Clarence Thomas and sexual discrimination hearings in 1992, revitalised to spread through the younger generation of the time (Dicker, 2008). Rebecca Walker—daughter of feminist novelist Alice Walker—wrote in *Ms. Magazine* about 'Becoming the Third Wave' and issued a figurative 'call to arms' to other women of her generation, announcing that she was “not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave” (cited in Dicker, 2008, p. 118). This provoked a movement that aimed to expose and tackle the impacts of sexism and patriarchy on society by creating underground activities to add voices of dissent to the dominant social discourse. An apt example of this in action was the formation of many female punk bands in the early 1990s, that collectively made up the *Riot Grrrl* movement, started in the U.S. to spread outwards, devised in, what Dicker (2008) suggests, “an effort to try and explore the paths restricted to young girls and women; 'grrrl' an aggressive, powerful growl to challenge historical ideas of female meekness” (p. 118).

Simultaneously, mainstream elicitation of these ideas also seemed to appear with less confronting or diluted feminist principles by popular icons like the *Spice Girls*, which according to Dicker (2008) “embodied contradictory notions of feminist empowerment and sexualised beauty culture”, to exploit and commodify the message for wider audience consumption (p. 122). These concepts formed part of the wider perception of 'Third-wave' feminism in the 1990s into 2000s and preceded a re-appropriation of the word 'girlie', used historically to dismiss and demean feminine pursuits or connotations, reclaimed by many to instead validate an “embracing femininity”, that celebrates the

“trappings of femininity in a conscious, parodic way” (Dicker, 2008, p. 123). This is significant to understanding the contemporary perceptions of the word ‘girlie’ and the part it plays in conceptions of femininity and the dominant coding of such in cookbooks. Contextually, the ‘third-wave’ came about in “a world shaped by technology, global capitalism, and multiple models of sexuality, changing national demographics, and declining economic vitality” (Piepmeier & Dicker, 2003, p. 14). Subsequently, the embrace of certain concepts of femininity alongside feminist ideas can be directly tied to contemporary Western neo-liberalistic notions, where ideas of self-reliance, individualism and competition prevail to become “a proliferation of faux-feminist gestures, [whereby] girls are celebrated and supported for their potential and for what they ‘can-do’ in the world” (McRobbie, 2011, p. 181). This has culminated in a ‘can-do’ attitude tied to the “freedom to consume”, which McRobbie (2011) links to the “enormous explosion of the female fashion and beauty corporations” influenced by a sense of empowerment boosted by the “rather nebulous idea of ‘consumer citizenship’” (p. 182).

Although the ‘Third-wave’ enabled more room to explore more nuanced, multifaceted feminist expressions and look critically at the rigidity of femininity and gender roles, the legacies and reverberations of previous movements and wider social propensities—focused on development of the ‘self’ and the individual—impacted and curbed the effect that such a movement could—or was expected to—have, particularly on social policy and collective achievement (Munro, 2013). In the Australian context, this shift in priorities were further aided by years of conservative governments—starting with the election of the Howard Government in 1996—actively disassembling the “gender equality machinery that promoted legislation and policies supporting women’s advancement” (Bulbeck, 2014, para. 11) to refocus the public conversation on economic

solutions—like participation in the workforce—rather than holistic social and community focused reforms.

Contemporary feminist movements have seemingly sought to focus on balancing life and work, particularly around addressing economic inequalities in the wage gap and motherhood (Dicker, 2008), yet many of the core hindrances of ‘Third-wave’ feminism, and its progression into post-feminist notions, according to Heywood and Drake (2004), are associated with individualism and middle-class femininities, constructed as a “celebratory and critical engagement with consumer culture”, to enable a feeling of empowerment and liberation as “few alternatives [exist] for the construction of subjectivity outside the production/consumption cycle of global commodification” (p. 19). Currently, perceptions of feminism seem to be entangled with financial power and choice, witnessed across popular culture and in media representations, which become increasingly important to examine for contextual evidence, as “for many women... formative understandings of, and identifications with, feminist ideas have been almost exclusively [developed] within popular culture” (Hollows & Moseley, 2006, p. 2). A look at feminist movements is important to demonstrate that conceptions of gender and femininity in the last thirty years not been a lineal process, and shifts in action, thought, and condition throughout the Western context reveal both progression and impediment.

### **2.3 Dominant media representations of femininity**

Unpacking the place of cookbooks in social narratives starts with examining dominant media representations of femininity in the last three decades. These representations have been heavily influenced by social movements and ideas, constructing ideologies that centre on the search for the ideal ‘individual self’; filtered throughout different modes of popular culture and fashioned as part of the identity process. Within this ideology is the

prescribed duty that contributing members of society are required to both shape and maximise this ‘self’ to somehow reach a true ideal (see Bordo, 1993; De Solier, 2013; McRobbie, 2011). As Hollows’ (2000) suggests, femininity can be seen as a “cultural product” influenced by dominant media messages to “play a role in socialising women into restrictive” behaviours (p. 21). Through advertising, public relations campaigns, and visual entertainment, it is evident that this search for identity seems to heavily involve the consumption of material goods, and the use and display of these products. The rise of social media has also played a role in the endorsing these values and the spread of postfeminist and neoliberal femininities into mainstream usage (Duffy & Hund 2015; McRobbie 2015).

The last thirty years have seen a rise in the ideological construction of femininity in media representations spurred by political and social rhetoric, which continues into contemporary perceptions. Consistently, gender is a focus of contention and provides a search for understanding shifting concepts and public discussion. If femininity is conceptualised as the specific gendered behaviour that is associated with or defined by women, and in relation to masculinity [see chapter 3 for further discussion of the concept in scholarship] then a critical look at media representations can provide insight into how ideals are widely communicated and promulgated.

Popular texts presented an empowered, ‘liberated woman’ as a symbolic and idealised concept to re-establish a women’s proper place in the societal framework, while encouraging post-feminist visions of a women’s movement that had won, and was therefore obsolete (Hollows & Moseley, 2006). Contextually, this is indicated in the reporting of gender inequality collected via Australian census statistics—from data comparing income, spatial circumstance and wealth—that expose a consistent disparity in the average earnings of men and women, a national gap of 14.6 per cent, only

narrowly up from 15-19 per cent in the last two decades (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018; see also Baker, 2018). The disparity is also observable in the disproportion of women in positions of power, with only “14 female chief executives running the top 200 listed companies” in Australia (Khadem, 2018, para. 1); and in political representation, with 26.1 per cent of women ministers in the current federal government (Martino, 2018). Yet these studies are often met with—and assuaged by—the notion that “it’s only a matter of time before women match men in the ministerial, CEO or billionaire stakes” (Bulbeck, 2014, para.13) reaffirming the perception that social progress is more advanced and that no more effort is needed to ensure this reality.

Mixed media messages urge women, according to Douglas and Michaels (2004), to be “simultaneously, independent, achievement-orientated, successful, the equal to any man and yet appealing to men, selfless, accommodating, nurturing, the connective tissue that holds all families together and of course, slim and beautiful” (p. 325). These somewhat unreachable and oft contradictory images and notions of a woman’s place in the world are repeated and re-enacted across the media landscape, seen in advertising, magazines, television sitcoms, films, and even newscasts, to have “a powerful effect on women’s self-perceptions and on men’s perceptions of them” (Douglas, 1995, p. 293). An example of this becomes obvious when examining the media focus on the political campaigns of Hilary Clinton (2008 & 2016), but also those of Sarah Palin, Angela Merkel, Julia Gillard, and Theresa May. The messages communicated by media coverage and social media commentary can be seen explicitly not in the quantity of coverage—which was comparable regardless of gender—but, as Fowler and Lawless (2009) found, in quality, which chose to examine and assess candidates with entirely different standards. To explain this further, Ross (2017) found in her study of gendered frames placed on parliamentarians, that often “when considering women politicians...

[the media] expect better standards of behavior, higher moral values, more honesty, integrity, and loyalty” (p. 60), and that these standards are exacted in personal terms—dress, appearance, marital and family status, personality—criteria which are not applied to their male counterparts. Visibility and representation of women in the political arena has grown considerably in the last thirty years, yet the perception persists that such an arena belongs to men, which often translates as a punishing media “reaction and response to women who dare to cross the gender line and do “men’s work” (Ross, 2010, p. 74).

Throughout late 1990s and 2000s more female-centric content was created within popular entertainment that seemed to focus on utilising “shifting notions of feminist politics and the relationships between feminism and femininity” to concentrate and explore “the tensions between work and home, private and public space, and sexuality, motherhood and ‘liberation’” (Hollows & Moseley, 2006, p. 12). Examples on American Television like *Murphy Brown*, *Ally McBeal*, *Friends*, *Sex in the City*, and film franchise *Bridget Jones’ Diary* embodied the fragmented and complex landscape of popular feminism and provided aspirational, strong, intelligent and capable female figures who were decisive in their career choices and in wielding their sexuality. At the same time, these sites of entertainment also demonstrated the “ambivalence, contradiction and compromise” that existed in the choices available to women who wished to ‘have it all’ (Douglas, 1995, p. 278). In particular, *Sex & the City* demonstrated this idea of ‘having it all’, through what Akass and McCabe (2004) discuss as the lens of citizenship, identity, and of course, consumption. This representation has become common, as popular texts tend to present female characters as “all things to all people: to be both competitive workaholics *and* sex objects, to be active workers in control of their bodies *and* passive ornaments for the pleasure of men,

to be hard-as-nails superwomen *and* vulnerable, unthreatening, teenage beach bunnies [emphasis original]” (Douglas, 1995, p. 263); the ‘can-do’ attitude of the ‘third wave’ translated onscreen.

The persistent representation of contradictory womanhood can also be seen explicitly in advertising, bringing together the threads of empowered financial choice and a search for identity through consumer culture heavily connected to displays of pervasively popular fantasies. Advertisements in women’s magazines—both presently and throughout the last thirty years—have a far-reaching ability to convey ideals of femininity, as they are “the largest and most profitable of all genres within the magazine industry” (Ross, 2010, p. 37), and contain a varied marketing of products that operate as a kind of ‘authoritative text’ of femininity (Smith, 1990). For decades, advertorials in women’s magazines—and other media advertising—have encouraged their readers to change themselves to fit certain feminine idealised and expected norms of body and behaviour (Ross, 2010).

More recent shifts in the last decade have seen gendered ideas shift in the media landscape influenced by cultural and technological transformations, with more awareness leading to beauty brands like *Dove* and *The Body Shop* to address prevalent representations of “the tyranny of the perfect female form” by including images of ‘real’ women in their advertising; although the initial campaign run by *Dove* included women of different shapes, sizes and ethnicities promoting a firming cream (Ross, 2010, p. 48). Constructions of men and women in advertising are still often rendered closely to an essentialist view of gender, which leads to persistent stereotypes, for example, a common representation in advertisements for health or medicinal products, sees women “almost exclusively as the givers of remedies to family members, playing into normative stereotypes of woman as earth mother and nurturer” (Ross, 2010, p. 17).

While there have been some exceptions to these typical positions, Ross (2010) posits that the “routinized stereotyping of women in advertising is remarkably consistent over time” and “playful ads where women know about engine size and men are interested in upholstery fabric... are noteworthy precisely because they go against the gender-traditional grain” (p. 37).

In order to understand cultural conceptions of femininity and the relationship to baking and sweet foods, representations of ‘being a mother’, practising care and nurturance are vital behaviours to consider. In the last three decades, representations of motherhood have grown to become a media obsession, connected somewhat to ‘baby booms’, or periods where the number of women having babies increased (Douglas, 1995).

Consistent attention in the media, dedicated web spaces, and social media has emphasised the extensive—and somewhat infinite—amount of information that mothers—although this is shifting to consider ‘parents’ more—are expected to consider, understand, take on, and put into practice to ensure the best for their child. On the surface such narratives seem to exult motherhood, but also insidiously encourage an environment of impossible, guilt-inducing expectations and demanding standards (Douglas, 1995). Douglas (1995) describes the contradictory media representations of mothers as an effort to “revere them in imagery, revile them in public policy”, that has promulgated unreachable standards of ‘perfection’ without providing any infrastructure or flexibility that would allow this to occur in reality (p. 293; see also Lupton, 2011; Miller, 2018).

Dominant perceptions of motherhood have expanded and been socially consequential, essentially work as distortions of feminist ideologies that has bearing on how femininity should be enacted in Western society. Advertising, in particular, consistently displays images of women who seem to be completely fulfilled by a devotion of “her entire

physical, psychological, emotional and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 4) in order to sell domestic products for the home, as well as toys, cereal, fast food, candy, and the like. Susan Bordo’s (1993) study of advertising in the 1980s/early 1990s found that domestic conceptions of femininity “cast women as the chief emotional and physical nurturer” (p. 313), where domestic and familiar responsibility are internalised and used as the measure of womanhood. For the last three decades, and seen still within current promotions, advertisers seized on notions of feminine care and used “commercially promoted maternal love” to sell organic products that were “pure, natural, synthetic-free, talc-free, non-animal tested, nut-oil free, nonpetroleum, non-mineral oil, artificial fragrance free”, by harnessing heavily cloaked narratives of apprehension, protectionism, and necessity in order to do the “best” for her child and fulfil the ‘duty of care’ to her family (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 269; see also Lupton, 2011). These constructed ideologies of motherhood—and parenting—and the “hyper-individualised emphasis on how truly, exquisitely unique and precious our child is” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 269; see also Miller, 2018) have been hugely impactful and shifted perspectives that prove difficult to abate or adjust on a wider social scale. It is in this contemporary media space that representations of food can be examined with more careful focus to contextualise how baking can be linked to these deeply engrained and pervasive cultural understandings of femininity.

## **2.4 Food, femininity, and popular culture**

Examining the place of food in social narratives is significant to understanding the relationship between femininity, baking, and consumption; particularly how such is represented in the wider trans-national media landscape. Food has and continues to

make up a large component of consumer culture, advancing in influence since the term *foodie*—someone who appreciates and derives pleasure from food in all its forms—was first coined in 1980 by *New York Magazine*'s food critic Gael Greene (Stoeger, 2013, p. 37), and entered into social consciousness. Continually, the books at the top of the best seller lists are often associated with food, covering preparation, travel and leisure, history and anthropology, memory and generational legacy, dieting and health, as well as numerous other categories. Even as the published book declines due to the pressures of technology and publisher demise, the popularity of cookbooks remains buoyant—Jamie Oliver's *5 Ingredients: Quick and Easy Food* topped *The Guardian*'s 2017 Bestsellers' List (Dugdale, 2017). Food in popular culture also extends out to incorporate a mass of other categories across consumer culture, including cooking implements, crockery and kitchen associated products, as well as the actual foodstuffs themselves.

More and more attention has been given to food in popular culture, depicting it as a pleasurable pursuit and a form of entertainment or leisure, or as Gelber (1999) terms it, “productive leisure”, which has contributed to the growth of food related media and television programs. From a tradition that began with simple demonstrations of technique in a traditional setting to the vast breadth and variety of programs available, shifts in providing basic culinary instruction have evolved into competitive contests of skills and explorations of the exotic (Swenson, 2009). Currently, information that contextualises the way that the domestic sphere and the kitchen are thought to be navigated and utilised by society can be observed via food-related media. Dedicated channels like *The Food Network*, and other programs within the cooking/leisure genre, are responsible for instructing many people about buying, preparing and consuming food, showing emerging patterns that sometimes seem to reinforce traditional gendered

messages (Swenson, 2009). Many of the programs position male hosts as an instructor with “an aura of professionalism”, complementing the idea that manhood is achieved outside of family life—through business, sport, politics—and demonstrates that cooking can become just another professional arena for accomplishment (Swenson, 2009, p. 142). ‘Celebrity Chef’ is another term that has sunk into collective use and has become imbued with a multitude of complex social meanings.

Widespread perceptions of the restaurant industry and its professionally male-dominated environment can be seen in reality across the UK, where fewer than a fifth—or 18.5%—of professional chefs are women (Olbrich, 2016); in the U.S., where men are the chefs or head cooks in 78.4% of all positions, and whose salaries are on average \$6,000 higher annually (Crea, 2018); and in Australia, which in 2017 counted 66,735 male chefs compared to 21,308 female ones (Waters, 2017). Alongside this, are common reports of bullying and sexual harassment from women working within the industry, leading to—or perhaps instigated by the energy of the #MeToo movement—the disgrace of once prominent restaurateurs and celebrities, like Mario Batali, Ken Friedman and John Besh. These contemporary understandings of food culture lead to dominant perceptions of belonging, social appropriateness, and proscribed/expected masculine or feminine behaviours around professional food, cooking, domestic spaces, and conceptions of food and food-activities.

One prominent Australian example that illustrates a pervasive dichotomy of public/private food and cooking space, involves award-winning chef and entrepreneur Maggie Beer, who was in long-running cooking show *The Cook and the Chef*, alongside Chef Simon Bryant. Despite her accolades, she persisted in classifying herself and her cooking abilities as the simple know-how of a cook, which contributed to the persistent disconnect between female cooks who prepare food every day in necessity, usually with

simple methods and ingredients; and the high cuisine produced by the skilled expert preparing food in a professional arena or environment.

Examining the public/private perceptions of food spaces further provides contextual understanding of wider social issues, particularly when viewing studies of gender and unpaid domestic labour which consistently record an imbalance in the division of household tasks to do with the kitchen and cooking, oriented towards women (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000). Historian Laura Shapiro (2004) observes this imbalance throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century to note the normal behaviour of “women... responsible for a double shift, working a full-time job and then rushing home to cook a meal for the family” (pp. 35-36). The same pressure to take on a ‘second’ shift by men of the household does not hold the same notion of normality or necessity. Another idea that contributes to this perception of responsibility may be the notion of the “male cooking mystique”, which Sherrie Inness (2001) describes is the need to ensure that “if men choose to cook, they must make sure their masculinity isn’t diminished” usually shown via a meal that contains meat or related products (p. 15).

Many cooking programs produced in the last ten years bolster ideas of a masculinised professional pursuit through cooking contests or challenges. Similar to athletes competing in an arena, masculinity within these programs is presented as “tied to hierarchy, success, power, speed and stamina”, and directly contests the feminine associations of cooking as “nurturing, democratic and family-centred” (Swenson, 2009, p. 149) The rise in competitive contests that involve food, and the popularity of such contest shows like *Iron Chef*, contribute to the continual separation of the domestic element and the manly nature of professional cooking. As Naccarato and Lebesco (2012) suggest, these programmes exemplify “the tension between the public and

private boundary, between cooking domestic and institutional, [with] ‘male’ cooking shows set outside the private environment” (p. 46). A prime example of this is the comparison between any of the programmes featuring Nigella Lawson (*Nigella Bites*, *Nigella Feasts*, *Nigella's Christmas Kitchen*, *Nigella Express*) and *MasterChef Australia*. Nigella Lawson’s presentation is perceived as “domestic, amateur, playful and female”, whereas *MasterChef*, with its high-octane challenges to find ‘the best of the best’ can be coded as “professional, competitive and male” (Packham, 2015, p. 87).

Examining the current Australian context, the pattern of ‘professional, competitive and male’ is often indicated throughout popular food programming and cookbook trends. Arguably the most successful food television show, long-running *MasterChef* has three male hosts who guide amateur contestants through challenges and find ways to constantly show off or demonstrate their superior cooking skills, always framed from a professional stance. Another very popular challenge program, *My Kitchen Rules*, has two male hosts who bring a professional outlook to a domestically centred show that has teams of family or friends attempting to produce three course meals in their home kitchens. Even without the pre-textual challenge element, instructional cooking programmes also feature patterns that connotes professionalism with masculinity. Daily cooking show, *Good Chef/Bad Chef*, has hosts Chef Adrian Richardson and Nutritionist Rosie Mansfield produce versions of dishes considered good/bad. Adrian produces dishes that are usually more traditional, containing typical ingredients to demonstrate a simpler form for viewers to take note of and re-create. In comparison, Rosie, makes a dish that is often the lower-fat version and uses alternative ingredients to produce something ‘healthier’. The Chef in this case brings a sense of professionalism and culinary know-how to the kitchen, and the Nutritionist, while bringing skill and

knowledge, demonstrates it in a distinctly feminised way that considers and connects to social parameters beyond the food.

In the last ten years, Australia has seen a surge in popular women chefs becoming household names, like Kylie Kwong, aforementioned Maggie Beer, prominent restaurateurs Liz Egan and Christine Mansfield, and *MasterChef* competitors who have managed to branch out and become their own brand like Anna Polyviou, Justine Schofield, Julie Goodwin, and Poh Ling Yeow. This new development has also been noted more broadly, with profiles written about the trend of all-female kitchens: like Thi Le's *Anchovy* in Melbourne; Sara Kramer's LA restaurant *Kismet*, and Asma Khan's *Darjeeling Express* in London. However, perceptions persist that show that these shifts still have ways to go, as indicated via a recent viral tweet that drew criticism for its sexist undercurrents from a Michelin restaurant critic who dined at *Darjeeling Express* and expressed, "it's rare to see a completely female kitchen team—and one so utterly calm under so much pressure as the place was packed" (Wills, 2017). Such perceptions, whether benignly intentioned or not, indicate a different approach to how even highly regarded women chefs are viewed in a professional setting. Even Nigella Lawson, who demonstrates professional knowledge, skill, and approach, and has become a world-wide brand, is still firmly linked to a domestic experience.

Lawson projects a type of femininity around food that seems to embrace past ideas while reinterpreting and reshaping others. Much commentary, in written articles and throughout social media, has attempted to tackle Lawson's message and how her notions of enacting a 'domestic goddess' in the kitchen, "articulate and disarticulate different feminine identities with and from feminism" (Hollows, 2006, in Hollows & Moseley, p. 106). In particular, when Lawson (2012) writes in that "many of us have become alienated from the domestic sphere, and that it can actually make us feel better

to claim back some of that space, make it comforting rather than frightening” (Preface), she presents as Shapiro Sanders (2008) suggests, a “complex reinterpretation of contemporary feminism” (p. 157), tied closely to expressions of femininity, yet couched in language—claiming back space—that resembles feminist rhetoric. Contextually, this is significant, as Lawson’s ‘domestic goddess’ exists as a ‘fantasy’ and a product of material culture, and although mired in populist debates around contemporary tensions, and post-feminist ideas of femininity, the core ideas are ultimately harnessed in order to sell books, television programmes and the ‘Nigella’ brand. Looking wider, this can be connected to how most contemporary cookbooks are packaged to be a type of literature, full of fantasy and escapism, similar to reading a romance to bring pleasure rather than just practicality (Bower, 2004). Lawson’s representation prompts a pertinent glimpse into current frictions and re-articulations of feminist/feminine approaches to food and cooking, contextualising the feminine space of, or depictions in twentieth and twenty-first century cookbooks in a clearer way, particularly in terms of baking culture, and the fantasy that is currently engaged with, bought into, and collected [further discussion on contextualising contemporary cookbooks can be found in the next Section, 2.5, of this chapter].

## **2.5 Contemporary ideas, technology, and new domestic femininities**

Conceptions of femininity and baking culture can be contextualised in relation to media commentary and descriptions of a ‘culture of anxiety’ that has been shaped and influenced by socio-political crises (Matchar, 2013). Current notions of domestic spaces and ‘the home’ are often represented in post-feminist terms and against a backdrop of concerns about threats of terror, worries over the impacts of climate

change, fears of environmental instability, and global financial crises (Matchar, 2013; see also Martens & Scott, 2006; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Slater, 1997). A flow of twenty-first century rhetoric amplifies the “discontinuities, pluralities, chaos, instabilities, constant changes, fluidities, and paradoxes” of twenty-first century contemporary life (Ger & Yenicioğlu, 2004, p. 464) to create an environment which poses domesticity as a sanctuary, and the idea of home as a place to find a “simpler, more sustainable, more meaningful way of life” (Matchar, 2013p. 20; p. 12). Bestselling books espouse ways of shifting perspective and lifestyles, like Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (2012) and Stephanie Bennett Vogt’s *Your Spacious Self: Clear the Clutter and Discover Who You Are* (2012); as well as many articles, commentaries, and focused programmes which propagate notions of finding simplicity in modern life. Throughout popular culture, book, television, and film adaptations of the last few years have popularised ideas of ‘finding the self’ and optimising it, for example, *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010), *Wild* (2014), and Netflix shows *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* (2019-) and *Consumed* (2011-), to make narratives of ‘simplicity’ and minimalism appealing for those disillusioned or dissatisfied with contemporary life or work conditions.

Twenty-first century texts also centre on aspects of contemporary female experience communicated through television, film, books, and wider media representations such as magazines, newspapers, and in news reporting. Many magazine think-pieces seek to discuss core concerns of the ongoing feminist movement, which is often seen as “no longer about whether women should pursue career or motherhood or both” but “how they can best combine whichever roles suit them” (Ghazi & Jones, 2004, p. 131). *Cosmopolitan* magazine declared *Meet the New Housewife Wannabes* (Dutton, 2000) and presented an article that interviewed a group of women in their twenties with this

position; other prominent columnists wrote about *The Opt-Out Revolution* (Belkin, 2003), *Looking to the Future, Feminism Has to Focus* (Hirshman, 2008), and *Why Women Still Can't Have It All* (Slaughter, 2012), to encapsulate this social trend and lifestyle re-evaluations. This narrative connects to popularised post-feminist ideas that urge reassessment of previous tensions between domestic femininity and feminism, and view notions of “female power...as [not] compromised by femininity”, but instead, as Genz (2009) describes, allows women to “adopt feminine values and appearance as a sign of freedom and independence” (p. 31). Books published like *Downshifting: The Bestselling Guide to Happier, Simpler Living* (2004), advised women in particular, to shift their thinking, opt out of the career rat race, reduce working hours, and cut back on purchasing to live simpler, balanced and ‘more fulfilled’ lives. The desire to ‘downshift’ prompted an outflux of well-educated yet discontented women to give up enterprising careers and high-powered jobs throughout the 2000s to find satisfaction elsewhere and concentrate on family life by re/embracing domesticity (Hollows, 2006, in Hollows & Moseley; Matchar, 2013). This renaissance of homemaking and a re/claiming of ‘new femininity’ saw “domesticity became the buzzword of the new millennium and housewives, fictional and real, were emerging in all areas” (Genz, 2008, in Gillis & Hollows, p. 49). As Hollows describes (2006, in Hollows & Moseley), a “hybrid form of domestic femininity” developed “between the feminist and the housewife” (p.106). Changes in technology have also allowed and authenticated further lifestyle downshifts. Websites dedicated to home craft projects—quilting, pickling, knitting and baking—are appreciated widely on social media via “the influence of women and mom bloggers”, which according to Technorati’s State of the Blogosphere report in 2010 estimated participation at around 18.9 million American women (Matchar, 2013, p. 51). These trends of ‘new domesticity’ feature stories of getting ‘back-to-basics’ and reclaiming

“lost domestic arts” to venerate terms like ‘handcrafted’, ‘heirloom’ and ‘traditional’ and prize skills like crocheting, quilting, sewing, making preserves (Matchar, 2013, p. 2; p. 4). The allure of growing food in a sustainable way in order to give children a ‘pure’, clean and green life has led to a legion of what Orenstein (2010) labels ‘femivores’, who moved by the “romanticisation of family life [as] a natural response to a scary, unpredictable outside world” took their “enlightened attitudes towards food and the environment” (Matchar, 2013, p. 25; p. 28; see also Mies & Shiva, 1993) to buy a farm or homestead outside of the city to live out this experience.

New technologies enabled the ability to harness projects into businesses that could be run from home. With the use of an *Etsy* Store, or through online bakeshops—for occasion cakes or cupcakes—the last decade has seen an expansion of artistic enterprises to include blogs, cookbooks and YouTube tutorials; extending into DIY trends on *Pinterest*, *Instagram* and *Tastespoting*, or in published materials like Australia’s *Frankie Magazine* to cultivate greater consumer appeal. *Frankie Magazine* has itself spawned a widespread trend in Australia and New Zealand by showcasing a “cosy vintage aesthetic” (Matchar, 2013, p. 4) that carefully connects to consumerist ideals and material culture.

Contextually, many of these conceptions of femininity have long-standing ties to domesticity and baking in Australia. Most notably, such practices are celebrated by the Country Women’s Association (CWA) originally formed in 1922 and whose legacy and influence remains substantial in contemporary Australia. Though the organisation was most active during war times, its core ideology of ‘service to the community’ (Teather, 1992) and actions in times of turmoil still have broad effect, translated into support for contemporary causes like disaster relief across Australia with fundraising drives via sweet food and baking, such as the still-running annual *CWA Bake-off*.

The CWA was responsible for establishing exclusive ‘feminised’ spaces and experiences, where members are still admired for their recipes and sweet foods, encapsulated in the many editions and reprints of the iconic *CWA Cookery Book and Household Hints* first published in 1936, and still prized for useful tips (Teather, 1992). These books, along with many contemporary cookbooks and culinary-focused magazines that have long-lasting ‘brand’ recognition, like *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, are lately seen as items to collect and keep in pride of place, rather than for instructions on how to bake a cake. Long-running debates and articles continually discuss the usefulness of cookbooks versus the vast sources of online databases accessible to the would-be baker. Arguments on adaptability, practical use in a messy kitchen where a screen can be wiped off with ease, and the everyday cycle of “online food publications putting out great recipes and hundreds of talented food bloggers doing the same” is compared to the single unchanged version in a published book (Thomson, 2017, para. 2). However, the production of cookbooks has evolved to keep up with trends and find new market appeal as “big, beautiful story books” that act as “showpieces” to pay “homage to a cuisine or place or an ingredient” (Thomson, 2017, para. 4). This too is notable context to consider, as wider cookbook currents have played a part in shaping how the cookbooks in this thesis were conceived, designed, and edited. Contemporary cookbooks are created presently to be an experience, using personal anecdotes, providing insights, and specially written narrative passages and glossy pictorials to evoke emotion and reveal aspects of food culture that might provoke adjustments in perspective in audiences.

Shifts in contemporary cookbook and cooking culture, and the re-evaluation of “old-fashioned symbols of household drudgery” such as baking and craft skills, have shaped much of late twentieth and twenty-first century texts, often articulated as “playful

expressions of modern femininity” (Matchar, 2013, p. 100; see also Levine, 2015); to be appreciated on a multitude of platforms, via multi-layered experiences and social levels. Therefore, contextualising where baking fits into these new conceptions of femininity and ‘playful expressions’ of feminine pursuits is pertinent to provide understanding into where—and how—this study is placed within contemporary Australian culture.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter contextualised contemporary connotations of femininity by exploring major cultural, socio-political, and historical events in the last thirty years. It examined trans-national ideas that have shaped contemporary Western society and how they have come to inform the Australian cookbooks in this thesis. By investigating conceptions and waves of feminist thought, social backlash, and the influence of consumer values, current ideals and definitions can be better identified to contextualise the rise of baking and food patterns in popular culture. This chapter also examined media representations of the late twentieth and twenty-first century, including books, television, film, magazines, and wider reporting, and probed the implications of food trends and experiences throughout this larger mediascape, particularly considering contemporary ideas of post-feminism and re-evaluations of domestic femininities, and how they have shaped current cookbook incarnations.

## 3 Femininity and Food Performs: Literature Review

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### 3.1 Introduction

The way that a society treats and deals with food, meals and consumption can provide deep insights about social interaction, expressions of identity and ritual, as “food and its artistic by-product, cooking, eating, meals—may be analysed in scientific fashion; food language and myth (a language informing and absorbing culture) form a system capable of yielding in the broadest sense of the term, poetics” (Fink, 1986, p. 10). Cake and sweet food have many cultural and ritualistic elements attached that justifies a deeper exploration. As the rise in popularity and use of more elaborate decoration becomes an almost necessary component of food expression, a greater critical exploration of the stringent conventions is needed to closely examine societal reflections and definitions around enacting gender, social conditioning and the enforced rules performed within and associated with cake, sweet food and baking culture.

This literature review provides a framework for the research conducted in the thesis. The theoretical framework established within the review helps to explain and discuss the social and cultural meanings behind different representations of cake and baking, and how they connect to conceptions of femininity within Australian cookbooks. Within the larger theme of food, this chapter seeks out complex implications of food in broader scholarship and how such connects to expressions of identity and articulations of gender, specifically focused on femininity. It explores some fundamental questions about the way food and cookbooks are objects of material culture that consider prevalent social ideas and encapsulate aspects of cultural hegemony, playing a role in the socialisation of gender. The review probes the links between definitions of

femininity and performances around food, particularly the role sweet food and nostalgia play in the coding and understandings of feminine practice.

### 3.2 Exploring Food in Scholarship

The emergence and growth of food studies within academia has demonstrated how valuable insights can be read into food, eating habits and choice, taking on symbolic meanings that extend far beyond the simple meal or special cake. It is significant therefore, to establish how food has been academically examined in order to discern the extent to which the relationship between sweet food, baking, and cultural conceptions of femininity has been underexplored.

Well-respected cultural theorists have discussed and debated the societal interaction with, and expression of, food for decades. *The Raw & the Cooked* by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969) made such theories more accessible to a wider audience by examining the sensory nature of food in different forms, states and binary oppositions. In Lévi-Strauss' approach, cooking is a cultural practice of transformation akin to a study of myth, able to yield insight into the "processes pertaining to the creation of cultural order and social hierarchy" (Elyada, 2010, p. 3). Similarly, this too was considered in *Mythologies*, where Roland Barthes (1957/1972) explored the meanings behind what is consumed in 'Wine & Milk', 'Steak & Chips' and 'Ornamental Cookery'. Barthes' (1961/2012) exploration of myth and consumption continued throughout his later works, leading him to explain that:

Food... is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, and a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour. (p. 43)

These theorists urged others to see food as not just the mundane product of everyday life, but as an important system of communication and meaning, that could relay important cultural and social insights, and collective understandings.

This set of communications, protocols and behaviours discussed by Barthes, is complemented by the research of anthropologist Carole Counihan (1999), who asserts, that through a common and collective connection, food provides “a language that... conveys meaning and contributes to the organisation of the natural and social world... Food constitutes a language accessible to all” (p. 19). By interpreting this language and represented images transmitted via societal consumption, choice and ensuing social product, revelations about the way that food connects to, and is informed by, cultural values and conventions can be drawn and dissected.

The cultural connotations of food and eating are examined by Sherrie Inness (2001), who in *Kitchen Culture in America* explores how “...eating is an activity that always has cultural reverberations. Food is never a simple matter of sustenance. How we eat, what we eat, and who prepares and serves our meals are all issues that shape society” (p. 5). The way that food has become a signifier of meaning rather than just about survival or nourishment has become a common thread of investigation, and as Bell and Valentine (1997) suggest:

for most inhabitants of (post)modern Western societies, food has long ceased to be merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings. Every mouthful, every meal, can tell us something about ourselves, and about our place in the world. (p. 3)

These ‘social, cultural and symbolic meanings’ of food have led to the spread of scholarship into a diverse range of fields, such as philosophy, psychology, geography, film studies and architecture; and strengthened food studies’ validity as an academic

pursuit. For example, this can be seen in the numerous editions—currently, in 4<sup>th</sup> edition print—of interdisciplinary essay collection *Food & Culture: A Reader*, which in its third edition describes the area as “novelty, richness and scope, proved limitless” (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013, p. 9).

These explorations of food and culture prove extensive across varied sources of academic inquiry, demonstrating how cultural connotations of eating and cooking—or baking—can be shaped symbolically and associated with certain social practices, behaviours and representations. Significantly, the probing of cultural processes and food-related activities enables more insight into how gender, or specifically femininity, is conceptualised, informed and attached symbolically. While there have been many close studies that have revealed complex implications, there remains a plethora of unanswered questions and areas waiting to be investigated, particularly around the links between food and gender.

### **3.3 Connecting food and gender**

Many major studies continue to focus on the way that food relays messages of identity, social standing, place and behaviour by looking closer at how some of these messages are transferred and consumed, namely through the cookbook. The value and scope that these studies place on the role gender plays in shaping messages is significant to identifying what has not been conclusively probed, or how deeply specific elements—such as cultural notions of femininity—have been explored.

Janet Theophano’s (2002) study *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives through the Cookbooks they wrote*, discusses the way cookbooks can also reveal stories of everyday life, communities, and contribute to wider visions of society and culture. Theophano (2002) examines the expressive potential of cookbooks for more than just utilitarian or

aesthetic purposes, but as a historical glimpse into the political, economic and social constraints of an era, as well as the way change has occurred in food fashions, tastes and trends, and how the use of cookbooks themselves have remained similar overtime. She explores the “timeless” themes present in many cookbooks, discerning them to be “life and death, youth and age, faithfulness and betrayal, memory and forgetfulness”, explaining that “cookbooks... tell us how to make beauty and meaning in the midst of the mundane”, which is particularly relevant when looking at women’s histories told through these books, “as their lives as often quite defined by food—who they need to feed, the daily life of taking care of others” (Theophano, 2002, p. 6).

Theophano’s study is one of many that investigates the gendered connection of food, particularly through cookbooks, and her exploration of the feminine expressions and representations made in such books is extended by Jessamyn Neuhaus (2003), who explains in *Manly Men and Mom's Home Cooking*, that by examining cookbooks, distinctively “presented images of gender” begin to emerge, particularly reflected in “the recipes, languages, and illustrations” which “reiterated a powerful set of social norms... cookbooks uniformly advocated very specific gender roles” (p. 4). Although both Theophano and Neuhaus reaffirm and demonstrate the indelible connection between food and expression of gender—and femininity—their approach is very general. Both spend time dissecting cookbooks as tomes of history, memory and culture, yet do not extend their study to look critically at specific foods, nor the gendered reverberations associated with certain foods, and whether the eating, baking, sharing of—or avoidance of—signifies wider social or cultural shifts.

Other theorists too attempt to explore the connection between food and gender.

Significantly, a contemporary shift becomes apparent in academic research towards exploration of the gendered dimensions present in different aspects of food consumption

and culture, with a focus towards using these dimensions to interpret and reflect on social behaviour and societal relations. Inness (2001) discusses the ways that food and cooking culture have shaped women's gender roles over the past century and calls for “a better understanding of the important role that food plays” in a wider social context, through careful analysis of what she labels “Kitchen culture” (p. 3). Inness (2001) describes this as “the various discourses about food, cooking and gender roles that stem from the kitchen”, important ideas to dissect because they permeate and impact on—even unconsciously—society on many levels, including via “advertising, cooking literature, and our daily meals, wherever we might consume them” (p.3).

While Inness (2001) looks at the associated ephemera—adverts, books, meals—of cooking, her study prompts further inquiry into the connection between baking and gender conceptions, particularly highlighted in her chapter, *Cooking Lessons for Girls and Boys*, when she calls for a closer look at the impact that gendering of food, cooking and cooking culture has in the transmission of gender roles within the domestic environment, by asking “What does it mean that the toy I craved most as a child was a *Betty Crocker Easy-Bake* oven?” (pp. 133-134). While she poses such a salient question, her study fails to adequately or critically attempt to examine the question, nor offer an appropriate exploration.

Gendered reverberations of food and its preparation have also been closely explored by Marjorie DeVault (1991), in her examination of domestic work, who investigated these dimensions within the real and lived experiences of women and their interaction with food, cooking and consumption. DeVault (1991) concluded that:

Feeding work has become one of the ways that women ‘do’ gender...activities like feeding a family are understood... as ‘properly’ women’s work... By feeding the family, a woman conducts herself as recognisable womanly. (p. 118)

DeVault's (1991) study was vital in recognising the somewhat unconscious gendered association of food, specifically on feminine interactions, and the ways in which societal messages reinforce and strengthen this connection; allowing for greater awareness or understanding in similar studies.

Through the literature it is integral then, to understand the way that gender conceptions and behaviour, particularly femininity, are shaped by interaction with food and cooking culture. Inness (2001) explains that "Kitchen culture is a critical way that women are instructed about how to behave like 'correctly' gendered beings" (p. 4). This idea of learned gendered performance is extended by Theophano (2002) as she discusses how cookbooks and domestic literature were used by women to develop "their concepts of the feminine ideal" (p. 6) through "self-consciously shap[ing] their identities by selecting significant memories and preserving them in images or textual fragments... as deliberate constructions" to project a performance of womanly behaviour, all within the "vivid details of the author's everyday reality" (pp. 122-123). The domestic reality shaped and constructed in many cookbooks used the home as an arena to excel and compete in by recording shining examples in these books and becoming, as Theophano (2002) puts it, an "emblem of the self", encoding "culturally appropriate images of the feminine, of the ideal family, and of the good life" (p. 123). This critical look at the construction of a feminine ideal falls short when actually looking at particular food products, as the mentioned studies take a quite generalised approach to the connections, rather than tracing a recipe or cooked dish, where specific 'shining examples' may epitomise this ideal domestic environment by containing an associated gendered performance.

### 3.4 Cultural hegemony, socialisation, and gender

The feminine performance or images framed within cookbooks fit well with wider theories that discuss social gender production and boundaries, definitions of which are widely contested and dependent on varied factors across communities. Significantly, understanding how gendered ideas and norms associated with feminine performance are learned and tacitly taken on is essential to this thesis, as well as the scale to which specific behaviours are considered—namely baking, eating, and symbolic meanings of sweet food—in shaping understandings and constructions of femininity within society. Threads within varied fields of scholarship have sought to explore the part socialisation plays in shaping implicit and explicit behavioural norms, and how such are learned and reinforced consistently and pervasively. French theorist Émile Durkheim examined these notions in *The Division of Labor in Society* (originally published in 1893), by probing the way order and stability were sustained in societies through shared cultural engagement in rituals, rules and norms. Durkheim (1982) labelled this ‘conscience collective’, whereby shared perspectives, values, experiences and beliefs reiterate relationships and generate ‘social facts’—the material and non-material aspects of a society—viewed as beneficial aspects of shared cultural and collective effort. Durkheim’s (1982) theories also suggested that social expectations of behaviour, domestic labour and gender roles were produced via these ritualised ‘social facts’. These ‘facts’ or implicit guidelines ultimately, in Durkheim’s (1982) view, enable the shaping of a society and compel customary participation in common culture, due to a sense of solidarity reinforced via the celebration of these rituals, as well as a need to conform in order to avoid social ostracisation. Durkheim’s theories prove valuable to consider when examining the correlations between hegemonic concepts and values learned and reinforced through socialisation.

As this thesis probes the value of cookbooks as material objects of culture and draws on theory relating to the symbolic nature of food and food-connected rituals to socialised gendered behaviour and expectations of femininity, considering the role socialisation plays becomes significant. However, scholars have noted that Durkheim puts forth notions that are limited in their consideration of the coercive effect such have on behaviour, and of the prescriptive social values thereby indicated, focusing instead on the positive sense of unity created in collective rituals (Dyke, 1995). Durkheim is criticised for failing to properly account for the part—whether coercively or tacitly communicated—played by material culture in reinforcing values, beliefs and experiences. According to theologian Gordon Lynch (2014), Durkheim’s approach to the symbolic importance of material objects is quite reductive and diminishes the social and cultural impact that such objects have on collective experience and transformation through ritual.

To further examine the role that material and non-material culture plays in learned social ideas, Durkheim’s theories of socialisation can be tied to how coercive aspects of social systems are maintained and how they relate to the power narratives of a society. Accordingly, how socialisation and ‘social facts’ relate to ‘cultural hegemony’, a concept articulated by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci’s (2000) theories came about as an extension of Karl Marx’s writings on ideologies of power, and his analysis of the significant part non-material culture and mainstream values perform to preserve systemic inequality in the interests of the ruling class/es (Ramos, 1982). Specifically, Gramsci was inspired by Marx’s contention that this situation of systemic inequality would eventually reach a point where the exploitation of the working class would prove too untenable and revolution would become the inevitable and natural course of action (Ramos, 1982). Marx’s theories of capital, labour, and dominant social ideology

provided Gramsci (2000) with the apparatus to explain the efficacy of dominant social ideologies and how culture can be harnessed for hegemonic, established rule. In

Gramsci's view, ideology is:

A conception of the world, any philosophy, which becomes a cultural movement, a 'religion', a 'faith', that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which a philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical 'premiss'. ...In its best sense [it is] ...a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. (as cited in Martin, 2002, p. 300)

For Gramsci, ideology developed as an organic form to permeate "all manifestations of individual and collective life" through what he called two "superstructural levels", namely, a "civil society" and "political society" which corresponded to produce a dominant group which functioned through the organisation of the state and government (as cited in Martin, 2002, p. 381). To Gramsci, this dominant group shaped a 'cultural hegemony' which relied on the mass consent of 'civil society' to follow the social norms and laws legitimised via the institutional social and economic machinery to spread ideals, ideas and culture that serve in their interests. Inevitably, this 'conception of the world' embeds within social and cultural texts to construct narratives of power, reinforced via economic, political and class systems to take on a natural or "practical, everyday, common sense" (as cited in Martin, 2002, p. 300).

Many theorists have focused their studies of societies—both past and present—on examining dominant power structures described by Gramsci and how they function to reinforce certain ideas. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz (1985), in particular, investigated how patterns and conditions of consumption could indicate the differences in race,

class, wealth, culture, and ethnicity of a society. For example, Mintz (1985) connected control of sugar production and consumption to hierarchical class systems, where the wealthy exclusively had historical and colonial dominance over the availability and ingestion of sugar. Mintz' (1996) theories have asserted engrained connections between eating and social development, and how food is able to 'carry' understandings of power, as it is the material representation of economic, political and class systems at work. Mintz' (1985, 1996) theories are able to show how cultural hegemonies can function in interaction with food, yet he neglects to analyse gender as an indicator of difference, and how such is informed or shaped in social development. Specifically, Mintz fails to recognise how food, the symbol of the "cultural practice" he analyses, at times mirrors "male-female power relations" in a society, to show how power over consumption practices and attached values predominately belonged to men (Counihan & Kaplan; 2013, p. 3).

Gramsci's theories too do not specifically comment on how cultural hegemony influences conceptualisations of gender or femininity, yet his focus on the power of cultural texts and ideology to shape norms, roles, social consent of expectations and behaviour have been utilised by many scholars to understand contemporary gender structures and paradigms. For example, Jane Slaughter (2011) applies Gramsci's theories to look at women's history and the way that "power... adheres to gender hierarchies that are both cultural and material, and how these might be sustained or resisted" (p. 256), while other theorists have attempted to interpret gender relations in media representations through a Gramscian lens (Slaughter, 2011; see also Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008). In these instances, Gramsci's observations enable a closer examination of how education, media representations, law, politics, and other institutional influences shape cultural hegemony and how a gendered ideology

permeates, accumulates, and is directed within a society. Specific norms, rules and expectations that make up this gendered ideology elaborate within the authority wielded by institutions, to be translated in communities and family, through a “contest and constant struggle” to inform everyday life (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 336).

Extending on this, one can also find links to a Foucauldian (1977, 1978, 1988) interpretation of the ‘struggle’ and ‘contest’ in hegemonic ideas present within society, which would also enable a deeper understanding of how power is networked and harnessed via institutions to create hierarchies of knowledge, and ideologies that are reproduced and resisted as a result. Although both Gramsci and Foucault did not deeply consider the gender complexities of a society when formulating their theories, the described ‘constant struggle’ in both their writings, can be connected to gender, primarily to theories about masculinity, and the hierarchies of power that occur in interaction and repeated behavioural validation (Connell, 1987, 1989; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007). Raewyn Connell’s (1987; 1989) theories, in particular, posit an order of hierarchical and hegemonic masculine identities, and place femininity as the subordinated other or as an ‘emphasised’ performance. However, in more recent academic attention, discussion on the conceptions of femininity and how they are shaped by institutional discourse, social struggle and contest, ultimately shows Connell’s (1987; 1989) theories of hierarchical gender and understandings of femininity in relation to hegemony to be reductive and stereotyped (Paechter, 2018; Schippers, 2007; Budgeon, 2014). This is significant to consider as concepts of femininity have been expanded on, ushering shifts in thought and application in scholarship, as well as in social understanding. As this thesis seeks to probe how contemporary conceptions of femininity inform, and are informed by representations of cake, baking, and sweet food, Connell’s theories can then be seen as a somewhat narrow and restrictive approach.

New feminist lines of inquiry that enfold Connell's concepts while incorporating a Foucauldian frame of power relations have begun to consider femininity as a hegemonic category in itself. Carrie Paechter (2018) employs such, as well as adjusting Gramsci's theories to re-conceptualise hegemonic gender ideas, "which act, within a particular context, to uphold a gender binary and maintain traditional social relations between genders" (p. 124). Within her research, Paechter (2018) maintains that contemporary conceptions allow for what she labels a definition of 'hegemonic femininity'. Although differences exist in the framework between hegemonic masculinities and femininities, "both perpetuate the traditional gender order", through:

Cultural models of aspiration against which a particular social group expects women to measure themselves, even if in practice they do not, and which, however much they are presented as feminist, maintain traditional forms of male dominance. (Paechter, 2018, p. 124)

Paechter (2018) represents a surge in scholarship seeking to probe the dearth of research into definitions of femininity (Budgeon, 2014; McRobbie, 2009; Renold & Ringrose, 2012; Schippers, 2007), and she applies her assertions specifically to school-based situations and how gender is performed by children and adolescences in the classroom (see also Paechter, 2017; Paechter & Clark, 2016). Research probing the connections between food and femininity (Cairns & Johnston, 2015b; Levine, 2015; Jovanovski, 2017) has also examined how women are socialised into feminine practices, roles and associated performances, particularly when tied to material objects—culinary texts—that relate to contemporary cultural hegemonies and notions of domesticity (Neuhaus, 1999). Much of the literature indicates that certain gendered ideals are presented in cookbooks—both implicitly and explicitly—to "echo a national debate about women's social roles in general and represent particular kinds of food and cooking as gendered.

They help to reinforce the notion that women ha[ve] inherently domestic natures” (Neuhaus, 2003, p. 2), which designates them significant sites for socialisation and consent of gender ideology.

### **3.5 Definitions of femininity**

In much of the literature, a focal point of articulation has been the way gender roles and behaviour are informed by interactions with food, both in a historical and social sense. Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2011a) suggests in *Food and Culture in Contemporary American Fiction*, that food works as “oral stimuli as part of psycho-social development” to indicate “gender, class and socio-cultural identity”, while strengthening the “cultural association between women, gender and food” particularly around the “almost inescapable” correlation between women’s responsibilities and food preparation and cooking (p. 5). This becomes particularly significant when considering Deborah Lupton’s (1996) suggestions that “food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self” (p. 1), which ties together the learned performance of femininity to essential notions of how one fits or carries themselves in the world.

The formation of a ‘sense of self’ becomes pertinent when examining how scholarship deliberates over definitions of femininity, and how such shifts and are continually reinterpreted. Susan Bordo (1993) labels this the “elusive ideal of femininity”, sought after yet never conceptually stable (p. 309). Susan Brownmiller (1984), in her exploration of historical and cultural contexts of *Femininity*, re-emphasises this idea, by asserting that “femininity, in essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations” (p. 6). This combination of limitation, association and formation leads to an impression that femininity is intimately entwined with performance and outward practice, rather than any internal or innate recognition. As Angela McRobbie

(2008) suggests, femininity “is always a doing” and that “there is no original, or natural femininity, it is always a staging”, and therefore connected to ritual (p. 542). These rituals contain what Jennifer Craik (1994) suggests are the “techniques of gender” where “the techniques of being female include practices associated with fertility, nurturing, caring...” as well as “domesticity and the management of everyday life” (p. 43).

In *Decoding Femininity*, Dawn Currie (1997) examines representations in women’s magazines as an example of extensive stereotyping of femininity, and which “seem to imply that we become women naturally through domestic and sexual roles” (p. 455). Currie’s view draws on research from Marjorie Ferguson’s (1983) extensive study of women’s magazines and other substantive literature, to consensually conclude that these magazines have a definite effect in shaping “both a woman’s view of herself, and society’s view of her” (p. 1).

While much of the literature discusses the deep-rooted and enduring relationship between food and womanly practice, particularly regarding preparation and cooking, and many use cookbooks to dissect the connection and/or focus on specific historic or social moments that reflect or demonstrate this irrefutably, there seems to be a pronounced gap present where cookbooks themselves are yet to be critiqued as a form or mode of influence on feminine performance. Just as Ellen McCracken (1993) asserts that magazines exert “cultural leadership” in defining what it means “to be a woman”, the same consideration has not been extended to cookbooks and food literature. The cultural influence and modelling or shaping effects of “consensual images and definitions of femininity” (Currie, 1997, p.455) that cookbooks have, symbolically and literally, on consumers, merits closer study, which much of the literature has failed to adequately consider.

The images and cultural messages transmitted through cookbooks, as a prevalent social text, sell traditional ideas of femininity, and feminine performance and practice, similar to other modes of consumed media and published materials. A significant component of feminine performance reflected within most forms, is the idea that women show their regard and care for others with food. Katherine Parkin (2006), in *Food is Love* investigates the history of food advertising in America to discuss the gendered aspects of food and food culture, and how “advertising, in particular, has envisioned the preparation and consumption of food in distinctly gendered terms. While everyone eats food, women have had sole responsibility for its purchase and preparation” (p. 1). She goes on to explain that the fundamental theme connected to this staged and deliberate gendering of food preparation is that “women should serve food to demonstrate their love for their families” and that through food women “convey their affections and fulfilment of duty to their families. In the hands of women, food is love” (Parkin, 2006, p. 4). Again, a general approach to food examples is taken in Parkin’s study, with no specific trace or critique of the actual food mentioned or used to convey affection, nor of the deeper connotations associated with showing love and serving particular types of food. In particular, what becomes apparent in the literature is a closely linked relationship between conceptions of femininity and the baking, serving, and eating of sweet food.

Some of the literature reviewed connects sweet foods to images and constructions of femininity. Cakes and baked goods, specifically, have deep-seated connotations to ideals of home and wellbeing, perhaps due to the influence of advertising. Wendy Woloson (2002) discusses the way that “‘domesticated’ homemade confections conveyed sentiments belonging to the pure and wholesome realm of the feminine domestic environment”, going on to assert that sugar, once historically a much fought

after substance associated with long, dangerous journeys and the precarious nature of a steady supply, became “feminised” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of the domestic association (p. 188).

Another connotation of sweet food is that to comfort and solace, particularly when associated with childhood. One area which has well been explored in the literature, is the link between sweet foods, femininity and children’s literature, particularly the way food is deeply connected to issues of maternity and pleasure. Carolyn Daniel (2006) in *Voracious Children: Who eats who in Children’s Literature* discusses children in literature and “sweet, rich food” which often “metaphorically represents the body of the mother in popular culture, and the desire for such food includes a subconscious yearning for restoration of the primal relationship with her” (p. 89). Daniel (2006) connects this “yearning” to both an emotional nourishment as well as the “gastronomic pleasure from the food provided by maternal figures” where “the food symbolises love, comfort, and safety and is coded to create a familiar atmosphere, a ‘homely’ maternal environment suggestive of the primal relationship” (p. 93/95).

Although examples are given in her exploration of cakes and baked food within the mentioned narratives, Daniel does not extend her critique towards the specifics of the sweet food baked and served by these fictional mothers, missing an opportunity to look beyond the shallow read of grouping together all ‘sweet food’ without contemplating the deeper meanings that the particular baked goods could connote and contribute to the analysis.

Daniel connects the many descriptions of sweet, rich food in children’s literature to ideas of “bodily contact, comfort, and love provided by the mother figure to produce the idealised maternal aesthetic” (2006, p. 93), which aligns well with conceptions and ideal

performances of motherhood. As Elias Canetti (1960/1962) describes in his look at *Crowds and Power*:

the mother... is the core and very heart [of the family] ...A mother is one who gives her own body to be eaten. She first nourishes the child in her womb and then gives it her milk”, ideas which still seem to have relevance and resonance to contemporary social notions. (p. 258)

The emotional and physical nourishment provided by the sweetness of mother’s milk, and the urge to recapture or recreate this by substituting sweet foods is a widely considered concept amongst notable theorists (see the works of Freud). One prominent example that encapsulates the very esoteric idea of yearning for a sweetness that may be half-remembered is Julia Kristeva’s (1977/2001) essay *Stabat*, where she describes this connection:

concerning that stage of my childhood, scented, warm, and soft to the touch, I have only a spatial memory. No time at all. Fragrance of honey, roundness of forms, silk and velvet under my fingers, on my cheeks. Mummy. (p. 35)

This powerful description gives an insight into what Daniel (2006) suggests as a “primal experience [that] precedes perception, but arguably has indelible and profound effects upon an individual's formation of identity” (p. 87). The literature surveyed makes a connection between sweet foods, comfort and a yearning for home, and although it does not extend to specifically classifying or considering particular baked goods as a way to dissect femininity, the reviewed theory does provide a basis to assert an indubitable correlation between such and femininity.

### **3.6 Tracing links between sweet food and ideas of femininity**

Much of what has been written on sweet food and cake examines the origins of or ever-evolving trends involved, rather than the surrounding implications and relation to society. Woloson (2002) discusses certain implications in her extensive study of sugar and confectionary, and how sugar shifted from a rare commodity due to its expense, into a widely accessible and popular component of celebrations at the start of the twentieth century. Woloson (2002) posits that before this time, only the wealthy or privileged classes could afford the ingredients and an artist to create a “specialised cake” (p. 170). This changed at the beginning of the twentieth century when the ornamental craft work used in wedding cakes began to move out to include other celebratory cakes, leading to a commercialism of these events (Woloson, 2002). Like Woloson’s study, the literature that exists is general in approach to cake and baking, and apart from specific anthropological studies, the focus on a particular cake or sweet food catered to one group or celebration is not common. Even the *Wedding Cake*, a very iconic and significant component of Western marriage rituals, lacks sufficient critique or serious study. The most significant research conducted is Simon Charsley’s (1992) cultural history, which traces the evolution and changing ideas of the cake. Other studies conducted have looked at iconic cakes with deep cultural value, for example, Greg Patent’s (2009) concise investigation of Pound Cake’s recipe variations and popularity through American history; or Paola Signori’s (2004) examination of the marketing ingenuity that created a subsequent consumer trend of the Pandoro and Panettone—classic Italian celebratory cakes—across world markets. While these studies contribute to understanding the cultural worth of such cake creations, they stand out as

exceptional examples when looking at the extent of scholarship on food and food-related behaviours.

Some of the reviewed literature focuses on cakes and sweet foods which have significant cultural and iconic value to Australia specifically. An anthropological study exists on the Pavlova Cake, the heritage and creation of which are claimed by both New Zealand and Australia, as a national icon (“Pavlova Wars”). Two significant studies, attempting to trace the exact origin of the original cake recipe, were conducted by Helen Leach (Leach & Browne, 2008) and Michael Symons (2010), with interesting, yet indefinite conclusions. Symons’ (2010) study discusses the social implications of the Pavlova as “a cluster of personal memories, public myths, treasured ideals and associated names, which together contribute to a distinct concept” (p. 205), which functions as the high ideal of the cake itself as a meaningful icon of antipodean cuisine. Symons’ (2010) study, and in some of his previous works, probes connections between the Pavlova and socially constructed ideals of femininity and national identity. Symons (2010) explores the portrayal of feminine daintiness and delicacy of early and mid-20th century Australian women, an image projected in cookery books and food marketing that “aspired to gentility” and sophistication by constructing a narrative of ideal femininity that drank tea, ate lovely iced cakes, loved the colour pink and were fond of little embellishments (2010, p. 207). Symons links this projection of femininity to a national project of civilisation, ‘good women could make society decent’, as well as cunning marketing from food companies who sought to “convince women to accept a new role as consumers” (2007, p. 160) where masculine images of damper, meat pies, bad beer and a hankering for the bush—representations of Australia’s first century—were slowly replaced by pots of tea, little cakes and the Pavlova (Symons, 2007, p. 155). This appeal of ‘daintiness’ exploited by “prettily-decorated cookery booklets to

persuade housewives to use canisters of sugar, ovens and beaters for lady-like afternoon teas and suppers”, also utilised the era’s “glorious symbol of cultured femininity”, Russian Ballerina Anna Pavlova, as the ideal association with this “fluffy, white round of meringue cake” (Symons, 2010, p. 207).

Symons’ study into this connection between femininity, food and national identity exists as a very superficial exploration, and he does not pursue or examine the effect that this campaign to ‘sell daintiness’ actually had on wider social or cultural scale other than the production of the consumer housewife. There are very few studies that look at the reverberations from this period, particularly on cake and baking culture, nor on the wider implications on conceptions and expressions of femininity in Australian culture.

### **3.7 Sweet food and motherhood**

While much of the literature written on cake and sweet food outlines the history, evolution and adaptation into part of a widespread ritual of celebration, the few examples that exist look into the implications behind the social product fall short of evaluating the full effect on gender and consumption, or satisfactorily connect cake, sweet food and feminine expression.

What has been explored in relation to cake and baking in the literature is the close connection to representations of motherhood. To use the birthday cake as a prime example of how motherhood is conveyed and has been—somewhat—critiqued in relation to baking practice and feminine expression, a study by Lee, Katras and Bauer (2009) *Children's birthday celebrations from the lived experiences of low-income rural Mothers*, explores how “... cake presentation is the most widely recognized ritual script enacted at the birthday party”, and detail how adamant their interview subjects were about cake’s importance “as the single most common required element for a successful

birthday party” (p. 5). Lee et al. (2009) assert that “the cake presentation therefore becomes a symbol of love and indulgence that mothers use” and conclude that “in terms of socializing children via cake presentation, mothers often emphasized the intangible rewards of feeling special for the birthday boy or girl” (p. 5). Though it presents a well-explored look at the birthday party, this study misses the opportunity to show or delve into the significance of the cake—other than it being an important part of the ritual—and why it represents such an integral component to celebratory social scripts. Further attention could have uncovered the implications that underlie the ‘special feeling’ relayed not just by a specialised birthday party but equally attributed to a specially crafted cake.

Some of the literature reviewed looks into the connection between maternal love and affection, and making children feel special, particularly through food. Parkin (2006) describes the way that advertisers have consistently re-affirmed traditional gender roles, conveying to mothers how “...the power of food” could be used “to shape their children’s lives...” (p. 221). However, cake or sweet food are never mentioned specifically as a prime conveyer of this, nor as a way to shape gender conceptions in an inter-generational frame, which seems to be consistently overlooked theme in much of the surveyed literature.

Scholars have explored these interactions between contemporary motherhood, and this idealised version of a ‘proper’ childhood and a ‘perfect’ mother. DeVault (1991) discusses the “gendered work of discourse and nurture” and “the effort and skill behind the ‘invisible’ work of planning, cooking, shopping and serving meals” (pp. 55-57). The ‘invisible’ labour mentioned by DeVault links to contemporary ideas of motherhood and societal expectations and are also contained within elaborately detailed recipes in baking books. Another question to pose, that again is not astutely addressed by the

literature is: what pressure is put upon the ‘proper’ expression of motherhood and the need to make an elaborate cake, not only satisfying a child’s wish, but as an outward show of ‘perfect’ articulation of maternal affection and care?

Jennings and Brace-Goven (2013), in their study *Maternal visibility at the commodity frontier: Weaving love into birthday party consumption*, explore what they label ‘emotional labour’ drawing on DeVault’s (2011) assertions of the increasing feeling of vulnerability and surveillance in relation to mothering in public, discuss the “public performance of motherhood through their children’s birthday parties (p. 5), which indubitably requires the making or buying of an impressive cake to match the celebration, and although this is mentioned briefly, it is not truly expanded on or explored in the lived experiences of the study’s participants.

Also complementing this line of inquiry, DeVault (1991) uses a metaphor of an ‘iron cage’ of women’s responsibility which “becomes more visible when circumstances combine to exceed the ‘normal’ demands and difficulties of caring” (pp. 55-57).

Spending hours discussing, planning, shopping for, and then finally creating a spectacular cake, surely could be considered above the norm, yet is seemingly expected of ‘good’ mothers, “the adequate mother may buy a shop cake or host a McDonald’s party, but the ‘good’ mother will transform the backyard and create a cake that commands this magical domain” (Risson, 2012, p. 74). This links closely to conceptions of motherhood and how consumer culture impacts notions of ‘making’ the best choice/s for their child (MacKendrick, 2014; Cairns, Johnston, & MacKendrick, 2013; Clarke, 2004). In this case, to ensure their child does well socially requires the purchase of necessary materials and ingredients for a successful party. The gendered labour required here is taken on by women regardless of effort or cost and as way to demonstrate the love and care of ‘proper’ motherhood.

DeVault (1991) concludes that:

...women live their lives in the shadow of social demands for ‘womanly care’. Whether women embrace or resist responsibility... they are subject to cultural expectations surrounding women’s personality and what we owe others. As women act in the social world, discourses of caring are part of a context that powerfully shapes their actions. (pp. 231-232)

The cultural expectation of motherhood includes this “demonstration of ...maternal love through the personalisation of the birthday party to their child” (Jennings and Brace-Goven, 2013, p. 15), although this link has yet to extend to incorporate the impressively made and personalised cake. It seems like an oversight that studies that have analysed motherhood and acts of ‘womanly duty’ in such a specific way should overlook the integral function that cake and baked goods play in these performances, and the wider social and cultural implications associated with idealised childhood, identity and even to nostalgic discourses.

### **3.8 Nostalgia, femininity and sweet food**

Popular representations of sweet food and baking practice often contain or are accompanied by a nostalgic remembering of childhood and motherhood, demonstrating how contemporary conceptions of femininity are informed by nostalgic connections. The ‘idealised’ performances of motherhood, nostalgic remembering, and childhood described in the previous section are strengthened by Nicola Humble (2010). In *Cake: A History*, Humble (2010) associates nostalgic fantasy with baking a cake, which can be “a way of recreating an ‘innocent’ past... [and] of a yearning for childhood, for pastel-coloured reassurance and simple pleasures, for home, for mother, for the smell of baking, for being allowed to lick the mixing bowl” (p. 118). However, though Humble

(2010) presents a rare historiographical look at cake as an important cultural product, tracing origins, myths and even an encapsulation in art exhibits, she still fails to adequately and penetratingly delve into specific social conceptions, implications and strictures around cake, baking, motherhood and femininity.

The links between sweet food, femininity, and nostalgic remembering have been somewhat overlooked by scholarship, yet substantial associations between nostalgia, memory, and food have been quite comprehensively explored and can prove significant to probing the meaningful relationship. In particular, many anthropological and ethnographical studies investigate a wide variety of cultural expressions, and critique social, economic and political contexts. Jon Holtzman's (2006) extensive anthropological review into the relationship between *Food and Memory*, examines how particular memories can construct aspects of identity to show:

the role of food in various forms of 'nostalgia'; dietary change as a socially charged marker of epochal shifts; gender and the agents of memory; and contexts of remembering and forgetting through food. (p. 364)

Holtzman (2006) summarises other significant approaches and studies that delve into this relationship, suggesting that the senses associated with food—taste, smell, texture—can be used as devices to transmit and contain memory. Other major theorists suggest similar ideas (see Seremetakis, 1993, 1996; Sutton, 2001, 2005, 2008; Lupton, 1994) and discuss how tangible memories are made and recalled through the experience and sensuality evoked by food. These ideas can be seen outside of anthropology as well, glimpsed within literary works, as Northrop Frye (2008), in his exploration of comparative literature writes how “the efficacy of smell and taste, and magic food and drink in recalling memories and performing similar miracles run all through literature” and are customarily used as way to build or understand character and tether events to

certain emotions (pp. 202-3). One prime example is Marcel Proust's (2006) description of eating a Madeleine cookie dipped in tea, and the subsequent evocation of such strong unconscious memories from his childhood.

Nostalgia and nostalgic remembering are intimately entwined with food, and as Holtzman (2006) asserts, food is "a vehicle for recollections of childhood and family" as well as deeply imbued with "sentimentality for a lost past" (p. 367). Theophano (2002) echoes this idea by suggesting that cookbooks exist as a type of "nostalgic re-creation of past culture that persists mostly in memory" (p. 8), an idea which is extended by David Sutton (2008) who describes our ability to move between "taste and social relationships" to "powerfully evoke entire periods of time - 'the good old days', 'childhood years' - and thus capture individual biographies and collective identities" (p. 178). Certainly, the breadth of published food related memoirs and cookbooks which function as a type of family history support this idea, as well as suggest that perhaps the description of food within such books is consumed alongside the vibrant nostalgic recollections. Many studies discuss this as a type of "armchair nostalgia" and as a "longing for times and places that one has never experienced" (Holtzman, 2006, p. 367) in order to find a sense of comfort, where ultimately nostalgic remembering is "not dependent on a happy childhood, but recreates the fiction of one" (Lupton, 1996, p. 50) and a picture of a time without conflict, tension or contradiction, full of childhood whimsy and free of responsibility. Food is able to encapsulate and evoke this type of nostalgia in a very unique way, and the links between certain foods and recollection worthy of much closer scrutiny.

By surveying the literature that details the deep and indelible connection between nostalgia and food, it becomes surprisingly obvious that little scholarship focuses on the particular foods that inspire such longing or instinctual recollection. While Sutton

(2008) discusses the importance of the oven—and the dishes it helps to create, for example, Lamb—to Easter ceremonies on the Greek island of Kalymnos, and Nadia Seremetakis (1993) refers to the importance of bread as a shared substance able to awaken memory of the senses, there are few studies that adequately focus on specific foods or dishes in order to analyse the wider social conceptions that may be present or connected. Nor do they pursue the way that nostalgia is highly connected to cake and sweet food and has the capacity to recreate past domestic idealised environments and create a feminine legacy of culinary performances enacted/re-enacted on a contemporary stage through their consistent insertion and reiteration within cookbooks. Jean Duruz (1999), in her study of the effects of nostalgic re-inscription of the 1950s and 1960s in contemporary Australian narratives, attempts to tackle some of the mentioned ideas, by discussing the “collection and consumption of everyday nostalgic images [in cookbooks] as... a cultural style” and that this “looking and tasting the text” signifies that the main purpose of cookery books is not instruction, but a way to build “popular imaginary” narratives and offer a romantic look at identity (p. 235). This goes towards unravelling the appeal of nostalgia and its connection to current narratives within cookbooks and culinary ephemera, yet like many of the studies mentioned still falls short of looking closely at the types of food that encapsulate this “cultural style” and popular romanticised fantasy that appears more frequently in contemporary culinary forms.

This yearning for a femininity that is long past described by Duruz is also used in Paul Christensen’s (2001) *Mac and Gravy*, who views the kitchen as a repository for memory, who describes it as a place where as a child his mother “absorbed the habits of those around her”, subsequently used to recreate her memories by “open[ing] the skin of a garlic and dic[ing] its contents into grains [which] allowed her to become a daughter

again, to re-enter the female world of her childhood” (p. 26). Considering the established link between food narratives and femininity already discussed, and Holtzman’s (2006) assertion that a “wide body of literature emphasises memory structured through what is constructed as women’s special relationship to food” (p. 370), much of the literature fails to examine the way that sweet food has such a capacity to evoke strong childhood memories, particularly when tied to a certain cake—made specially—or even the “armchair nostalgia” evoked from a description of freshly baked sweet foods wafting through the house, reminiscent of another time and place.

### **3.9 Nostalgia and postmodernism**

Conceptions of nostalgia, cake and femininity discussed in this chapter—and by the thesis in greater depth—connect closely to postmodernist scholarship on commodity culture and society. Specifically, the theories of Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994) and his notions of simulation and simulacra, the widespread production and re-production of copies which have supplanted the original idea to persistently blur the distinction between what is real or imaginary. Baudrillard (1976/2016) explains how postmodern societies function within a world dominated by codes, models, and signs, and how such influences constructions of identities and the way individuals perceive themselves, the world around them, and their place within it. Within Baudrillard’s (1976/2016) concept of ‘hyperreality’, ideas of reality, truth and reason can be distorted within ‘a society of simulation’ and artificial simulacra, particularly when applied to the sphere of consumption and the way media texts and advertising use goods to function as ‘symbols’ (see also Baudrillard, 1970/2016). In Baudrillard’s (1970/2016) view, the mass media—and most mass production systems—generate “models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”, by “artificial resurrection”; or in simpler terms, by taking

cultural imagery and familiar symbols and persistently re-appropriating and re-contextualising them, ultimately substituting in “signs of the real for the real itself” (pp. 166-7).

Baudrillard’s (1981/1994; 1976/2016; 1970/2016) take on postmodernist ideas—as well as Lyotard’s (1984) and Jameson’s (1984)—enable a greater ability to discuss power in symbolic terms, particularly when applying it to consumer culture and the “uninterrupted circuit without reference” (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 11) seen in images and concepts across advertisements and media confronted in everyday life. Examining how consumer culture has harnessed the symbolic value of nostalgia and kitsch—which Baudrillard (1970/2016) wrote about as a “pseudo-object”, able to appear simultaneously as a “superabundance of signs...[and] disparate connotations” (p. 110)—to consistently re-contextualise and re-package appealing experiences, provides greater insight into how cultural categories evolve and shift. This can be applied to theoretical approaches to sweet food, as Humble (2010) suggests, “cake is as much an idea as a reality... suggested by the sheer number of such creations...representing kitsch and nostalgia, femininity and childhood, manufacture and home craft, tradition and innovation...speak[s] to us of the many things cake has been and is yet to be” (p. 116). By looking at cake—and sweet food in general—as postmodern ‘pseudo’ objects, the “real signification” (Baudrillard, 1970/2016, p. 110) of such to society—in concept, experience, and as material objects of culture—can be identified and interrogated in more scholastic depth.

### **3.10 Summary**

Further study that explores the implications tacitly found in cake, sweet food, and baking culture, including those that participate in the conception, creation and

consumption stages, is important and justified by the insights provided. While there is much study on food and society in general, the focus on sweet food and baking is not prevalent, even less so when looking at a particular group or segment and does not provide deeper perception into feminine connotations or conceptions. Much of the literature explores very similar themes and ideas, addressing the cultural and iconic value of food and eating, and how such communicates notions of history, memory, hegemony, and traditional ideals and expectations of gender.

The scholarship posits theories that could easily be applied to and seen symbolically in cake and sweet foods yet fails to take the opportunity or incorporate the specific cultural phenomena around such. The gap in the literature also prompts a variety of queries into how—Western—ideas and ritualised performances of cake and baking intersect with wider areas of inquiry. What implications and cultural, social and political meanings associated with femininity can be found in baking cookbooks? How do contemporary ideas of femininity inform, and are subsequently informed by, the conception, creation and choice of such sweet food?

Finally, the overarching question which impels further investigation is: how are prevalent social ideas demonstrated in cake, baking, and sweet food, and what conclusions can be drawn and uncovered by identifying these ideas and conventions?

## 4 Methodology and Research Design

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### 4.1 Introducing the methodological approach

In the previous chapter, a close review of the literature centred on the cultural, social, and political implications indicated by representations of femininity, baking, and cake in cookbooks. Specifically, it demonstrated the gaps in information present and the intersections between representations and wider contemporary conceptions of femininity seen to influence and converge with behaviours, expectations, and practices around sweet food. Additionally, the literature reviewed further highlighted how the examination of images, narratives, recipes, and other pertinent parts of cookbooks can reveal dominant social ideals, norms, and constraints, as well as provide insights into contemporary—in the case of this study, Australian—society.

Accordingly, a qualitative methodology was developed to closely examine a dataset of Australian cookbooks in a content-driven and exploratory way (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) that placed the gathered materials at the centre and then began to identify, categorise, and find meaningful correlations. This chapter discusses how a thematic analysis was an appropriate fit for this thesis, and closely examines the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, particularly connected to the process of collecting and sorting data. In addition to this, a careful interrogation of the meta-critical framework considers the incorporation and synthesis of varied interdisciplinary views from cultural studies, gender studies, history and sociology to extensively analyse the research conducted in the thesis. Lastly, the chapter explains the data collection techniques used, and discusses the implementation and impact of the chosen research design and methods on the collection process and the subsequent analysis.

### **4.1.1 A thematic analysis**

The cookbooks present data in several interlocking and overlapping ways, which include elements of discourse construction—in recipes, jargon and images of food—as well as larger contextual, representative and narrative information—introductory, front and back cover copy, commentary, images of domestic scenes, colour choice—that requires close interpretation in a flexible manner.

The research in this thesis is based on a thematic analysis, which allows for an interpretation and explanation of baking representations and practices in cookbooks, and interrogation into the role sweet food plays in performances and symbolic constructions of contemporary femininity. Thematic Analysis is a commonly used method of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) facilitating greater contextual acknowledgement for “capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 14). Equally, a thematic analysis allows for “a broad theoretical framework concerning the nature of discourse and its role in social life” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 175) to be developed, whereby meaning is generated through the study of texts, and the discovery of patterns or themes that can reflect wider social issues worthy of closer scrutiny (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Foucault, 1972). This approach appropriately suits the central inquiry of the thesis—probing the relationship between baking, sweet food and femininity—to require a close reading of the selected cookbooks, identify recurrent trends, user language, descriptive labels and decoded themes able to indicate conscious or unconscious links to larger narratives within society “in order to describe a particular aspect of the world” (Gavin, 2008, p. 280).

Applying thematic analysis allows for “creation, collection, coding, organisation” (Bellamy, 2011, p. 9) of patterns, trends, and representations in the cookbooks.

Additionally, the approach enables discovery of more comprehensive “development of conceptual definitions, development of typologies and classifications, exploration of associations between attitudes, behaviors, and experiences, developing explanations of phenomena, and generating new ideas and theories” (Britten, 2011, p. 385). The development of ‘definitions’, ‘classifications’ and new ‘associations’ and ‘ideas’ is particularly significant, as the area of inquiry into the material value and impact of cookbooks and connection to broader social concepts of contemporary femininity has largely been overlooked in a scholarly sense, as explained in the review of literature section [see chapter 3]. A thematic approach suits the conception of themes and patterns connected to aspects of living and behaviour (Aronson, 1995), and the communication/encapsulation of social concepts revealed in the cookbooks.

Furthermore, by approaching the data using an applied thematic analysis, focus can be placed on interpretation and the forms of representation present, seeking out “the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they reveal” (McKee, 2003, p. 17). According to Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), the “approach is a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible” (p. 15). The researcher is able to identify patterns and representations, and decode themes revealed in the cookbooks in order to direct the parameters and areas of theoretical exploration to ensure a comprehensive consideration and formulation of the study. As Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013) suggest, a thematic analysis allows for greater attention on abstract interpretations while emphasising the discovery of tacit meanings, which gives the approach more credibility, as such is typically used when prior scholarship on the particular phenomenon is scant, and coded classifications need to be directly obtained from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As analysis of the selected cookbooks in the

thesis evolved to fit shifts in the parameters of the central inquiry, a broader view of baking and sweet food, and the significance of cake to conceptions of femininity was considered, and certain themes were indicated, de/coded, and shaped directly through the closer and continuous examination of tacit meanings and representations found within the data.

#### **4.1.2 Limitations of thematic analysis**

Despite impartial intentions fostered by an interpretative thematic approach, the drawbacks of this form of qualitative analysis should be considered an inevitable part of the process. Specifically, as Gavin (2008) argues, the approach needs to be carefully monitored and strategised to consider subjective views and the impact on accuracy and process this poses. In addition to this, Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss how “the ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (p. 82). Hence, a theme or classification can be reliant wholly on a researcher’s interpretation and subject to predisposition of meanings or how such connects to and supports the central research inquiry. Although a critical approach to the data was attempted, preconceived theoretical concepts suggested by the research questions may have directed the focus or classification of certain aspects of the cookbooks, while overlooking or excluding other components. As stated previously, the coding process was continual and evolving as the data set—the cookbooks—were gathered and updated as the project went on. Not all the cookbooks in the data set were used equally in the discussion of findings in this thesis, as some cookbooks contained more expressive, overt or supportive examples. It is not the view of this researcher that the themes were unable to be represented or discovered in all the cookbooks, but that the decisions to use, explain and scrutinise certain examples were based on the ability to clarify,

demonstrate and corroborate a specific code or theme, and how it related to the overall inquiry of the study.

### **4.1.3 A meta-critical approach**

One of the advantages of a thematic analysis was a flexible, accessible advance to the cookbooks which allowed for the synthesis of broad theoretical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as well as a comprehensive holistic approach in research, methods used, and collection of data (Thamilarasan, 2015). This thesis is situated in popular culture studies which essentially ensures an interdisciplinary approach and maintains a meta-critical methodological framework to synthesise views from cultural studies, food studies, gender studies, history, and sociology. Although the focus of each of these multiple approaches may not be typically aligned, this thesis attempts to synthesise these views and critically investigate the material value of the cookbooks as popular culture texts able to demonstrate wider social meanings and the relationship/s between cultural conceptions of femininity, and the role baking and sweet food play in shaping these notions.

Moreover, employing broad theoretical approaches in the study ensures a closer examination into how popular culture texts can influence, interact with and be informed by, larger cultural and social concepts. The study integrated a social, anthropological, and text-focused theoretical approach to examine the layers of meaning behind the visual and text-based data elements of the cookbooks. Hendry (1999) explains that social anthropology centres on the relationships, behaviours, customs, consumption patterns, gender relations, and socialisation that humans experience culturally, and the way such is maintained, or caused to shift over time. This is a significant lens which to examine the data, as the cookbooks are shaped by cultural context, audience, consumer, and informed by the pervasive gendered relations of Australian society.

#### **4.1.4 Applying a textual analysis**

The way the cookbooks are read/consumed, received, and their impact on other popular and material texts is a significant factor that calls for a textual analysis to uncover the layers of social and cultural meaning present. Alan McKee's (2003) guide to textual analysis is essential to understanding how the method was used in this thesis to look for "expressions of power and material for identity-formation" in the cookbook data (pp. 1-2). Textual analysis can be used to understand the "most likely interpretations" of a text, influenced by cultural communications and audience/s ability to construct or form a "view of the world" (McKee, 2003, p. 3).

As a methodology, it is about finding "feasible interpretations" of a text—or texts—that uncover representations or explain how such go towards making sense of a particular "version" of the world that is largely accepted as the norm (McKee, 2003). Thus, focus can be placed on popular texts consumed widely—like television programs, films, magazines, or in this study, cookbooks—that can be analysed to consider context and the influence of other related texts, in an open approach that allows for all kinds of different knowledge to be sought out and questions posed, investigated, and probed to interpret "particular elements" (McKee, 2003, p. 11). The analytical approach attempts to uncover many 'versions' or representations of reality—or 'truth'—depending on the context and meaning of the textual elements. In order to consider the context, McKee (2003) suggests three vital steps used in this thesis. Firstly, examine the text as a whole to understand the 'rules' and avoid a limited or narrow focus. The cookbooks were approached holistically and read as a complete text, where each section, recipe, or image was considered and interpreted in entirety.

Secondly, the genre of the text should be given attention as codes that communicate meaning and "rules of signification" are indicated which help to understand narrative/s,

and “make reasonable interpretations of how a text is likely to be read by an audience” (McKee, 2003, p. 13). Considering the genre specifics of the cookbooks was important to provide clues to how each book and its narrative should be taken and perceived. In some of the cookbooks the ‘rules’ were obvious and seen from the outset, and in others more scrutiny was required to properly understand how each element worked to produce meaning.

Thirdly, McKee (2003) proposes understanding how the text fits into wider public context; or what John Hartley (1996) describes as the popular cultural “semiosphere” and how the wider ‘world of meaning’ functions to shape everyday reality and perspective. In the case of the cookbooks in this thesis, contextual considerations of history, production, circulation, and how they are received/read were particularly pertinent. Many of the cookbooks had contextual links that are significant and relevant to consider, particularly those with established and recognised branding—*Frankie Magazine*, *Australian Woman’s Weekly*, *Margaret Fulton*—while others had wider related associations—TV program *The Great Australian Bake-Off*, or well-known contributing chefs and bakers. All three steps in McKee’s (2003) guide were used to determine elements that were imperative and meaningful to support the conception and legitimacy of themes and interpretations drawn from textual representations. Therefore, a text-focused analysis and method through the gathering of contextual clues enables a nuanced and complex interpretation, that considers, describes, and elucidates the visual messages displayed in the cookbook data.

#### **4.1.5 Using interpretative tools**

The method of textual analysis applied in this thesis can be further facilitated via the use of wider interpretative tools to deepen and extend how meaning is deciphered. Aspects of phenomenological analysis were considered to show how a common and essential

reality is thought to exist that demonstrates a type of embodied perception and experience through space and time (see Creswell, 1998; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007; Sokolowski, 2000; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). It is through this knowledge that meaning can be created and shaped, reliant on the researcher as an interpreter or translator of the perceived narrative/s. Alongside this, characteristics of iconographic analysis too prove useful when assembling contextual evidence and reconstructing meanings or intentions of the author/s, editor/s, publisher/s; and significant to understanding specific kinds of information, or when making certain assumptions about a text. Erwin Panofsky (1953) regarded this a ‘common sense’ approach to interpretation of symbols and “symbolic implications” (pp. 142-43), principally based on what can be seen or observed and then connected to wider related works. As cookbooks are objects that present a common experience full of contextual and symbolic information, these tools are useful to enhancing and expanding the central method of analysis.

Additionally, drawing on aspects of semiotics further advances the analysis of a text to uncover underlying meanings, connect references and other relevant signs and codes able to be interpreted and explained contextually. Semiotics is the study of literal and symbolic meanings, or the relationship between the *signifier*, the shape or thing that signifies something, and the *signified*, the concept referred to (De Saussure, 1916/1977). Many theorists discuss how semiotics can work as a “form of enquiry” or a tool used to search for answers (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 1), particularly when examining how representations can stand for or symbolise deeper meanings and connotations of human interaction and behaviours (Danesi, 2004). Theo van Leeuwen (2005) writes about the potential of semiotic study on perception and communication to allow meaning to be interpreted in the ‘framing’ or putting together of visual elements, patterns or ‘degrees’

of connection that can be observed and inventoried. These patterns and ‘framings’ help to reproduce social and cultural ideas of reality instead of just “reflecting pre-existing reality”, which adds to the layers of complexity that can be drawn from interpreting the representations (Hollows, 2000, p. 44).

Significantly, Barthes’ (1957/1972) commentary suggests tools for the analysis of hidden connotations found “in everyday spectacles, performances, and common concepts” (Danesi, 2004, p. 10). In his view, a collection of signs can become something or indicate something larger, as extended metaphors that signify wider social ideologies or prevailing cultural and historical values that are accepted as natural or normal, which he labelled as *myth* (Barthes, 1957/1972). For Barthes, as a structuralist—and later feminist screen theorists Laura Mulvey (1989), Pam Cook and Claire Johnston (1988)—language was ideological and functioned to ascribe meaning and make dominant cultural conceptions appear ‘natural’. Therefore, drawing on aspects of semiotic inquiry helps to probe dominant ideologies—or to draw it back to this study, how popular ideas about gender, femininity, and baking—successfully present themselves as simply the way the world should be.

Myths generate or construct codes, which serve to organise and express collective conceptions of culture, or as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, “our conceptual system... plays a central role in defining our everyday realities”, and thus contribute to sense-making activities, what is thought, what is experienced, what is communicated (p. 454). By approaching the cookbooks in an interpretative manner, this thesis analyses the cultural and social myths that are encapsulated and reinforced within. The codes and themes identified in the cookbooks are deconstructed to examine the layers of meaning and metaphors underneath, revealing dominant ideologies and conceptions, while uncovering others that were suppressed or hidden.

Barthes' (1957/1972) framework on the way popular ideas are repurposed, repackaged or "reduced by a pure signifying function" (p. 113) to form myths and hence attributed with altered implications is significant in the way data was collected in this thesis.

Patterns of presentation in recipes and images were noted across cookbooks repackaged and rebranded to connect to specific versions of femininity and feminine baking performances. Part of the impetus that shaped the research inquiry was an examination into the way that similar or somewhat identical materials, recipes, and images of sweet goods were republished, re-edited or collated in collections, reprints, or new editions. These patterns of similarity are also found beyond the selected dataset in this thesis, identified across decades of published cookbook materials. In noting this then, Barthes' (1957/1972) semiotic tools become an additional mode of exploration that adds to the textual analysis used, as the data shows contextual order shifts, and the "sum of signs" (p. 113) becoming uniform, unthreatening, and reassuring to readers.

Significantly, what emerges across most of the contemporary cookbooks selected in the study through use of a textual analytical method that draws on various tools of interpretation, is the pervasive pattern of nostalgic remembering in presentation, theme, narrative, and branding, and how this dictated the repurposing, repacking or construction of the cookbook materials.

## **4.2 Research design**

The study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to conducting thematic analysis, as a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (2006, p. 79). By organising and describing the data in detail, a theme can capture "something important about the data in relation to the research question and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). In the

initial stages of the study, I generated codes by finding patterns and trends in the cookbooks and begun to group them into wider categories in relation to the research question. This method is also recommended by Schensul and LeCompte (2012), who suggest that data collection methods should be shaped to answer the research question.

#### **4.2.1 Selection criteria of Australian cookbook materials**

The method of selecting specific cookbooks for this study was based around a set of specific criteria. Although not every cookbook chosen had an equivalent output of detail or examples that contributed to the findings of the thesis, each satisfied the criteria as defined.

A significant criterion in choosing a cookbook was the *Content and Description*, which essentially required a baking section to be present, particularly focused on sweet foods. The cookbook could be a more general collection of recipes, yet for it to be included in the study, had to contain recipes, attached images, and narrative forms—either in the form of an introduction, cover copy, recipe commentary—that specifically referred to the baking of sweet foods. Even the consideration of sweet foods was narrowed down further, and cookbooks that favoured or contained more cake recipes were prioritised.

Another vital criterion was the *Publishing and Sales information*, which required the cookbook to be published by an Australian publisher—or the Australian imprint at least. The cookbooks chosen were widely accessible and available—whether in bookstores, department stores or online retailers—to an Australia-wide audience.

The next criterion that was considered in selection, was the role that the author—or editor—played in the way the book was packaged and how it was branded. This was particularly significant to consider as many of the cookbooks openly declared connection to a ‘Trusted name’ or a widely identifiable and recognisable brand—such

as *The Australian Women's Weekly*—as a selling point for their collection of recipes. Many of the authors or associated publishers emphasised ideas of history and prestige and used this to connect deeper to the themes of their cookbooks, specifically a sense of nostalgia and familiarity in their readers. There were also connections to the wider media landscape—such as TV or other published materials—which were attached to promote the cookbook.

Lastly, the year that the cookbooks were published became a significant criterion to consider, as the research questions probed the contemporary situation. Originally, the parameters sought to encompass cookbooks published from 2000 onwards, but the chosen selection narrowed this field to 2010 – 2017. The cookbooks published from 2010 onwards were seen to contain more connective thematic aspects and contrasts which could be used to formulate a more precise overview of dominant ideas of the period, and how effective they were in informing cookbooks published during it.

**Table 1: Selected Cookbooks**

<b>Cookbook used in Study</b>	<b>Content and Description</b>	<b>Publishing/Sales Information</b>	<b>Author/Branding</b>	<b>Year Published</b>
<i>The Great Australian Baking Book</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, contemporary, creative</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Narrative attached to many contributed recipes</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced food</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>	<p><i>Echo Publishing Australia and PQ Blackwell Limited NZ</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One of the editors was Food Writer and journalist Helen Greenwood</li> <li>○ 80 Australian contributors, some very known culinary icons like Stephanie Alexander, Matt Moran, Adriano Zumbo, Maggie Beer, Stephano Manfredi, etc.</li> <li>○ Book is branded with Australiana, with cartoonist Reg Mombassa illustrating the hard cover and inside cover pages with iconic images of an Australian outback homestead with a veranda, garden shed, Hills Hoist and native flora (arguably essential and recognisable fixtures of the classic Australian Dream)</li> <li>○ Royalties from book sales go to <i>OzHarvest</i> Charity</li> </ul>	2017

<p><i>The Best-Ever Collection</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10 chapters with all different cuisine</li> <li>○ Chapter 8: Cakes and Cupcakes</li> <li>○ Chapter 9: Biscuits and Slices</li> <li>○ Glossy, very carefully curated photos of produced food and kitchens</li> <li>○ Narrative attached to some recipes, particularly historical or iconic recipes</li> </ul>	<p><i>Bauer Media Books</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The historical and iconic factors of <i>The Australian Women's Weekly's</i> contribution to Australian cuisine is emphasised throughout, the legacy that began in 1933 with <i>The Weekly</i> publication</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> <li>○ Embossed gold stamp declares on the Cover 'Celebrating 80 years with the Weekly', anniversary edition to celebrate the frequently requested recipes from readers</li> <li>○ Stamp 'Triple Tested for your Success', explained in the narrative as a reassuring guarantee for readers</li> <li>○ Back Cover explains that more than 75 million copies of <i>The Australian Women's Weekly's</i> Cookbooks have been sold worldwide</li> </ul>	<p>2013</p>
<p><i>The Great Australian Bake-Off Companion</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, contemporary, creative</li> </ul>	<p><i>Hachette Australia, BBC World Australia Pty Ltd, Fremantle Media Australia Pty Ltd</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recipes, Photos and narrative connected to the tv show <i>The Great Australian Bake-Off</i></li> <li>○ Cover declares 'Over 90 fully illustrated recipes from the hit tv show', and back cover brands the book as essential tips from all 'your favourite bakers' to 'recreate that magic in your own kitchen'</li> </ul>	<p>2016</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Narrative attached to some of the recipes</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced food, kitchen spaces, warehouse used in the TV show</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sticker on cover ‘As seen on Lifestyle Food’</li> </ul>	
<i>Retro Baking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury, classic and iconic recipes</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, decorative</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> </ul>	<i>Bauer Media Books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> Collection</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> <li>○ Stamp ‘Triple Tested for your Success’ in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly</i> Test Kitchen</li> <li>○ Branding of ‘Vintage Recipes’, most of the book is presented with this feel of ‘retro’ in photos, illustrated pictures, food presentations, font, colours, borders, narrative and recipes</li> <li>○ Nostalgic branding that is emphasised throughout, back cover ‘nostalgic family favourites’ ‘a special part of everyone’s childhood’</li> </ul>	2015

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced food, kitchen and domestic spaces</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>			
<i>Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury, classic and iconic recipes</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, decorative</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced foods, napery and implements</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>	<i>Hardie Grant Books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Each recipe curated by Australian culinary icon, Margaret Fulton, with photos of her, her previously published cookbooks and her home throughout</li> <li>○ Her branding, approval and signature is emphasised throughout the collection</li> <li>○ Emphasised Old-fashioned, classic feel to the book, decorated with hand-drawn flowers, implements, fonts and presentation of food</li> </ul>	2015
<i>Baking: The Complete Collection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury,</li> </ul>	<i>Bauer Media Books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Collection</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> </ul>	2016

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>classic, iconic and contemporary recipes</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, contemporary, creative</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Narrative attached to some of the recipes</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced food, kitchen and domestic spaces</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stamp ‘Triple Tested’ in <i>The Australian Women’s Weekly Test Kitchen</i></li> <li>○ Branded an extensive collection of almost 500 pages, section with kids’ recipes and birthday cakes</li> </ul>	
<i>Planet Cake: Love and Friendship (2015)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to celebration cake making</li> <li>○ Extensive glossy photos of baking instructions, tools and materials needed, fully-decorated products</li> </ul>	<i>Murdoch Books</i> , an imprint of <i>Allen &amp; Unwin</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cover declares ‘Celebration Cakes for Special Occasions’</li> <li>○ Cookbook author, TV series <i>Planet Cake</i> presenter, owner of cake-making training business <i>Planet Cake School</i> Paris Cutler</li> </ul>	2015

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introductory Narrative, and very extensive directions for each recipe</li> </ul>			
<i>Baking Day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury, classic and iconic recipes</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, decorative</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Recipes in sections with narrative connected to retro theme</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced foods, napery and implements</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>	<i>ACP Books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Collection</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> <li>○ Stamp 'Triple Tested' in <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Test Kitchen</li> <li>○ Emphasised Old-fashioned, classic feel to the book, decorated with hand-drawn illustrations and cut-outs of food and women baking, fonts, page decoration and presentation of food; Inside cover of book is decorated with flowers that resemble fabric material like old-fashioned curtains</li> <li>○ Nostalgia is obvious and injected throughout in the narrative, the decorative aspects and the included recipes</li> </ul>	2012

<p><i>The Baking Collection</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking with sweet classic, iconic and contemporary recipes</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced foods, napery and implements</li> </ul>	<p><i>Bauer Media Books</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Collection</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> <li>○ Stamp 'Triple Tested for your Success Every Time'</li> <li>○ Cover declares 'A selection of classic baked treats to share', and has a classic, very curated feel to the presentation of recipes, fonts, borders, colours and baked goods, emphasised on back cover, 'time-honoured tradition of baking in all its forms'</li> </ul>	<p>2014</p>
<p><i>Afternoon Tea</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking, with sweet classic and very iconic recipes</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narrative</li> <li>○ Narrative connected to contributors and their recipes</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced foods, presented simply</li> </ul>	<p><i>Morrison Media</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Frankie Magazine</i> Collection, a popular lifestyle magazine</li> <li>○ Emphasis of 'Old Favourites' 'Hand-picked and handed down through generations', Nostalgia is obvious and injected throughout in the narrative, the decorative aspects and the included recipes</li> <li>○ <i>Afternoon Tea (2010)</i> Contributors 'share their childhood cooking memories', a collection for readers to relate to</li> </ul>	<p>2010</p>

	with napery and implements			
<i>Recipes to Remember</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking both sweet and savoury, classic and iconic recipes</li> <li>○ Many cake recipes included; iconic, classic, decorative</li> <li>○ Detailed introductory and cover narratives</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced food, kitchen and domestic spaces</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>	<i>Bauer Media Books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Collection</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> <li>○ Stamp 'Triple Tested' in <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Test Kitchen</li> <li>○ Branding of 'Nostalgic Recipes', most of the book is presented with this comparison of then and now in the narrative; 'Retro food' and 'Popular recipes of yesteryear'</li> <li>○ Nostalgia is emphasised in the photos, illustrated pictures, food presentations, font, colours, borders and recipes</li> </ul>	2016
<i>Retro: The Complete Collection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Book dedicated to baking, specifically Cakes, Pies, and Doughnuts</li> <li>○ Classic and iconic recipes</li> </ul>	<i>Bauer Media Books</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Collection</li> <li>○ Editorial and Food Director Pamela Clark</li> <li>○ Stamp 'Triple Tested' in <i>The Australian Women's Weekly</i> Test Kitchen</li> </ul>	2017

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Detailed introductory, cover and section narratives</li> <li>○ Glossy photos of produced food, kitchen and domestic spaces</li> <li>○ Illustrated pictures</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Narrative emphasises ‘Requested Retro recipes’, ‘Favourite Retro food’, ‘Take a walk down memory lane’, ‘some dating back to the 1950s’</li> <li>○ Nostalgia is emphasised in the photos, illustrated pictures, food presentations, font, colours, borders and recipes</li> <li>○ Deliberate highlighting of how extensive the collection is at almost 500 pages</li> </ul>	
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### **4.2.2 Data organisation and categorisation of themes**

Choosing the cookbooks and organising the data was an ongoing process that continued throughout the thesis. While this process occurred, I looked critically at the data to search for themes that signified deeper meanings, or symbolic representations (Boyatzis, 1998). For instance, all of the themes seemed to intersect to show a pattern of ‘perceived perfection’, where the dominant idea in each connects to a performance or practice of femininity that is idealised, presenting the symbolically ‘proper’ or socially prescribed way of these feminine practices. This was closely connected to Boyatzis’ (1998) summary of the stages of data analysis, where one must sense themes in a reliable and accurate manner, then develop codes, to finally, interpret the information into refined and definable themes. Greater scrutiny of the data allowed for more in-depth critique, interpretation and exploration of the research questions. In terms of ensuring the themes generated were ‘accurate’ or ‘reliable’, certain limitations may emerge on further reflexivity of the categorisation process. According to Morse and Mitcham (2002), a type of ‘conceptual tunnel vision’ can occur in studies of this nature, whereby “the overcategorization of data, assigning more data to one category than actually belongs, or seeing or justifying most things as being related to, or considered examples of, the concept being investigated” (p. 30). Although effort was taken to ensure that themes did not overlap or become over-categorised, this may have occurred in the process, and examples from the cookbooks could have been interpreted to reflect different angles or notions according to the connected theme or specific discussion it was attached to.

### **4.2.3 Key themes**

In order to provide greater explanation into formulation and definition of themes and codes, I will describe and summarise the key themes here, which will be, presented,

analysed, discussed, conceptualised in much more detail in the upcoming chapters, and in the conclusions.

Firstly, the data was grouped into codes and themes to elaborate on the way such concepts were developed and interpreted in the wider scope of the research inquiry. In the original conception of the project, I had shaped my research questions around the notion of cake and its relationship to femininity. Due to this, my initial codes were focused on the intersecting codes that centred on notions of cake and embodied femininity, celebration, identity and consumption. My original themes before refining, reworking and embarking on deeper analysis of the study were as follows:

*Cakes, baking and performing femininity; Sexuality, sensuality and appetite; 'Having it all': embodying the modern superwoman; Cake, feminism and the 'new domesticity'; and Motherhood, maternal anxiety and baking.*

As the process evolved, and the research inquiry reshaped to focus more generally on baking and sweet food, the codes become more refined and expanded, which caused the themes to shift. This shows a process of monitoring for accuracy and reliability in the interpretation of the data set to ensure the codes and themes tackle and categorise the data in the appropriate way.

Ultimately, the codes were revised into four themes, labelled as follows:

*Mythmaking Australian femininity: baking in historical context; Performing femininity: baking as practice; Sexuality, sensuality and feminine identity: baking for consumption; and Appetite and Restraint: femininity and indulgence.*

Each one formed a table which established defining ideas and examples that reflected the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Some of the establishing codes overlap and intersect between themes, but there are differences in the way the code is explained and

used within the analysis discussion. The tabling of codes and themes proved useful in clarifying exactly what each discussion chapter would cover, and how the overlapping notions could be extended and elaborated on in each without repetition or duplication of ideas.

#### 4.2.3.1 Mythmaking Australian femininity: baking in historical context

This theme deals with the way the cookbooks depict an engrained heritage of baking in contemporary Australian practices, and how baking practice itself seems to be essential to feminine performance. It is split into sections that probe the cookbooks to find examples that show how baking shapes the Australian character and establishes a prideful legacy of tradition encapsulated by the adaptation and invention of Australian bakers and the stereotypical domestic performance of ‘filling the tins’. Such practices are revealed to be intimately connected to tea traditions and shaped by historical and dominant cultural notions of nostalgia, the Anzac myth, and collective commemoration. The theme forms the first chapter of the analysis and uncovers a pervasive type of ahistorical Australia represented in the cookbooks, which combines stereotype, myth, and fantasy of a past Australian feminine performance.

**Table 2: Theme One**

<b>Mythmaking Australian femininity: baking in historical context</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example from text</b>
Shaping the Australian Character	Ideas connected to how baking is connected to Australian character and culture	“you will find tried-and-true Aussie classics such as damper, hot cross buns, apple pie and lemon tart” ( <i>The Great Australian Baking Book</i> , 2017, p. 8)

		<p>“Rich cakes, melt-in-the-mouth biscuits, light-as-air sponges and fluffy scones have held pride of place in the Australian kitchen since pioneering days” (<i>Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics</i>, 2015, p. 6)</p>
Legacy of tradition	Ideas connected to shifts in baking traditions and repertoire	<p>“it’s wonderful to know these recipes get passed down in families and continue to live on” (<i>Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics</i>, 2015, p. 6)</p> <p>“This wonderful collection of best ever recipes from <i>The Weekly</i> is every bit a part of your cooking history as it is ours” (<i>The Best Ever Collection</i>, 2013, inside cover)</p>
Adaptation and Invention of Australian bakers and ‘Filling the Tins’	<p>Ideas connected to stereotype baking to ‘fill the tins’ and keep everyone in the household fed and happy</p> <p>Embodiment of “She’ll be ‘right’” Australian attitude &amp; historic links to traditional pioneer spirit present in bush kitchens</p> <p>identity</p>	<p>“It’s not so long ago that the baker in the family set aside one day a week to make cakes, biscuits, tarts, pies, bread etc. – whatever the family required for that week. The baked goods were usually stored in airtight tins at room temperature – it was understood that they would become stale as the week went on, and lose a little of their appeal, but that didn’t stop them from being consumed – or, at worst recycled as food for the chickens” (<i>Baking Day</i>, 2012, p. 6)</p> <p>“Back then... Baking was done routinely by stay-at-home mums, usually once a week, so there was always something sweet and delicious to have for children’s lunch boxes or after school snacks, or for when friends dropped in</p>

		for a ‘cuppa’” ( <i>Retro: The Complete Collection</i> , 2017, p. 7)
Nostalgic Domesticity	Ideas coded to ideas of the past, traditions, heritage nostalgic remembering Fifties, Old-fashioned	“nostalgic family favourites that were lovingly made from scratch and a special part of everyone’s childhood” ( <i>Retro Baking</i> , 2015, back cover)

#### 4.2.3.2 Performing femininity: baking as practice

This theme centres on baking as practice and connects to social perceptions of femininity, coded traits, and qualities related to the performance or behaviour associated with being feminine or womanly. The sections of this analysis chapter explore how the cookbooks reveal persistent cultural notions that connect naturalness and baking practice, and encapsulate the performance of baking without cookbooks, generational recipes, and feminine practice. It also examines how nostalgic practices are consumed via perceived and projected images, and descriptions of feminine pastiche function to sustain hegemonic expressions seen within a ‘kitschification’ of femininity.

**Table 3: Theme Two**

<b>Performing femininity: baking as practice</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example from text</b>
Baking as essential feminine performance	Ideas coded to the idea that baking is an essential component of expressing and performing femininity, including the assumption that women will	“Familiar recipes such as these, handed down through the generations, continue to be firm favourites” ( <i>Baking Day</i> , 2012, p. 139)

	naturally attain or have the skills required to bake or follow the recipes Handed down, Heirloom	
'Kitschification' & Femininity	Ideas coded to ideas of baking and homemaking that require creativity, skill, knowledge Reclaiming 'lost' domestic arts 'hipster housewife' Kitchen craft Homemade handcrafted, handmade, crafty, creative	<i>Afternoon Tea</i> (2010), hand-crafted tea cosy (p. 5) a strainer rusted, tarnished wood handle (p. 8) an old-fashioned metal tray (white & blue), silver serving spoon (p. 34) a hand-painted cat platter (p. 49)
Feminine & Generational Practice	Ideas coded to topics or ideas around the performance or behaviour associated with being feminine or womanly >Including actions, expression, interaction with others Traditional feminine roles (and stereotypes) of wife, hostess, mother, community member, etc. Generational links to talent in the kitchen Glamorous, cultured, hospitable 'make a positive impression' capable, 'don't show the effort required'	"When Friends Drop By: What better to serve friends than blueberry muffins or buttermilk or pumpkin scones." ( <i>Baking Day</i> , 2012, p. 139) "Memories of favourite food seem to grow out of all proportion to reality – no one made better scones than my great grandmother!" ( <i>Retro: The Complete Collection</i> , 2017, p. 7) "I've continued the tradition, as has my daughter,

	stylish yet simple	Suzanne” ( <i>Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics</i> , 2015, p. 6)
Naturalness and baking practice	Ideas coded to notions that success in the kitchen is a form of feminine accomplishment, and a skill to be honed rewarding experience bringing others pleasure pride showing love	“every single recipe is carefully Triple Tested in our famous Test Kitchen, giving you the reassuring guarantee... [of] success first time, every time” ( <i>Baking: The Complete Collection</i> , 2016, p. 3)  “Homemade childhood treats are something to be remembered, learnt and passed on, because the baked imposters in the shops never taste like Mum’s or Grandma’s” ( <i>Afternoon Tea</i> , 2010, p. 9)
Feminine Pastiche	Anachronistic fantasy Retro/vintage	gendered representations as simulacrum

#### 4.2.3.3 Sexuality, sensuality and feminine identity: baking for consumption

This theme focuses on contextualising elements of sensuality, temptation, and the ‘pleasure of consumption’ encoded within the cookbooks. The sections of this chapter probe how the cookbooks emphasise consuming a narrative of pleasure amongst the images of food, renditions of women and feminine practice, while inviting readers to

participate in the voyeuristic pleasure that constructs notions of fantasy and feminine identity connected to sensuality and consumption. The chapter explores how cookbooks are a commodity of material culture connected to the transaction of consumption, including notions of consuming experience and the pleasure of labour, beyond the goods represented, described or alluded to within.

**Table 4: Theme Three**

<b>Sexuality, sensuality and feminine identity: baking for consumption</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example from text</b>
Feminine Identity & Fantasy	<p>Ideas coded to idea of ‘ideal’ feminine embodiment</p> <p>&gt;Including traits, qualities, appearance</p> <p>Ideas coded to topics or ideas around the performance or behaviour associated with being feminine or womanly</p> <p>Including actions, expression, interaction with others talented in the kitchen</p> <p>Glamorous, cultured, hospitable ‘make a positive impression’ stylish yet simple</p> <p>Aesthetic perfection of home, clothing, product made</p> <p>Anachronistic ‘Simulacra’ of femininity</p>	<p>Descriptors: ‘fairy’, ‘princess’, ‘fashionistas’, ‘little girls’ (<i>Baking: The Complete Collection</i>, 2016)</p> <p>Throughout <u>all</u> the texts:</p> <p>&gt;Delicate icing</p> <p>&gt;Flowers printed on dishes, cups, napery, spoons, aprons</p> <p>&gt;Pink, pastel colours</p> <p>&gt;Warm, alluring, pretty images</p> <p>&gt;Lacework, doilies, decorative touches to each dish</p> <p>Seen in <i>Retro Baking</i>, 2015; <i>Baking Day</i>, 2012; <i>Recipes to Remember</i>, 2016; <i>Retro: The Complete Collection</i>, 2017:</p> <p>&gt;Cut-outs and drawn renditions of women</p>

	<p>Decoration</p>	<p>&gt;Women posed delicately and dressed stylishly yet femininely</p> <p>&gt;Pearls, make-up &amp; high heels in the kitchen</p>
<p>Voyeuristic pleasure</p>	<p>Ideas coded to the construction of feminine pleasure</p> <p>notions of female interaction with systems of consumer culture</p> <p>images doused heavily with voyeuristic values and meanings</p> <p>wider implications about the expectation of femininity and baking,</p> <p>the male gaze</p> <p>&gt;Resembles pin-up imagery</p>	<p><i>Retro: The Complete Collection</i> (2017):</p> <p>&gt;Paper Dolls—figures cut out of paper or thin card—depicting mostly women, dressed in various states of dress, vintage style underwear, aprons, short jumpsuits and bathers</p>
<p>hedonism, sensuality, sexuality</p>	<p>Ideas coded to the pleasure associated with and from cake and baked goods, including the representations of women serving, baking or practising within the books</p> <p>Aesthetic perfection that makes you salivate</p> <p>Shapely, smooth, hedonistic</p> <p>Richness, only a little bit needed</p> <p>Orgasmic experience</p> <p>Enticing, alluring, appealing</p>	<p>“Baking is great fun and rewarding” (<i>Baking Day</i>, 2012, p. 7)</p> <p>Throughout the texts:</p> <p>Descriptors: ‘chocolate’, ‘rich’, ‘smooth’, ‘sugary’, ‘buttery’, ‘creamy’</p> <p>Red colours used</p>

#### 4.2.3.4 Appetite and restraint: femininity and indulgence

This chapter examines how cultural notions of feminine appetite, excess and pleasure are implicitly transmitted within the cookbooks. The analysis is split into sections that interrogate the narrative of indulgence depicted in the cookbooks through the consumption of both images and ideas presented. It probes how feminine indulgence is intimately tied to proper ways of sharing and communicates the need to show restraint and moderation of appetite. Lastly, it discusses the emotionality of sweet food and how attached notions of illicit or ‘forbidden’ eating are communicated in the cookbooks by valorising corporeal control.

**Table 5: Theme Four**

<b>Appetite and Restraint: femininity and indulgence</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example from text</b>
Indulgence	extravagant decorative gold sumptuous aesthetic experience wealth taste temptation	<i>The Great Australian Baking Book</i> (2017), “Scones and sponge cakes with never-enough cream and jam. Desserts we love so much we are never too full for a second round – pavlova, apple crumble and sticky toffee pudding” (p. 8) <i>The Great Australian Baking Book</i> (2017): ‘Chocolate Eclairs’, pictured with topped glossy chocolate icing and perfectly piped creamy fillings, “do not fill more than 1-2 hours before serving or they will become soggy” (p. 278)
Emotionality & sweet food	excess emotionality overwhelming	<i>The Baking Collection</i> (2014), “everybody loves cakes and sponges” (p. 6)

	<p>happiness</p> <p>romanticised</p> <p>love</p> <p>care</p> <p>treats</p>	<p><i>Retro Baking</i> (2015): ‘Ginger and Lime Kisses’ (p. 127), ‘Caramel Apple Kisses’ (p. 128), ‘White Chocolate and Passionfruit Kisses’ (p. 131), ‘Chocolate Raspberry Kisses’ (p. 132) and ‘Spicy Banana Kisses’ (p. 124)</p> <p><i>Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics</i> (2015), “there’s something very comforting about small cakes, and the indulgence of a cupcake or small sweet treat with a cup of tea or coffee” (p. 150)</p>
<p>Illicitness &amp; ‘Forbidden’ Food</p>	<p>sin</p> <p>guilt</p> <p>decadent</p> <p>addiction</p> <p>chocolate</p> <p>sugar</p> <p>desire</p> <p>pleasure</p> <p>over-indulgence</p>	<p>“the main course was often followed by a slightly wicked dessert” (<i>Recipes to Remember</i>, 2016, p. 43)</p> <p><i>Retro Baking</i> (2015): ‘Mini Banana Blueberry Cakes’ (p. 156), ‘White Choc-Chip and Orange Mini Muffins’ (p. 240), ‘Mini Cherry Bakewell Tarts’ (p. 10), ‘Mini Chocolate Hazelnut Cake’ (p. 152) and ‘Mini Jam Drops’ (p. 170)</p> <p><i>The Baking Collection</i> (2014): ‘Wicked Choc Nut Bites’ (p. 260)</p> <p><i>Afternoon Tea</i> (2010): ‘Lemon Curd Tartlets’ (p. 75) ‘Small Cakes’ (p. 24) and ‘Lorraine’s Small Eclairs’ (p. 43)</p>
<p>Corporeal Control</p>	<p>curbed</p> <p>controlled</p> <p>craving</p>	<p><i>The Best-Ever Collection</i> (2013): ‘Raspberry Loaf Cake’ (p. 268) “this delicious loaf is low in</p>

feminine form	fat and sugar making it perfect for those
calorie	watching their diet”
evaluation	<i>The Great Australian Baking Book</i> (2017):
judgement	“there are no eggs in it, only ¼ cup of oil and no
regulation	dairy products – as long as you don’t ice it! My
fatness	husband would die if he read those last words I
	wrote, as icing is the whole point of a cake for
	him!” (p. 84)
	‘Guilt-free Caramel Slice’ (p. 236)

### 4.3 Overview of the research design

The examination of the cookbooks was a careful and repeated process to identify parallel ideas, patterns and trends that form the codes at the core of each theme. Every part of the cookbooks was considered when identifying codes to ensure that the process was continuous and rigorous and support for each code justified and able to critically substantiate conceived themes. This process underwent levels of refinement to garner more direction and clarification as data was gathered and compiled.

For *Mythmaking Australian Femininity*, examples and defining ideas that related specifically to Australian practices and concepts of baking and sweet foods were grouped together. Much of the data uncovered concepts to show how baking practice helped shape and direct the Australian character from pioneer days to contemporary notions of feminine ideals. Food examples and recipe commentary examples focused on a certain type of ahistorical remembering that reinforces other connected codes and concepts, like ‘filling the tins’. The linked and recurrent ideas identified built a picture

of a nostalgic longing for traditions and concepts of heritage and legacy able to encapsulate the practice of baking and linked to the pioneering spirit of a care-giving and providing feminine performance.

This led to the dedicated theme of *Baking as practice*, and the collation of examples, commentary, and image descriptions that focused on how baking is depicted as an essential part of the performance of femininity. This was expanded to include how baking connects to other representations of feminine behaviour, particularly domestic practice, or a type of ‘kitschification’ of femininity that includes the use, display and descriptions of objects. Significantly, objects or domestic environment/s presented in the data can be coded as ‘vintage’ or ‘retro’ to connect to nostalgic remembering, presented instead as a type of pastiche or simulacra of an idealised past and associated performance.

The third theme, *Sexuality, sensuality and feminine identity: baking for consumption*, brings together examples, commentary, images and narrative depictions of feminine performance as a type of fantasy that relies on heavily sensualised elements. These are identified via colours or words/phrases to evoke experiences in the reader, while inviting voyeuristic pleasure to be taken and consumed, particularly focused on aesthetic perfection and feminine ideals. There are also associations to the fantasy of consuming feminine sexuality and the hedonistic pleasure in the practice and eating of sweet food, connected wider to systems of consumer culture.

The final theme, *Appetite and Restraint: femininity and indulgence*, is formed around examples, images and narrative representations linked to indulgence and the aesthetic experience connected to temptation and sweet treats. These depictions are accompanied by pervasive messages of guilt, decadence, over-indulgence, and uncontrolled

emotionality, which seeks to moderate and show the ‘proper’ way to indulge. The examples collected here communicate a curbing of appetite or regulated indulgence by providing ‘healthier’ options tied intimately to the performance of femininity and baking culture.

Overall, at times the collected data proved difficult to separate and categorise specifically, and many of the codes seemed to overlap. However, through careful sorting and the development of definitions of each theme, the overlap shifted instead into intersecting and recurrent notions that were elaborated on to create a more cohesive whole.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Through use of a thematic, qualitative analysis, based on a meta-critical, interdisciplinary framework, a suitable methodology and research method was formulated for this study. A broad theoretical synthesis allowed for a critical, flexible and interrogative examination of the cookbooks, and a textual analysis probed deeper meanings and wider contexts represented in the data. By incorporating and implementing the elements discussed, a critical investigation into the material value of the cookbooks as popular culture texts was maintained, producing solid explanations of the relationship/s between cultural conceptions of femininity, and the role baking and sweet food play in shaping these notions on a broader social level.

## 5 Mythmaking Australian femininity: baking in historical context

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This truly spectacular cake comes from Yolán Frank...Yolán's cakes were legendary at cake stalls in Perth. Her Custard Chiffon recipe remained her closely guarded secret until she was finally convinced to share it with the Monday Morning Cooking Club. Since then, it has become her culinary legacy. Yolán lives on through her cake, and it is now well known all over the world. (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 88)

### 5.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have outlined the contextual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks for a robust interrogation of the relationship between symbolic representations of baking and sweet food found in contemporary Australian cookbooks and wider cultural notions of femininity, which will be carried out in the next four chapters. A closer examination of cookbooks provides deeper understanding of cultural identity and culinary tradition and delivers insights into practice and gendered obligations in relation to food (see works by Anne Bower, Rosalind Coward, Jean Duruz, Janet Floyd, Laurel Forster, Janet Theophano, Sian Supski). Relevant to this chapter's discussion are the historical connections of these notions and how past practices often relate directly to contemporary conceptions, emulating Seitz's (2006) suggestion that "the most engaging cookbooks are those which convey [a] sense of continuing history" (p. 167).

As with most food cultures, one of the most defining characteristics of Australian culinary tradition has been the continuing link to history—whether in methods,

ingredients, or in eating practices—becoming a rich, well written about and deliberated topic, particularly over concepts of Culinary Nationalism (Ferguson, 2010) and Gastronomic Authenticity (Symons, 1999). Scholastically, attention has been dedicated to identifying defining national dish/es; exploring adaptations in ingredients and recipes over time (Santich, 2012; Supski, 2006); and the evolution of technologies and methods from early Australian colonial days that shaped cultural cuisine (Bannerman, 1998; O’Brien, 2016). During the 1990s, Australian cuisine style was steadily celebrated by Sydney food columnist Cherry Ripe, who wrote about the ‘culinary cringe’ of Australian cooking, while championing what she described as ‘modern style’, “We have potentially the most exciting and eclectic cuisine in the world developing here, one that borrows from everywhere” to move “towards forging a culinary identity uniquely our own” (Ripe, 1993, p. 6).

It is this continual connection to past culinary shifts and modifications and contemporary baking practices seen within Australian cookbooks that this chapter will address. In particular, it will explore how each cookbook in this thesis exhibits both tacit and overt connections to an engrained heritage of baking, and how such is depicted in narratives central to understanding Australian cultural identity. Significantly, the historical connections presented form a backdrop for closer examination of feminine baking practices and specific performances suggested or enacted in imagery in the cookbooks, functioning to reaffirm dominant conceptions of a core baking culture and attached traditional femininity.

This chapter will also probe concepts of legacy, legend and tradition seen in the cookbooks. These prevalent ideas contain dominant notions of feminine labour, connoted via implications of pride and the importance of carrying on traditions within the family—often from mother to daughter/granddaughter—or passing on secret or

‘closely guarded’ methods and tips for the betterment of wider society are found throughout the cookbooks. In reference to the example at the beginning of this chapter, it is through the continual baking, sharing, and consumption of ‘Yolan’s Custard Chiffon Cake’ that the legacy of her feminine performance is emulated, and its tradition celebrated accordingly.

Drawing on scholarship that examines how cultural memory and collective identity are defined by “instruments” like repeated and reproduced stories “to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord... with the predominant thoughts of the society” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 40); emerging patterns of repetition and presentation will be examined for how they reflect or create a type of implicit propaganda (see Kingsbury, 2010; Staub, 2012) that communicates a pervasive type of ‘historic’ Australia, tied indubitably to a particular evocation of ideal feminine practice and performance. Depictions that emphasise a continual reach back to the past in recipes can be seen to deliberately conjure nostalgic responses—in the reader expressly but also culturally imagined—enhanced by imagery reminiscent of another era, and in commentary reflecting on “the way we used to cook and eat” (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, back cover). Noting this, this chapter further explores how images—both in general and of pictured food products—and descriptions of ingredients and process work together to present a culturally proscribed look and expected behaviour informed by historical and social notions that can be traced back representationally to early colonial days.

A crucial element to the study is the way the cookbooks function to form images of an idealised and historical Australian femininity by pervasively and recurrently depicting the performance of cooking and baking as essential practice. Drawing on theories on mythmaking, this chapter will examine the sense of yearning that occurs when past traditions are seen as lost or abandoned. Specifically, how the process of mythmaking

occurs during a simultaneous mourning of the ‘lost’ practices of baking within performances of femininity and the comfort and reassurance evoked by the reproduction of traditional methods, techniques and recipes (Duruz, 2005). Taking a wider view, baking can convey this continual and simultaneous mourning/reassurance and becomes a vivid method that attaches sentimentality re-imagined through practice. Significantly, the chapter considers how nostalgic and ideal domestic environments depicted in many of the cookbooks are thereby consumed as a pervasive ahistorical stereotype of a past Australian feminine performance that exists solely in collective imagination.

## **5.2 Shaping the Australian character**

Examination of the cookbooks provides a clearer idea of how aspects connected to Australian culinary and cultural traditions are reflected. In particular, a picture of the generic Australian character is shaped, viewed through traditions/conceptions of baking and baking practice. In the introduction of *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017), the stage is set for the reader/consumer by explaining that inside the book “you will find tried-and-true Aussie classics such as damper, hot cross buns, apple pie and lemon tart” (p. 8). The baked goods mentioned here—hot cross buns, apple pie, lemon tart—are very distinctive and recognisable [for more information on Damper refer to Appendix B] with clear connections to European, or more specifically, Anglo-Celtic Christian food traditions. That these are considered to be ‘tried and true’ Australian classics, indicates that the essential baking traditions expected in Australia is one connected to a certain cultural model of tradition. This builds a picture of ‘classic’ generic examples, particularly when such recipes reoccur across the cookbooks. Furthermore, as most cookbooks claim—or imply—historic connections, contextualising their contents to fit a perceived European baking tradition, to become examples that are, as Duruz’s (2005)

suggests, “naturalised, invisible, supposedly stripped of ‘ethnic’ interests and imperatives” (p. 24). In this way, dominant perceptions also function to shape a picture of the baker, and the type of sweet food that is, or should be, expected in the Australian repertoire. This seems largely disconnected to actual population make-up, as census data indicates that 49% of the current population are migrants—either first- or second-generation—as well as holding ninth position of countries with inhabitants born overseas (Hunt, 2017). The recurring depiction of these ‘generic’ recipes and baking practices as ‘typically’ Australian also seem incongruent when compared to contemporary identity conceptions of a multicultural and diverse society (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018).

Considering ideas of tradition, national identity, and food behaviour recalls the theories of Alan Warde (1997) and how the continuous “search for traditions to which one might return” is often fuelled by a “widespread feeling of insecurity or uncertainty induced by declining normative regulation or social belonging” (p. 64). This goes towards explaining why dominant perceptions of Australian baking practices and sweet foods are ‘naturalised’ or ‘stripped of ethnic imperatives’ due to changes in demographics, as a way to find comfort in ‘invented tradition’ and, as Warde (1997) suggests, a “social group membership that promises collective security and group identity” (p. 66) attached to ‘tried and true Aussie classics’. By framing concepts of ‘invented tradition’ in connection with femininity, a picture can be shaped of the baker to indicate a form of ‘culinary nationalism’ through recipes, cookbooks, and practice as “primary indicators of identity” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 102). These indicators are coded in the cookbooks to present a baker working to preserve tradition and hold close past practices and values in response to “pervasive worries of loss of identity” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 104).

*Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015) contextualises and links together notions of historicised methods and traditions of culinary nationalism within its recipes and wider Australian baking culture. The cookbook's introduction claims, "rich cakes, melt-in-the-mouth biscuits, light-as-air sponges and fluffy scones have held pride of place in the Australian kitchen since pioneering days" and "it's wonderful to know these recipes get passed down in families and continue to live on" (p. 6). What begins here and continues throughout, is a narrative that posits baking as an essential element of historic tradition that validates the performance of baking practice as part of the early Australian identity, enacted recurrently within the 'living text' of the recipe. This demonstrates Duruz's (1999) suggestions that the "collection and consumption of everyday nostalgic images" in cookery books creates a cultural and remembered imaginary style (p. 235), which in *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015) is recognisable via homemade baked goods—cakes, biscuits, sponges, scones—and the conflation of culinary practices shaped through a legacy of simplicity and 'pride of place in the Australian kitchen' to demonstrate cultural identity and evoke a sense of culinary nationalism. The example reveals a cultural and remembered style that is imaginary in that it evokes images of 'pioneering days' while providing a type of 'group identity' and 'collective security', showing the essential and comforting nature of Australian baking tradition.

The cookbooks continually affirm ideas of simplicity and tradition in Australian baking practice. *The Great Australian Baking Book's* (2017) introductory commentary openly declares such 'shared dispositions or customs', "...to our readers, we hope these recipes inspire you to create many delicious childhood and grown-up food memories for your friends and families" (p. 8). In crafting this specific motivation, the cookbooks ask readers to accept the "national imaginary ideal" (Duruz, 2005) of 'food memories' to confirm a consensus of what Australian traditional sweet foods—like the cakes,

biscuits, sponges and scones described in *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015)—look like, taste like and are expected to be like, or in contrast to these dominant conceptions, considered unfitting to Australian tastes. The repetition of narrative elements further reveals a communal connection through imagined practice, experience and what Warde (1997) contends as “acceptance of the authority of comparatively fixed or shared dispositions or customs of a social group” (p. 64). With these ‘shared dispositions or customs’ of baking traditions in mind, other ideas begin to emerge specific to the performances and practices of baking in Australia. Returning to *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015), many of the recipes are recognisably connected to Australian tradition, building a picture of the role baking played/plays in Australian Gastronomic Heritage. Within the cookbook, there is a consistent narrative that demonstrates how sweet foods specifically connect to the Australian character, and the relevance of the ‘classics’ label, which functions to uncover how culinary nationalism relates to the inclusion/exclusion of certain tastes and foods to indicate “how they fit together” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 102). When introducing ‘Blueberry Bran Muffins’, the cookbook explains, “Muffins introduced us to the wonderful blueberry. They do seem to work so well together. I think Australians embraced the muffin because it was so quick and portable and there were so many flavour variations” (*Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 71). Implied here are notions of adaptability [explored further in Section 5.4] in the Australian baker to embrace different flavours and ingredient variations, which ‘work so well together’ and intimate how widely practiced baking is assumed to be.

Correlations between baked goods and notions of the Australian character reoccurs in many of the recipes. ‘Raspberry and Almond Slab Cake’ is accompanied by the reasoning, “making a slab cake is a very Australian thing to do, isn't it? It's something

to take to people” (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 102). Certain ideas about gastronomic tradition in this narrative connects to other wider associations of character, such as adaptability and hospitality, and specifically to Australian references, as ‘slab’ is a common slang term that refers to a carton of 24 bottles or cans of beer, which is something usually brought to a party. The connection between baked goods and the shaping of the Australian character or historic experience has also been a topic of inquiry in culinary history. Historian Barbara Santich (2012) discusses the plentiful assortment of sweet recipes in early Australian cooking manuals, which were deemed to be more prevalent when compared to British culinary materials of the era:

The most remarkable feature of Australian recipe books from the 1890s until the post-war modern era has been the extraordinarily large proportion of recipes for sweet dishes—cakes large and small, biscuits and slices, puddings hot and cold, tarts and pies. (p. 184)

This observation, along with the examples explored in the cookbooks, reinforces ideas that baking remains a widespread practice in Australia and has played a significant role in shaping identity and character, both in culinary preferences and beyond. To reaffirm this further, the proliferation of sweet goods can also be seen in other observations from the early twentieth century which celebrated the embrace of this sweet culinary tradition and specifically connected it to the sphere of feminised labour. George Russell (1919), in *Lady Victoria Buxton: A Memoir with Some Account of her Husband*, remarks:

This should be called the ‘Land of Cakes’ by the way; the young ladies are remarkably good cake and scone makers and take much part in household work. There are cake-stalls at all the numerous sales and strawberry fêtes. (cited in Santich, 2012, p. 184)

Both the ‘extraordinarily large portion of recipes for sweet dishes’ and the labelling of Australia as the ‘Land of Cakes’ reiterates the popularity of sweet treats in Australian traditions, while connecting such practices to women and the realm of feminine domestic labour, ‘young ladies are remarkably good’, making such central to the spread of these ideas into the wider public sphere.

Links between sweet foods and specialised feminine labour can further be seen in the cookbook sections that refer or allude to cake stalls and the practice of making treats for public consumption or purchase. Specifically, two of the cookbooks feature sections that are dedicated to the practice of making specialty sweet goods that are recognisable, comforting, have saleability and appeal in order to fundraise for the community. In *Recipes to Remember* (2016) the narrative introduces the section ‘Fetes and Cake Stalls’ by showing a connection to traditional practice, “In the past, it was all about making as many home-made goodies as possible for the least amount of money, to sell at fetes” (p. 110-111). This narrative is nestled amongst the presentation of the familiar scene of a cake stall—a table with an assortment of sweet goods—that might be found at any fete or fair. The traditional nature of this practice is emphasised by the selection of recipes—Lamingtons, Anzac Biscuits, Banana Cake, Hummingbird Cakes, Toffee Apples, Gingernuts—that are familiar classics tagged with prices ready to be ‘purchased’ yet seem to be from another era. ‘Rhubarb Custard Tea Cake’ (p. 142-3) is shown cut into slices with an ‘8c each’ label attached.<sup>1</sup> This seems a disingenuous contemporary price and is therefore used deliberately to underscore the historic connections of the scene to the traditional practice of selling food at fetes made for, as the narrative suggests, ‘the least amount of money’ (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 110). This historic connection

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<sup>1</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Lamingtons (p. 333), Anzac Biscuits (p. 332), Hummingbird Cake (p. 333), and Tea Cake (p. 335)

is also emphasised by the placement of a vintage Kewpie doll next to the recipe, an artefact of the past, like the price of a slice of cake that categorically belongs in another era, yet all work to reaffirm the value and display of a specialised feminised labour in baking traditions.

*Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) also contains a section dedicated to ‘The Cake Stall’ (p. 212), with similar recipes that link familiarity, specialised feminised labour, and saleability of sweet goods. This section also alludes to traditional practice, as it shows a recipe for ‘Coconut Ice’ (p. 231), partitioned into squares in a jar advertising ‘2 for 5c’.<sup>2</sup> The recipe also contains a ‘Test Kitchen Classic’ stamp that seems to weave together all the elements, photographed with a filtered pink haze that leaves the edges of the picture unfocused and evokes an old-fashioned feel of past practices. These sections go towards highlighting the idea of baking practice in the public sphere, and significantly, how domestic implications are attached closely to notions of community as a required and/or expected component of such feminised labour. The contributions of feminised labour beyond the private and domestic sphere, and the way such connects to how baked goods and baking culture has shaped the Australian experience echoes debates of history which discuss the extent of women’s involvement in creating the nation. In particular, Marilyn Lake, writes about the effect that ordinary woman had, and how feminised labour built, created and sustained communities, and played a key role in shaping the Australian nation and character (in Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath & Quartly, 1994). This seems plausible when looking at proliferation of sweet foods to Australian gastronomic tradition and the subsequent links to conceptions of femininity.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes on Coconut Ice* (p. 332)

Within ‘The Cake Stall’ section in *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) there are familiar Australian treats, which would be expected at a cake stall or fete. Although the recipes shown in these sections indicate a past time, the baking of and selling of sweet treats for fundraising purposes is still an expected part of contemporary community practice. This is also emphasised in the narrative of *Recipes to Remember* (2016), which reminds the reader of some useable tips when looking to contribute to a cake stall or fete, “The recipes in this chapter are all highly saleable. Package items with stall-appeal in mind, sealing them well to keep airtight and fresh. List ingredients and any other helpful hints in the packaging” (p. 111). That these tips are for a reader to put into action in present day, points towards how prized this tradition of labour is within contemporary conceptions of feminised practice and how essential it remains to understanding the Australian character and experience. The historical evidence that correlates sweet dishes to Australian baking practice is convincing enough for Santich (2012) to posit that baking sweets came to then define the nature of and shifts of interests in Australian fare and behaviour in the kitchen, while constructing an expectation of the practice into Australian domestic performance.

The repetition of similar recipes across the cookbooks, along with narrative acknowledgements of traditions that are carried with and/or by particular sweet foods, reinforce the predominant role of sweet food in Australian baking practice by creating a type of repertoire that becomes expected in such collections. For example, every book in the study has a recipe for Lamingtons—with variations in ingredients, method or appearance—acknowledging the significance of the sweet to Australian historical baking practice and tradition. In *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015), the narrative explains that Lamingtons are “a popular Australian cake thought to have been made for a tea party for Lord Lamington, who served as Governor of Queensland from

1896 to 1901” (p. 155). The pictured creations are presented on an ornate tray in the process of being shared and eaten indicated by half-filled tea cups and forks—reaffirming the historic value and continued tradition of the recipe [see Section 5.6 of this chapter for further discussion on historic connections and tea culture in Australia].

More variant Lamington recipes are contained in other cookbooks, and although the main ingredients of coconut and sponge cake are ever-present, there are recipes that suggest using white chocolate instead of the customary cocoa-based icing (*The Baking Collection*, 2014, p. 280), or to remove the jam filling component (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 127), or substitute in other ingredients or flavours. By far, the most variations in recipe—even within the production of the sponge cake component—are in *The Great Australian Bake-Off Companion* (2016), which features recipe adaptations—or perhaps mutations—that are more complex in method and technique than the traditional recipe and challenge the conception of the Lamington itself. Lamingtons could be seen as a stand-in for the varied notions of femininity that exist, and as an ever-evolving concept that remains understood in some manner yet is subject to cultural and changing ideas. For example, recipes such as *Cream Tiramisu Lamingtons* (p. 72) *Pandan Lamington Cake* (p. 133) challenge the traditional taste and nature of the cake; while other variations see the cake shift into something more grandstanding, like *Lemingtons* (p. 103) made with lemon essence and filled with citrus curd; and *Limingtons* (p. 117) with lime icing and green food colouring. The variation of Lamington recipes implies a tradition of creativity and resourcefulness, just like conceptions of femininity, where the core practice and legacy of a sweet food can be celebrated and built on, even while elements are adjusted or modified for differing tastes or cultural contexts. These variations still connect to the expectation of a traditional Australian sweet but show a change in flavours closely linked to the evolution of

contemporary Australia, with room for Pandan and citrus as new “idiosyncratic Australian adaptations” (Duru 1999, p. 236). These adaptations also apply to symbolic meanings of baking, performance, consumption, and cultural conceptions of femininity which evolve and shift, yet remain connected to historic ideas, like the Lamington’s link to tea traditions and old-fashioned practice, anchored to sweet food, nation-building, and shaping the Australian character.<sup>3</sup>

### 5.3 Legacy of tradition

In order to further understand the engrained baking practice in Australian tradition and its connection to a feminised performance, attention must be given to the way notions of legacy and heritage are presented in the cookbooks. In many of the recipes, there are elements that indicate historic origins and traditional practice of baking culture, as well as the evolution or adaptability of methods and ingredients that has occurred to suit more contemporary tastes or technologies. In *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015), narrative that accompanies some of the recipes present a historic fact or extend further into a personal historic connection to the food. The ‘Hints & Tips’ section (pp. 14-15) provides practical advice on making biscuits including instructions on how they should be properly shaped, refrigerated, rolled, and cut. Amongst this advice, there is historical context, “the first biscuits were small, flat cakes that were baked twice to make them crisp (the word biscuit means ‘twice cooked’ in French)”, that allows readers to extend their focus beyond just the recipe (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 14). This narrative flourish gives some indication of the origins, French, and etymological knowledge, but also functions to ground the practice of baking biscuits in a legacy that retains past significance in present incarnations. It reminds readers of the

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<sup>3</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Lamingtons (p. 333) and Tiramisu (p. 335)

ability of food to contain complexity and symbolic meaning that move beyond just a recipe or a set of ingredients. In the case of this cookbook, the historical narrative purposefully works to enhance the ‘classic’ theme to the recipes included—also signalled via the title, narrative elements and the way the cookbook is visually put together—to substantiate the cultural conceptions that past traditions still influence contemporary trends or tastes.

The examination of the cookbooks reveals the use of a historical narrative to demonstrate the key factors of past traditions. Specifically, published compilations from *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, including: *The Best-Ever Collection* (2013), *Retro Baking* (2015), *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016), *Baking Day* (2012), *The Baking Collection* (2014), *Recipes to Remember* (2016) and *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) provide solid examples of this in action. Each of these cookbooks contain a ‘tried-and-tested’ label, either stamped in gold on the cover or on individual recipes, used to seemingly validate the contents. *The Best Ever Collection* (2013) outlines on its back and inside cover that “This special collection of recipes captures the culinary journey we’ve taken with *The Weekly* since it began in 1933” and “This wonderful collection of best ever recipes from *The Weekly* is every bit a part of your cooking history as it is ours”. The words chosen in these excerpts are staunch in their assertions that the recipes are a crucial part of Australian culinary legacy — ‘your cooking history’— which along with the repetition of “best ever” seen throughout the book, persistently functions to associate *The Australian Women’s Weekly* with superior baking tradition and historic practice. This recurrence builds the implication that these books exist as a type of tome that safeguards tradition and ensures generational quality, heavily reminiscent of Ranger and Hobsbawm’s (1983) concepts of ‘Invented Tradition’ and how a constructed set of practices take on a symbolic brand via repetition

to establish themselves as a solid connection of/to the past. There is a reassurance built by the repetition witnessed across books and years, imbuing the brand with authority and trust. Implied within the historical narratives is the notion that safeguarding traditions is the work of women—Margaret Fulton and *The Australian Women's Weekly*—and assumes it is part of feminised legacy.

*The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) further concretises the connection between authority, legacy, and feminised labour. The inclusion of certain recipes contributed by members of the Country Women's Association (CWA) clearly implies this connection. Merle Parrish, "CWA member, author and baking champion" contributed her *Peach Blossom Cake* (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 78) to the compilation, which contrary to its name, does not actually contain Peach Blossoms, but rather uses coloured food dye to create a marbled effect in the cake. The recipe evokes an old-fashioned approach to baking by encouraging the use of basic ingredients that are not too foreign or unfamiliar, presenting a cake that seems comforting and expectantly home-baked. The inclusion of this recipe—and its deliberately emphasised details—conveys how the CWA branding works to both privilege the legacy and history of Australian baking practice, and the practice of women, particularly when their baking compilations are taken into consideration. For years the CWA has compiled and published what they regard as the 'best' versions of traditional recipes contributed and voted on by their members to feature in their annual 'Calendar of Cakes'.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Santich's (2012) assertion that "inherited tradition is much more prevalent than the new Australian inventions among the CWA members' contributions" (p. 198) further levels of complexity can be determined tying baking tradition intricately to feminine practice.

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on the CWA's influence on Australian conceptions of baking and feminine space see section 2.5, pp. 32-33

The other notable contribution by CWA “baking champion” Merle Parrish is a ‘Pavlova’ recipe (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 262) decorated in a very customary and expected—Australian—way with berries, passionfruit and whipped cream. This image connects the iconic value of the recipe to legacy and tradition, as the cake is considered an achievement of baking practice in Australia, or as Santich (2012) posits, the Pavlova represents “the pinnacle of antipodean creativity” (p. 221).<sup>5</sup>

The CWA has played a part in romanticising Australian baking practice to ensure the survival or longevity of innovative new cakes and biscuits created the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century by adopting them into CWA communities and incorporating them into cookbooks, to actively guard against newly invented recipes which provided “insufficient advantage or distinctiveness for them to be worth retaining” (Santich, 2012, p. 199). This is a type of feminised labour that remains a core component of the Australian character, particularly as this tradition may have begun as attempting to bake in difficult environments and extended into a sustained practice of, as Historian Jennifer Issacs (1987) notes, “the most Australian of customs, ‘making do’” (p. 46) with ingredients, materials and “opportunities for women’s inventiveness and ingenuity” (p. 60) to produce innovative new cakes and biscuits then adopted by the CWA. This also shows links to a form of culinary nationalism and the preservation of perceived identity that may be under threat. By ensuring the sustained practice of certain recipes, conception of a femininity that is creative and inventive in baking yet respectful of tradition is protected and maintained.

Many of the cookbooks take up the romanticised picture of particular and persistent feminine practice by focusing their narrative on a historic hardy pioneer doing the

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<sup>5</sup> For further information on Pavlova’s role in Australian baking tradition see Appendix B on *Iconic Cakes* (p. 329); or for discussion on Pavlova’s connection to conception to Australian ideal of femininity see section 3.6 (p. 54)

essential job of keeping the ‘tins’ filled for family and un/expected guests. *Baking Day* (2012) describes how baking and ‘filling the tins’ were a recurring and expected routine or duty, where:

The baker in the family set aside one day a week to make cakes, biscuits, tarts, pies, bread etc. – whatever the family required for that week. The baked goods were usually stored in airtight tins at room temperature. (p. 6)

The outline of an expected weekly routine, with very specific described behaviour—setting aside a whole day to bake and fill the tins in order to feed the family—demonstrates the significance of such a lifestyle event and the essential role baked goods played to all the participants. *Baking Day* (2012) further extends on this narrative in a section dedicated to ‘Filling the Tins’, by providing the explanation for its title:

Not so long ago, on baking day, the tins were filled with homemade biscuits and cakes sufficient to last the week ahead. Lunch boxes, tea trays and suppertime – there were so many occasions to provide for. (p. 103)

To emphasise this particular narrative, the section is peppered with illustrated women practising the described labour, cutting up brownies and cakes, stacked tins full of sweet baked foods ‘sufficient to last the week ahead’ in the background, rolls of baking paper ready for the next batch of goods to be baked for all the required ‘occasions’.

Underlining the narrative and visual elements in *Baking Day* (2012) is a palpable sense of yearning for the historical practice and for a time ‘not so long ago’ when feminine labour was devoted to this essential duty and actively celebrated it.

These elements—descriptions, images, undercurrents—all function to mythologise the feminine labour presented, reminiscent of Barthes’ (1975) concepts, where:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. (p. 266)

Barthes' (1973) attention to how myth functions to reveal the way ideas can be naturally justified is perceived throughout the cookbooks in presentations of femininity.

Significantly, the account of 'the baker of the family' in the cookbooks—heavily implied to be the mother or grandmother—routinely providing 'whatever the family required for the week' can be read as a mythologised tale of nurturing and devoted feminised labour, a 'purified' and 'eternally' appealing frame of historic Australian baking practice. Examining other cookbooks also exposes the function of myth in building a narrative. *Retro Baking* (2015) and *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) both go further in specifying the exact conduct and behaviours around the feminised practice of baking, explaining that:

Back then... Baking was done routinely by stay-at-home mums, usually once a week, so there was always something sweet and delicious to have for children's lunch boxes or after school snacks, or for when friends dropped in for a 'cuppa'.  
(p. 7)

This reads as though it is a widely held and oft repeated idea which lends authority to it being accepted as a 'statement of fact', deeply-rooted in the direct connection to feminine role—stay-at-home mums—and matched with a sense of established and expected behaviour—baking done once a week for children or friends. The mythologised duty of 'filling the tins' substantiates wider conceptions of historic Australian feminine baking practice and firmly makes this labour the task of women,

affirming it an undisputed part of past tradition. The depiction of this concept within the cookbooks presents comfort and reassurance reinforced by a full tin of baked goods tempered with a mourning—or yearning—for the lost practice (Duruz, 1999) of a whole day for women to produce ‘sweet and delicious’ fare for children, family, and friends to enjoy.

## 5.4 Adaptation and invention

Continuing along this line of inquiry, many historians have connected the popularity of baking and cakes—reinforced by a continual need to ‘fill the tins’—in Australian traditions together with the ability of women to use such as an outlet for creativity and adaptation. Santich (2012) explains that the:

...possible and more persuasive explanation for all these cakes and biscuits, is that they represented female creativity. The monotony of main course dishes destined to satisfy male appetites—mutton boiled or roast, roast or boiled—would have given little outlet to a cook’s talent and imagination. If she wanted to be creative, imaginative, feminine even, or if she wanted to display particular skills, cakes and sweet dishes offered the ideal opportunity. (p. 187)

Drawing on these assertions, closer examination uncovers that within certain recipes, especially those with historic links to other cuisines or traditions, a noticeable pattern emerges of modified or re-interpreted ingredients functioning to show a unique Australian flavour or spin. Narratives that explain the incorporation and variation of various new techniques or ingredients—many of them local and/or nativised to Australia—are also common to many of the cookbooks. Considering Warde’s (1997) categories of tradition and how “sustaining the continuous development of a practice

necessitates embellishment or adaptation... creativity in this regard may be praised as valid improvisation on tradition” (p. 64), many modified recipes in the cookbooks explored are claimed as a part of traditional baking practice. *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) contains many recipes that show changes or acknowledge specific Australian shifts, while still emphasising the historic links present. One such example is the ‘Victoria Sponge’ in which the narrative explains:

This is the foundation of all sponges. It’s an English way of making a sponge. With this Sponge, in particular, it’s all about having the right proportions. The old way of doing it is to put the eggs on one end of the scale and the flour, sugar and butter on the other end to get equal qualities. I don’t always add cream to a Victoria Sponge, I sometimes ice it or have it as a plain butter cake. (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 114)

The acknowledgement of old traditions, ‘English Way’, ‘old way’, shows the celebration and continuing presence of history in practice, as recipes for ‘Victoria Sponge’ first appeared in the 1860s.<sup>6</sup> The recipe in this case—and accompanying image—includes passionfruit icing, which considering the emphasised historical aspects of the recipe, becomes then a somewhat Australian embellishment and ‘valid improvisation’.

Passionfruit has long been a durable part of Australian cuisine, transported and “partially naturalized in coastal areas of Queensland before 1900” (Morton, 1987, p. 321) and has a solid status in consumer taste and choice. This example fits well with research into early Australian cuisine and practice, evidenced by culinary historian

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* (p. 332) for further information

Colin Bannerman's (1998) work, which asserts that although food in early Australian cookbooks:

was overwhelmingly English in origin and quite recognisably English in style, there was plenty of evidence that colonial cooks had been busy adopting imported traditions to local needs. The process of adaptation was not led by teachers and reformers but took place in ordinary kitchens in response to the daily realities. (p. 83)

The implication here is through practice, tradition can be forged and validated within 'ordinary kitchens' and with available ingredients. Through shifts in creative variations and adaptations Australian baking repertoire was shaped by domestic practice responsible for 'sustaining', adapting and embellishing tradition, while prompting development and improvisation in cookbooks. *The Baking Collection* (2014) includes a variation of a classic cake, with a recipe for 'Coconut Sponge Cake' that is served with Passionfruit Cream (p. 114), which demonstrates these shifts that sustain the continuous practice of a touchstone of British baking—sponge—adapted to suit a developing/developed Australian taste. The addition of passionfruit to many of the recipes included also connects to Santich's (2012) suggestion that from early on, "Australian cooks embraced the passionfruit with exuberance" (p. 200), and thus goes towards explaining how an innovation in flavour was incorporated into many classic or traditional sweets. *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) readily gives licence for baking interpretations with ideas to "Jazz up a Victoria Sponge" by suggesting Passionfruit Cream filling—which consists of passionfruit pulp and heavy cream—and pronouncing to readers that "you can't go past passionfruit during summer" (p. 63). Deeper interrogation of the cookbooks reveals an incorporation of passionfruit throughout, some examples include 'Passionfruit Shortbread', 'White Chocolate and

Passionfruit Kisses’, ‘Passionfruit Melting Moments’, Lamingtons with Passionfruit Jam’, to signal a “continuous development” (Warde, 1997) of tradition, embellished and adapted to become a normalised and essential component of the Australian baking repertoire.<sup>7</sup> The enthusiasm for adaptation has been explored in culinary histories that indicate how early traditions of baking were heartily embraced by Australian colonial cooks. Specifically, Charmaine O’Brien’s (2016) descriptions of how late 19<sup>th</sup> century “colonial cooks had developed a reputation for their enthusiasm and skill in producing cakes, biscuits, puddings and desserts” much in part to the “ample and affordable supply of...base ingredients” which allowed for a diversity of culinary creations (p. 147). The ample supply and embrace of passionfruit as an ordinary ingredient in classic fare is accepted as standard in many of the cookbooks, and a part of baking practice, regardless of how far it digresses from the original essence of the recipe. As well as this, the implication is heavy here as to who can be referred to as a ‘colonial cook’, namely women employing “enthusiasm and skill’ and adapting the ample supply of native ingredients—passionfruit—to create something distinctly Australian. The long embrace of Passionfruit seems to have given it a valid place in Australian baking tradition to the degree that it is an expected ingredient or embellishment.

Notions of innovation and adaptability as naturalised parts of Australian baking tradition can also be traced within cookbooks that aim to provide a historical overview beyond instruction witnessed in early published cookbook materials. In an early *Australian Women's Weekly* Cookbook collection (1980), one of the first of its kind to collate cake and sweet baking recipes without including a savoury section, the introductory narrative explains how many new cake and biscuit recipes became a

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<sup>7</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Lamingtons (p. 333) and Melting Moments (p. 334)

standard part of the Australian culinary repertoire, even as “at its core...remained the standards of English baking—the scones and sponges and butter cakes—as adopted by Australian women as the basis of their variations and elaborations which simultaneously represented an Australianisation of the imported tradition” (Santich, 2012, p. 200). This indicates that early baking practices fused aspects of creativity, innovation and adaptability and established them as an expected part of a feminised domestic performance, deemed almost as necessary as the ability to re/produce sweet food.

Adaptations and shifts in baking practice also integrated the use of other localised ingredients—such as coconut and pineapple—into older established recipes, that were tacitly incorporated and repeatedly transmitted through the cookbooks and subsequent editions and republished recipes, eventually to be seen as ordinary within the Australian baking context. Coconut, in particular, “found its niche among the cakes and biscuits”, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, access and industry around it expanded, and its import and manufacture developed to a sizeable scale (Santich, 2012, p. 201). This, combined with the practice of modifying recipes, somewhat explains the ubiquitous presence of coconut in the cookbooks, which can be found in a varying number of sweet foods, beyond the Lamington—some examples include ‘Coconut Sponge with Passionfruit Icing’ and ‘Passionfruit and Coconut Curd Tarts’. While drawing further on Ranger and Hobsbawm’s (1983) assertions of invented traditions, the cookbooks display how the continued rituals of baking practiced as part of essential feminised labour were readily modified or abandoned to meet changing needs and Australian values.

*Recipes to Remember* (2016) contains advertisements that once featured in *Australian Women’s Weekly Magazine* circa 1960 with a notable example which showcases how valued Coconut was in Australian cooking. In the advert for ‘Chocolate Crackles’

(*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 14), the use of Copha—vegetable fat shortening made from hydrogenated coconut oil—is promoted:

Did you know that the much-loved chocolate crackles are true-blue Australian? We're the only country in the world to make Copha – the ingredient that binds crackling rice bubbles and chocolatey cocoa together. (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 14)<sup>8</sup>

There is a sense of pride that underlies this narrative of unique innovation, ‘the only country in the world’, connecting back to notions of culinary nationalism and identity, ‘true-blue Australian’, and expresses a celebration of inventiveness in Australian bakers. Echoing Santich’s (2012) suggestions that “inventiveness” in Australian baking came about “as an expression of creativity or femininity, or a response to hard times and straitened economic circumstances, or simply a practical solution to a seasonal surplus” (p. 223), a connection here is revealed that substantiates the relationship between baking practice, femininity, and invented tradition. The continual practice of home and colonial cooks found a way to be creative and adaptable even in harsh environs, and this feminised labour blended together the legacy of traditions with a distinct Australian sensibility. The abundant use of Coconut within the cookbooks—and wider baking culture—seems to fit each of the categories that prompted such inventiveness and whether it was initially used in innovation or due to ease of access, its use has been naturalised as a practical part of Australian baking tradition.

The influence of Pineapple can also be noted throughout the cookbooks, although, perhaps not to the same extent as Coconut has. *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) includes typical recipe for Carrot Cake, yet suggests the addition of canned

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<sup>8</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Chocolate Crackles (p. 332)

Pineapple, to give an Australianised twist, explaining “the idea of mixing in a can of pineapple seems extraordinary, but it works” (p. 109). Pineapple, like other ingredients explored, has a long and established history in the Australian diet and dates back to 1858, when transported from other British colonies (Okihiro, 2009). It has become a common ingredient within Australian cooking tradition, both in savoury and in sweet dishes, and yet its incorporation—here, and in other cookbooks—seems ordinary, whilst the reaction of an outsider, not familiar with this ingredient’s popularity or tradition of use could possibly question its inclusion in such familiar cake recipes. *Afternoon Tea* (2010) contains ‘Marshmallow Tart’ (p. 88) that calls for canned Pineapple, which reinforces the tacit legacy of the fruit in sweet dishes of all varieties and creative adaptations.

An ‘Australianisation’ of imported baking traditions can be seen in several recipe reworkings noticeable in the cookbooks. The improvisation or substitution of ingredients fits well with research on the early tradition of Australian cooks, who:

...invented and innovated. Sometimes from necessity, sometimes by serendipity and occasionally by using unorthodox methods, they adopted and domesticated indigenous ingredients and transformed foods and recipes from other countries, along the way establishing the basis of an Australian tradition. (Santich, 2012, p. 3)

The adoption of Indigenous foods is demonstrated clearly in ‘Bush Fruit Christmas Cake’ (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 98). The method and ingredients of this cake show similarities to a traditional fruit cake recipe yet call for additional fruits and nuts—specifically indigenous Australian ingredients—such as Quandong, both fresh and in jam form, Bush Tomatoes, Macadamia Nuts, Pepperberries, and

Wattleseeds. This example contains an unorthodox blend of native ingredients transforming the very traditional and well-established fruit cake into a distinctly Australian ‘improvisation’.

Within the cookbooks, many of the recipes elucidate in their accompanying narratives the influences present in Australian baking tradition and attempt to trace—to a certain extent—the subsequent incorporation into popular repertoire. Variations are shown in recipes for puddings, pies and tarts throughout the cookbooks, which can be traced to the national cuisine of other cultures yet are reworked and adapted to suit contemporary multicultural Australian tastes or ingredients. Examining the ingredients/variations from other traditions incorporated into recipes reveals the use of pistachio, pomegranate, tamarillo, chai, tahini, miso, yuzu, mascarpone, ricotta, cardamom, and figs; while specific recipes indicate how “multiculturalism reflects the ‘reality’ of Australia” (Hage, 2012, p. 190) by inviting readers to produce Panna Cotta, Tiramisu, Greek Custard Pie, Amaretti, Streusel, Kugelof, Dobos Torte (Three Milks Cake), Banana Fritters, and Baklava. The recipes and ingredients may be internationally recognisable, yet seem to fit within Australian baking collections, reminiscent of Warde’s (1997) ideas of incorporation of foods into tradition, where the familiar can become customary and a subsequent established part of national practice.

To illustrate further, *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) has a recipe for Crème Brûlée with Native Berry Coulis (p. 260), where indigenous Lilli Pilli Berries are used; in a similar way, *The Baking Collection* (2014), introduces a very American sweet treat with a unique Australian spin in the Lamington Whoopie Pie (p. 171). Both these variations seem to show how an Australian adaptation of classic recipes is a very normal and expected part of baking tradition, and the variation of a customary recipe strives to inspire ingenuity rather than a break or disconnect with tradition, the practice

of which invites improvisation and creativity in its reader. In the same way, the variation of recipes links back to colonial cooks improvising and creating such in their ‘bush’ kitchens using whatever ingredients they could find/substitute/experiment with in their practice.

## 5.5 Tea traditions

Examining the legacy of baking in Australian culinary traditions draws focus to the impact and influence of British customs and rituals. Specifically, close inspection reveals how each of the cookbooks features sweet dishes that significantly allude to imported British rituals of taking tea. Whether in the form of baked goods pictured as accompanied by a tea party, afternoon tea service or read in the elements of tea culture—teapots, cups of all varying sizes and patterns, saucers, spoons, tiered serving platters, tea cosies—the link to tea traditions is evident. Each cookbook embraces aspects of inherited tea culture and British—or Anglo-Celtic—core traditions, and some go further with narrative sections that describe the consumption of tea as interminably intertwined with the consumption of baked goods. *Baking Day* (2012) features an ‘All About Tea’ section—also replicated in *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017)—with a short description of Australian adoption and adaption:

Tea has a rich and complex history that dates back hundreds of years and spans countries all over the world. The traditions and ceremonies that have developed around the drinking of tea are fascinating and exceptionally varied, often reflecting the culture of their origin. (p. 10)

In the cookbooks, the ritual of Afternoon Tea factors highly in baking practice and its deeply rooted influence on ideal feminine performance. There is some scholarship that

supports this deeply rooted connections and how Australians incorporated tea drinking and afternoon tea into their everyday. Helen Saberi (2012) traces the way tea culture was readily adopted into Australian way of life, starting with the outback tradition of using a billy can, “a kind of simple tin with a metal wire handle”, that was filled with creek water and hung atop a fire to boil, and then in order to “settle the tea leaves to the bottom, the billy is swung back and forth at arm’s length or swung round the head three times” and poured into tin mugs (p. 123). This early outback practice then evolved into a widely-embraced cultural practice, as “Australians were the greatest black tea-drinkers at the beginning of the twentieth century” (Saberi, 2012, p. 124). However, tea culture reaches beyond just the consumption of tea. *Baking Day* (2012) and *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) further expand on tea culture and its significance, using it as a way to explain how the baking practice of sweet food shows direct links to past culinary traditions:

In London, as early as the 1700s, tea drinking was embraced as a social activity. It became popular to entertain guests in one’s home and serve tea. Of course, it didn’t take long for the art of afternoon tea to be perfected. Scones, pastries, sandwiches and cakes accompanied black tea with milk, carefully brewed to create the finest possible cup. (*Retro: The Complete Collection*, 2017, p. 10)

The way that tea is depicted in the cookbooks highlights the important tie of baking culture to the practice of an accompanying tea service—scones, pastries, cakes, accompanied by carefully brewed tea. It also suggests a carefully viewed and evaluated social act with exacting standards, the ‘art’ of tea. Even with Australian adaptations the ritual is still connected to a proscribed set of rules and expectations of both the tea service, accompanying food, but also an associated gendered performance.

*Recipes to Remember* (2016) provides a historical description in ‘Tea Time’ and gives some context to the recipes and how Australian adaptations were shaped. The description presented is not entirely accurate, as it confuses high tea with low tea (Moffat, 2012), but the narrative functions to explain the origins of the long-standing tradition of afternoon tea:

We inherited morning, afternoon and high tea from Britain where they were enjoyable rituals that broke up the main meals of the day. High tea was often a light meal in the late afternoon, later followed by supper. All three could be elegant affairs, with the best china, silver and napery on show. Both sweet and savoury food was served, some just dainty mouthfuls while others were more substantial – always with tea. (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 8-9)

Even though some of the historical particulars may be imprecise, the general explanation of the significance of the event is reminiscent of other accounts, in particular, Helen Saberi’s examination in *Tea: A Global History* (2012), which discusses how:

Afternoon tea began to be served in the drawing room and became more elaborate and the focus for social visits. Dainty sandwiches, biscuits, cakes and pastries were served. Elegant tea-ware in silver or fine bone china, cake stands, sandwich trays, sugar tongs and tea strainers were the height of fashion. Tables were laid with embroidered or lace cloths and serviettes. Afternoon tea became a special occasion. (pp. 103-104)

Many of the cookbooks depict the expected rituals of tea culture with a modified Australian spin, just as the descriptions above indicate. The significance of the ritual beyond just the drinking of tea or eating of food becomes clearly represented in the

cookbooks by ‘elegance’ and the ‘height of fashion’, and coded as feminine, ‘dainty’.

The accoutrements of tea culture—best china, silver, napery—required which are just as elaborate, if not more so, than the service itself. Ultimately, significance is placed on all of the ritualised components as required parts to properly emulate the historic tradition.

The ritual of afternoon tea often depicted in the cookbooks is not the elaborate affair described or attributed to high tea, but instead as *Baking Day* (2012) states, “Today, tea drinking is much more relaxed” (p. 10). Interrogation of the cookbooks shows a casual adaptation both in commentary and presentation revealing Isaacs’ (1987) ideas on the nature of the Australian tea ceremony, which despite adoption of tea rituals brought by early colonists with all the essential embellishments, varied from the Victorian art form, and instead “signified rest, refreshments and pleasant conversation” (p. 52). *Afternoon Tea* (2010) demonstrates this by inviting readers to “...put on your apron and set the table, it’s **afternoon tea** time [original emphasis]” (inside cover) which combined with the simple depictions of food and contributor descriptions reminiscing experiences of afternoon tea, communicates a relaxed approach, further distancing the experience from the refined elegance outlined as part of afternoon tea origins. The narrative here echoes Isaacs’ (1987) descriptions, where “wearing kitchen aprons, women served the tea and biscuits with little ceremony” (p. 52), that grew unassumingly to become an essential routine. The descriptions are still coded feminine, yet less focus is placed on ‘elegance’ or using the ‘proper’ components, and instead the ‘apron’ becomes an expected part of the practice. This signals a departure from refined British traditions, as serving tea and baked goods in an apron seems to indicate a casual approach, rather than a carefully proscribed ritual.

However, interrogation of the cookbooks still shows the significance of certain accoutrements of afternoon tea as well-established accompaniments of the ritual

required to ensure a proper experience. Common all of the cookbooks are repeated and recurrent presentations of the various stages or modes of afternoon tea in action.

Background—and sometimes out-of-focus—depictions of old-fashioned kitchens, with scratched and faded paint, decorated as if from older eras, full of cabinets with eclectic collections of teapots, cups, canisters, coffee pots, measuring jugs, sugar bowls, spoons, plates, and tea cosies. These elements allude to the engrained and deeply-rooted nature of the social custom—even as a very relaxed affair—shown by the carefully staged backgrounds of many recipes. The act of taking tea and sharing freshly baked sweets socially is very much rooted in the centre of the domestic environment, or the pride of place that is the kitchen. This too goes towards explaining the importance of tea culture to Australian households and the legacy of feminine practice, where taking tea was a part of the everyday domestic and as “the longing for a ‘sit-down’ in the middle of the housewife’s hard day, together with the love of embellishment itself gave rise to a flowering of domestic arts associated with tea making” (Isaacs, 1987, p. 52). The use of embellishments throughout the cookbooks support how important the proper implements and decorative effects are to the routine, demonstrating the ‘art’ required domestically to produce enjoyment for all involved, particularly women or ‘housewives’.

Much of the narrative that can be read around the emphasis on tea culture in the cookbooks provides a solid connection to the consumption of sweet food. Specifically, sections of the books which link to the ritual of afternoon tea—or just present the implication—by the prevalence of tea in tea cups; the presence of tea pots, tea bags, milk jugs and sugar bowls; and, by the sweet foods pictured being served or eaten alongside. A connection of creativity in baked sweet goods alongside the special focus

on the embellishments and ceremony of afternoon tea is summarised amply in *Afternoon Tea* (2010) contributor Natasha Linskill's memory of baking with her Nan:

...it was always an afternoon-long ritual. It was never just chucking ingredients in a bowl. Every time we'd bake, we'd use the exact same bowls, the exact same transparent green Tupperware strainer, the exact same faded brown plastic spatula that was melted at the tips, so it curled up. After our concoctions had baked and cooled Nan would lay her table with one of her own hand crocheted tablecloths, a pot of tea, and some of her amazing teacup and saucer sets. Then the three of us would sit, drink, talk and enjoy the fruits of our labour together for afternoon tea. (p. 95)

There is a sense of ritual attached to the practice of afternoon tea, seen in the very specialised creation of foods to eat with very particular implements—some of which are hand-made or treasured—along with the experience of having the tea itself. The recollection reveals Santich's (2012) suggestion that “cakes and biscuits and afternoon tea goodies belonged to the domain of women; theirs was not only the consumption but also the production” (p. 187), and how the pleasure attached to the memory of baking with Nan places it in feminine practice and afternoon tea in the ‘domain of women’. The pleasure is enhanced by taking afternoon tea together, which connects and deepens the ritual of the productive and consumptive elements; as one action without the other would not have caused such profound recollection.

The tea culture described and depicted in many of the cookbooks is made to seem deliberately intrinsic to historicised and ritualised feminine practice, deeply engrained with elements of a soothing, welcoming, and nurturing performance. In *Baking Day* (2012) the combination of practice and consumption, along with vital embellishments

allows for this performance or practice to be so meaningful, “There is something universally soothing about the time-honoured ritual of making a cup of tea and all its attendant traditions – hand-stitched napery, pretty china, dainty sandwiches and, of course, home-baked delights” (p. 9). This communicates Duruz’s (2005) assertion that the “ritual tasks of femininity provide contexts for their performance” (p. 67) and when applied here can be shown to be a multifarious performance of femininity, ritualised practice, and specific consumption. The cookbooks display the taking of tea as a fixed practice of femininity that draws upon aspects of tradition and expectation and relies heavily on the accompaniment of cake or sweet goods, especially those that have been made with the intention to share socially alongside the succour in cup of tea. This is tacitly alluded to consistently throughout the cookbooks, in the way sweet goods are presented in a very curated manner—hand-stitched napery, pretty china, home-baked delights—that displays the care of the set-up, the thought and the practice of creating such carefully presented food for guests. The embellishments and decorative details shown accompanied by the accretions of afternoon tea service indicate a precise and highly ritualised feminine performance expected in this context to enjoy ‘the fruits of the labour’ involved.

## **5.6 Nostalgia, the Anzac myth, and collective commemoration**

The examination of tacit and overt connections to nostalgia in the cookbooks is significant to understanding how baking practice helps construct a mythologised picture of Australian femininity. Presentations of nostalgic content are a consistent thread throughout the cookbooks in this thesis, glimpsed in images, recipe presentations and narrative flourishes. Accordingly, nostalgia becomes a recurrent concept explored

throughout the thesis, although its application changes depending on connected ideas and examples. This section examines how nostalgia conveys Australian cultural ideas and encourages a type of collective remembering—mostly ahistorical and imagined—that works to mythologise feminine baking practice as an essential part of Australian history [for further discussion on nostalgia and practice, see Section 6.4].

The type of nostalgic remembering constructed by the cookbooks seems to converge with theories of iconic or collective nostalgia, used to communicate and bolster folkloric traditions while authenticating ideologies of identity and nationalism as part of a recognisable cultural narrative (Holtzman, 2006; Supski, 2005; Morley, 2000). This is conveyed, according to Stern (1992), via the interconnecting evocations of, *personal nostalgia*, which idealises “the personally remembered past”; and *historical nostalgia* or a sentimentalised “imaginatively recreated past” (p. 16). These concepts are demonstrated aptly in the introductory narrative in *Afternoon Tea* (2010):

Do you remember a time when your mother’s or grandmother’s kitchen was filled with the delightful smells of baked goods? Birthday parties would involve homemade biscuits, marshmallow mouse cakes and vanilla slice. There were Lamington drives and school fetes, and afternoon tea would mean setting the brown Laminex table, which extended when guests were expected. (p. 9)

In this example, personal recollections—and definite connections—to childhood food favourites are asserted ‘do you remember’; as well as an affirmation of particular memories and ‘delightful’ smells familiar in the Australian context—vanilla slice, Lamington drives, school fetes, brown Laminex tables—that seem to form collective cultural symbols.<sup>9</sup> The nostalgic elements work here to reinforce a collective identity

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<sup>9</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes on Lamingtons* (p. 333) and *Vanilla Slice* (p. 335)

and supported by elements of culinary nationalism and practising femininity—in mother’s or grandmother’s kitchen—based on a fantasy of shared values and symbols (Kessous, 2015; Vignolles & Pichon, 2014; Baker & Kennedy, 1994) that are depicted as essential parts of the Australian experience.

The cookbooks continually reaffirm a sense collective nostalgia by asserting a collective understanding, that may not be actual or relatable personal experience, yet assume a shared familiarity and pleasure in readers (Baker and Kennedy 1994; Stern 1992; Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). This assumed communal experience forms a type of shared belief that binds members together, conveyed in *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) by the ‘incontestable’ declaration on its cover that inside are “all the favourites we know and love”. There seems to be no room for contest of this assertion, and that to be culturally Australian, one must find favourites within the collections and be moved—we know and love—by a sentimental past connection. These assumed assertions are reminiscent of studies that link the socio-historical continuity of a community to a buoyant collective nostalgia transmitted through communal memory, a legacy of shared beliefs, and distinctive national identity (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Halbwachs, 1992; Davis, 1979).

Many of the sweet foods featured in the cookbooks are indelibly connected to Australian culinary tradition and narratives of cultural identity that play significant roles in unifying and connecting Australians to a signature food or cuisine. The dishes—Lamingtons, Pavlova, Damper—have become part of a tradition that connects the past to the present and use nostalgia to encourage a sense of collective identity and experience [see Appendix B for further information on the sweet foods mentioned]. Closely tied to Mintz’ (1996) characterisation of national foods as those with “common social roots... the food of a community ... [to] unite people culturally” (p. 96), if food,

by nature, is a transmitter of national identity in the way it provides a sense of solidarity and carries shared cultural value in its partake or practice, then attached or associated memories can also work to reveal certain complexities of how this identity should look, behave, and the practice expected to uphold it. An appeal of cookbook collections—including those looked at in this thesis and beyond—is the intimate connection to lived or remembered experience, and without such attachment, would just be another book full of familiar reprinted recipes; yet here the reliance on pleasurable nostalgic elements creates an intricate relationship—one that communicates the symbolic meanings of baking and sweet food—beyond the food itself.

One recipe which is common to most of the cookbooks and evokes a familiarity to community and a sense of unified history are Anzac Biscuits. In many ways, Anzac Biscuits can be deemed Australia's national biscuit: through the various incarnations included in cookbooks throughout much of the twentieth century; in the recipes that feature in magazines and newspapers around the Anzac commemoration in late April every year; and in their ubiquity on supermarket shelves in the Antipodean region (Supski 2006; Cogley 2016). In any comparison of Australian cookbooks that focus on baking and sweet foods, it becomes an expectation that the recipe will appear, with its exclusion from any collection of Australian classics notable.<sup>10</sup>

Interrogation of the cookbooks reveals certain aspects of the Anzac Biscuit recipe as ubiquitous, for example, the ingredients used are virtually identical, with each recipe calling for flour, oats, golden syrup or treacle, coconut, baking powder and water. The method is essentially the same throughout the books, with slight differences in quantities of ingredients and/or preparation times. There is one significant variation, in

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<sup>10</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Anzac Biscuits (p. 332)

*The Best-Ever Collection* (2013), which includes ‘Macadamia Anzac Biscuits’ (p. 304-305) and adds finely chopped macadamia nuts and glacé ginger to the basic recipe, yet still retains a virtually similar method and pictured outcome to other Anzac biscuit presentations. Although an adaptation to the iconic recipe, the familiarity of the presentation reassures readers that this recipe is still firmly connected to Anzac Biscuit traditions.

In four of the cookbooks—*Retro Baking* (2015), *Baking Day* (2012), *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016), *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017)—the presentation of the recipe itself, along with the picture used of the final product are identical, although there are changes found in font, background and colour of the pages. In these cases, the Anzac Biscuits are presented next to a glass of milk and indicate a scene set for an after-school snack. This presentation functions to evoke the sense of a shared childhood memory and reinforce a communal recollection of a time past where Anzac Biscuits and milk were an expected and comforting part of growing up Australian. Taking note of Supski’s (2006) suggestions that Anzac Biscuits “are powerfully connected to Australian cultural identity and commemoration” (p. 53), the nostalgic familiarity of the scene and the recollection it imports onto the reader connects them to Australian shared beliefs and values. It also alludes to ritualistic aspects of afternoon tea and ‘filling the tins’ [see previous sections of this chapter for further elaboration] in a modified manner, with baked goods prepared and served for a familial and appreciative consumer, while the feminine practice behind the act is unseen yet undeniably assumed. Theoretical inquiries into Anzac Biscuits have probed their historical importance beyond the culinary, and how they have evolved symbolically to “...become a signature food because they stand for something more than themselves” (Supski, 2006, p. 52). In particular, the connotation of the label, ANZAC, plays a significant part in connecting

Australians culturally by promoting participation in ritualised commemoration, allowing “participants to connect themselves back to the cultural history of the ‘founding’ of their nation” (Morley, 2000, p. 19). The ubiquity of the recipe in an annual repeated ritualised commemoration works as a type of historical nostalgia or a sentimentally recreated past (Stern, 1992). The making of, consumption of, or just the awareness of, Anzac Biscuits displays Anderson’s (1983/2006) theories of a community imagined and constructed by those who perceive themselves as members, to reflect ideas of nation and national identity, here enacted through participation in Anzac Day, which ultimately becomes “a story of mateship among individuals who exemplify what it is like to be Australian” (Macleod, 2002, p. 168). The commemoration is experienced through the use of the symbolic brand attached to the familiar comfort of the biscuit to childhood, while also serving “as a potent reminder of the first world war, Gallipoli and the Anzac spirit” (Supski, 2006, p. 4). Anzac Biscuits and the symbolic commemoration they represent links to the mythology central in understanding the Australian experience and the reverence of the Anzac myth has been stoked and strengthened in Australian consciousness to “become a form of civil religiosity. Anzac Biscuits can be regarded as the communion wafer — through eating the biscuits, one ‘belongs’ in and to the Australian nation” (Supski, 2006, p. 9). The familiarity produced by baking and consuming them become essential aspects in telling the Australian story and shaping a particular identity and behaviour.

Considerable official recognition and safeguarding of the *Anzac* brand have been undertaken by governments of Australia and New Zealand, with the term’s cultural significance written into law “in 1916 to save the ANZAC legend from exploitation” (*National Army Museum*, 2016), and sought wider via an application to the *World Intellectual Property Organisation* in 2003 to further protect the word internationally

(*Ministry for Culture and Heritage*, 2018). The prestige of the brand is protected by law yet allows exception for its use in Anzac biscuit nomenclature. According to the New Zealand *Ministry for Culture and Heritage's* website, use of the word 'Anzac' in relation to a biscuit is allowed "provided that the product conforms to the general recipes and shape traditionally known as an *Anzac biscuit*" (2018, para. 10). A similar regulation appears on the Australian *Department of Veterans' Affairs* website, which attempts to further safeguard the cultural connotations, "referring to these products as 'Anzac Cookies' is generally not approved, due to the non-Australian overtones" (*Department of Veterans' Affairs*, n.d., para. 6). This goes towards explaining why the recipe feels unchanged and untouched by time, almost a carbon copy of ingredients and method throughout the cookbooks in the thesis. Unlike other adaptations and contemporary shifts in traditional recipes—such as the variations of Lamingtons explored earlier in this chapter [see Section 5.2, pp. 111-112]—there is little variation to the basic Anzac biscuit recipe, and it remains very rudimentary and familiar. To qualify for the Anzac brand and all the connotative context that makes them familiar classics, they must comply with government regulations and any commercial entity wishing to sell or market such must submit an official application (*Department of Veterans' Affairs*, n.d.). By using such carefully crafted and constructed regulations, the reverence for the *Anzac* brand is able to maintain and evoke "a coherent imaginative sense of connectedness and ongoing felt sense of national identity" (McConville et al, 2017, p. 99). As a result, the Anzac biscuit seems uniquely able to communicate this connectedness of identity, brand and experience, and is acknowledged officially as a way to participate properly and belong, as the *Australian War Memorial* website explains, "Making Anzac biscuits is one tradition that Australians use to commemorate Anzac Day. Everyone has their favourite recipe..." (Conde, 2008). While the day is to

be valued for its historical significance and cultural contribution, the tradition, familiarity and nostalgic comfort of the biscuits aids in proper commemoration, association and participation.

The carefully crafted communication of the *Anzac* brand converges with scholarship that interrogates the way that nostalgia provides “a sense of credibility as well as emotional bonding” to a commercial brand (Kessous, 2015, p. 1900). There has been much written on the longevity of a brand to evoke nostalgic feelings—whether real or manufactured—able to connect together an audience/consumer through either actual personal experience and/or collective cultural context, while communicating wider notions of stability and authenticity (see Kessous, 2015; Holak, 2014; Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Havlena & Holak, 1996; LaTour, LaTour, & Zinkhan, 2010).

The unchangeability of the recipe and the longevity that can be read in the repetition, ingredients and wider commemorative connotations inspire a nostalgic familiarity enhanced by the recipe’s resistance to cultural shifts. The recipe is comforting in its rigidity, reminiscent of Kravets & Öрге (2010) exploration of iconic brands and their ability to provide recognisable and gratifying points of reference to a community that “encapsulate[s] social knowledge and hold collective practices together” (p. 214).

Anzac Biscuits provide this ‘collective practice’ via the remembered eagerness and satisfaction of a childhood memory, seen expressed in an example from the introductory narrative in *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017), “We all have a favourite baked treat from our childhood. Anzac biscuits still warm from the oven and slightly floppy, which we scarf, too impatient to wait for them to set” (p. 8). This demonstrates an assumed collective experience and social knowledge of the taste and eagerness attached to the baking and eating of the biscuits, reliant on longevity and repeated practice.

Without the evocation of nostalgia present here and in many other instances, the iconic

nature of the biscuit and its commemorative function would not be as powerfully felt or as effective.

A pertinent aspect to examine then, is the function and importance of the Anzac tradition in Australian culture and why communication through baking practice and ritual is imperative to understanding the relationship between femininity, baking, and sweet food in Australian cookbooks. An examination of the mythology around Anzac, and its association to the role the biscuits play in the larger mythmaking process seems to matter significantly, particularly when considering the engrained cultural and historic aspects of Australian femininity that are intimately entangled within it. The recipe recognisable today as Anzac Biscuits can be traced from the 1920s onwards in Australian cookbooks, which calls into question the belief that such were sent to Anzacs during the First World War (Symons, 2010). Yet the story of women on the home front baking and sending biscuits to their hungry and heroic men in the trenches is well-held and widely repeated. Versions can be found in different forms—both officially, in War Memorials and Governmental literature, and more colloquial settings—which provides credibility and a sense of veracity to the myth. The myth has also found more widespread weight, for instance, in *Sweet Treats Around the World: An Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, a summary of the food of New Zealand and Australia features an Anzac Biscuits recipe with narrative that explains:

Wives, mothers, sisters, and girlfriends did not put eggs (which could hasten spoilage) in their Anzac biscuits sent in their versions of care packages. Without eggs, the butter, oatmeal, coconut, and golden syrup cookies would thus stay fresher on long overseas shipments to the soldiers. (Roufs & Roufs, 2014, p. 246)

In this instance and many others, the potent and romanticised idea, of ‘wives, mothers, sisters, and girlfriends’ playing a nurturing role, aids in the creation of a solid and wide-spread myth that becomes a type of truth deeply-rooted in cultural tradition and belief. The sentimentalised elements of the story function in a similar manner to the way marketing narratives are crafted around iconic brands with repeated and systematic consumption rituals connected to commemoration and associated with traditional celebrations (Kessous, 2015; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; McCracken, 1986). Here, the cultural narrative works to affirm the myth of hardy, caring and practical feminised practice, inspired by the Anzac ideal, to create a lasting culinary creation. Tied to Cobley’s (2016) commentary on the allure of the “seductive food fakelores” (p. 68) that surround the Anzac recipe in both Australia and New Zealand, the myth of feminine practice is willingly embraced—even as it presents an ahistorical idea—because the picture built and glorified by such ‘fake lore’ is so affecting and appealing.

Anzac Biscuits support the established Anzac mythology by pushing a continual narrative of imagined nationalism through invented tradition. Moreover, they further mythologise an idealised femininity that may not actually be rooted in fact or record, as Santich (2012) asserts, “there is no evidence that Australian women packed tins of homemade biscuits and despatched them off to loved ones in the trenches” (p. 204). In this version, the Anzac myth might work to make room for women’s participation, but only does so by confirming a certain expected type of feminised labour and practice. Therefore, the practice of the recipe, as well as Anzac Biscuit tradition, confirms an ascribed and created historic femininity that functions to support, nurture, and reinforce a specific idea of national identity.

The reaffirmation of aspects of the Anzac myth through the presentation and categorisation of recipes consolidate omnipresent and nostalgic notions of feminine

practice in the essential Australian experience, a sentimental narrative of alluring fantasy that melds “female nurturing instinct with patriotic duty” (Santich, 2012, p. 204). The commemoration baked into Anzac Biscuits strives to validate the value of women’s contributions to the Anzac myth, the significance of women’s roles in the war efforts, and ultimately in the building of a nation, presenting a balance to “the dominant masculinist trope of nation building pervading White Australian history” (Cobley 2016, p. 62; see also Supski, 2006; Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath & Quartly, 1994).

## **5.7 Mythmaking Australian femininity**

This section will continue on from previous discussion on myth, nostalgia, Anzac ideals and historicised Australian feminine practice, yet interrogate further how femininity has become mythologised. Idealised images of Australian women have long been used to convey social messages for differing purposes and become significant to consider when interrogating cultural conceptions of femininity in the cookbooks and ties to sweet food and baking. Propagandist ideals of feminine daintiness, projected via tea and little cakes, were promoted as a ‘civilising force’ in early twentieth century advertising and cookbooks (Symons, 2007), and images of cheerful women in a domestic setting have often been used to sell foodstuffs, appliances, and baking products (Santich, 2012; Bannerman, 1998). These images, along with those in the cookbooks project an idea of femininity in practice that is consumed alongside the product being sold or marketed.<sup>11</sup> In a similar way, the previous discussion of the Anzac myth is used to reinforce a certain unattainable ideal of heroic masculinity, with courage, determination and sacrifice for nation, and when connected to conceived ideas of femininity in practice, fits into a wider heteronormative narrative. The cookbooks work to emphasise and

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<sup>11</sup> For more scholastic discussion of feminine daintiness in Australian advertising see section 3.6 (p. 54)

reflect a romanticised domestic fantasy both comforting and easy to access.

Specifically, they reveal narratives where the boundaries around gender roles are strong and constricting, enhanced and polished via a nostalgia-tinged lens.

The cookbooks do not feature or factor men prominently in their narratives, instead centre on an imagined—and somewhat imaged—specific ideal of a past that extolled feminine practice in the domestic space. *Afternoon Tea* (2010) contains a memory from contributor Nadia Saccardo:

When it came to baking, my mum was the commander-in-chief. As she sifted, poured and stirred, my brothers and I would wait eagerly in the ranks (next to the bench) to be enlisted for the intricate task of bowl licking. Dad would often pitch in, too. (p. 93)

The baker and the control of the domestic space is deemed under her mother's dominion, with her father relegated to the side-lines to reap the rewards with her and her brothers, a passive participant in the practice. The nostalgic ingredients that underlie this example and seen wider in the cookbooks, function to communicate and augment a set of gendered norms. Guided by Vignolles and Pichon's (2014) examination of nostalgia's role in homogenising and reinforcing traditional gender binaries in advertising, the femininity displayed here unveils how essential maintaining such distinct roles is in asserting cultural identity. This can also be witnessed in how the core of the Anzac myth concentrates on masculinity and war; conveying distinct gender roles and behaviours that indicate the need for both to work together in order for the mythology to function effectively. Therefore, it is only due to the correlated feminised action that the masculine myth exists and is maintained, whether as a reaction to or in opposition with. The mythologised and underscored practicality of women—whatever

the environment or circumstance—is just as effective to reiterating the Australian experience and national tradition as its heroically masculine counterpart.

This reveals the significance of idealised or invented tradition to Australia and the essential role the image of a nation-building femininity plays. Parallels can be found in Hamilton's (2009) research on representations of World War II pin-up girls, and how public consumption of images functioned to provide soldiers with “comforts and pleasures of domesticity, family... femininity” and the “...simple pleasures of the home”, elements required to constantly reiterate the “aspiration to the Anzac ideal and emulation of the mythic qualities” (p. 10). Within *Recipes to Remember* (2016) and *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) examples in the narrative and imagery communicate and reinforce similar domestic ideals by displaying a specific performance of femininity. The inclusion of images and adverts from magazines and other publications that date back to the 1930s, 40s and 50s, feature illustrated women drawn to provoke a very pronounced sense of nostalgia, intended to elicit fantasies of a bygone time and experience. These fantasies invite a better appreciation of the recipes included and understood, by deliberately signalling the gap of time and shift of experience that should be keenly felt by the audience. Echoing the way that nostalgia is useful in identity construction, maintenance, and reconstruction (Davis 1979), these cookbooks promote a domestic ideal that centres on family and relies on depictions of a proscriptive heterosexuality and heteronormativity. To demonstrate, *Recipes to Remember* (2016) has a separate section for ‘Dad’s Turn to Cook’ and its attached narrative that introduces the section, emphasises the boundaries around gender roles, and though it provides a somewhat ‘historical’ context, the book nonetheless stresses distinct and expected gender roles:

More men cook at home today than ever before – more members of the household are in the workforce so household chores have to be shared. Decades ago, it was quite rare for a man to cook a meal for the family, and when he did, a lot of time and effort went into the meal as it was usually something ‘different’ from everyday fare. Barbeques weren’t as popular as they are today, but if there was one in the home, men ruled. (p. 261)

The recipes in the section are not so ‘classic’ or ‘retro’ as compared to other recipes in this collection and include a spread of contemporary ingredients and techniques that belies the intended approach. Many have a connection to classic fare with protein as a main focus, perhaps indicating a priority of ‘masculinised’ cooking, yet with a contemporary shift [for more contextual discussion around men in the kitchen, as well as perceptions of public/private cooking see Section 2.4]. Most of the recipes, ‘Southern Fried Chicken’, ‘Maple and Cheddar Burgers’, ‘Buttermilk Mac ‘n’ Cheese’, ‘Barbecued Lamb Leg with Lemon Thyme Salsa Verde’, ‘Steak with slow-roasted tomato and Jalapeño Ketchup’, would fit comfortably in contemporary cookbooks without the added ‘Dad’s Turn’ narrative that is underlined here.

The dessert recipes included in the ‘Dad’s Turn to Cook’ section on *Recipes to Remember* (2016) are very simple, and do not require too much time or effort to produce, yet by including a separate section for men to use specifically, the cookbook underscores the tensions present in gender roles and perceptions of domestic labour. Of the three recipes included in the section, the simplest and least challenging is ‘Passionfruit and Banana Crush’ (p. 300-301) and calls for the whipping together of cream and a few ingredients, one of which the recipe recommends buying pre-made from the supermarket. The second recipe is perhaps a little more challenging, ‘Warm Chocolate and Caramel Puddings’ (p. 302-303); while the last recipe, ‘Banoffee Ice-

Cream Tart' (p. 304-305) is the most demanding as it entails the making of a caramel sauce and toffee-d pecans yet has a quite basic combination and messy presentation. The 'Dad's Turn' section reveals the constrictive expectations of male participation in the kitchen. Here, baking is assumed to be a pursuit of the feminine—reinforced by the narrative, recipe choice and presentation—which fits the wider narrative of baking as feminised practice and interest. Dad's cooking can show challenging techniques and flavours in a meal—preferably with meat as the focus—yet pursuing challenging baking recipes or dessert in the home crosses a gendered boundary.

The examination of the cookbooks expresses how conceptions of the domestic space and the kitchen are coded as “a female domain, so female that any male who, by inclination or obligation, made the kitchen his workplace was automatically contaminated” (Santich, 2012, p. 187). This distinction is deliberately and pervasively bolstered by extolling the abilities of feminine practice and labour in domestic spaces. The most prevalent presentation in the cookbooks are coded as feminine and made even more obvious when sections are delineated especially for masculine practice, which is depicted in a very specific and careful manner to reiterate the temporality of the space that will revert back to a feminine domain once 'Dad' has had his turn to cook.

The masculinist 'care' in the domestic realm is curtailed and as circumspect as the feminised is. The promotion of a certain type of 'acceptable' gendered domestic performance functions to reaffirm a heteronormative fantasy and romanticised ideal that sustains conformity in its readers. Referring back to the Anzac myth and how it functions to construct masculinity and femininity in certain ways to reflect notions of Australian character and cultural value, let us turn once again to parallels between depictions of baking culture and World War II pin-ups. Hamilton (2009) suggests that pin-ups functioned as a way to promote conformity in Australian soldiers through

evoking “memories and fantasies of home, domesticity and family” while reaffirming conditions of “compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 9). Here, as in many of the cookbooks in this thesis, dominant ideologies are reaffirmed that still figure highly in definitions of Australian character—particularly masculine ones— and build a sense of national pride, heavily reliant on a certain ideology of feminine practice and historic connection that places the ideal female fantasy in a domestic setting. The popularity of pin-ups reveals, as Hamilton (2009) further asserts, “how central fantasies of home and family” were to the day-to-day existence of Australian servicemen, and how large they figured in “strategies of coping in an alienating and frequently dangerous environment dominated by other men” by assuring a public display and consumption of heterosexual practice “in a potentially homoerotic environment in which the male body and the masculine Anzac legend were evoked as ideals” (p. 10). The continual fantasy of the idealised feminine, offering comfort, pleasure, support and motivation in times of hardship, also works as a buttress to reinforce and strengthen gender lines and ‘acceptable’ practice in times or occasion when other social norms are not so easily adhered to. Both the tradition of baking culture and the functional value of the Anzac myth reaffirm cultural standards and attempt to secure gender ideals by presenting unattainable fantasy. It is this fantasy that the cookbooks exhibit and express which unveils the intertwined relationships between cultural conceptions of femininity, baking, and sweet food, ready to be scrutinised further.

## **5.8 Summary**

This chapter sought to find the historic connections present in the cookbooks and reveal how they conveyed Australian culinary traditions. It examined the significance of rituals, invented traditions, colonial heritage and legacy, to the construction of national

and imaginary ideals that are celebrated and commemorated through collective nostalgia. All the explored ideal depictions; whether a hardy, adaptable pioneer; or a devoted baker filling the tins; or a nurturing force of national spirit; are reflected in the cookbooks to reinforce a mythologised and ahistorical model of femininity in practice.

## 6 Performing femininity: baking as practice

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### 6.1 Introduction

The complexities of ‘gender’ are widely discussed and reflected upon notions taken up by varied academic disciplines, often posing highly conflicting theories and ideas. These contested notions, combined with cultural considerations, influence social perceptions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, shaping identity—both inward and outward—distinguishing characteristics, and are often used to justify differences in roles, exhibited appearances and expected behaviours (Butler, 1988; 1990; 1993; Ingraham, 1994, 2008; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

The previous chapter discussed baking practice as part of an engrained component of Australian culture and looked at the mythologised ideals of feminine performance in relation to historical—or ahistorical—traditions and perceived conceptions that bring together comfort and nationalism. This chapter will extend on many of the ideas introduced, such as ideas of nostalgia and hegemonic feminine practices, but will concentrate on the way the cookbooks in this thesis demonstrate a social perception of femininity. It will explore the traits and qualities that are closely coded around the performance or behaviour associated with being feminine or womanly, including actions, appearance, expression, and interaction with others. Drawing on research into gender based on theories of embodiment (Messerschmidt, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007), it will probe ideas of ‘doing gender’, seen in practices, social interactions, daily routines, and bodily behaviours. These are significant to consider when examining cultural conceptions of femininity and the way baking practices are connected to these behaviours, and how such a relationship is socially represented, in this case, within the cookbook materials.

In order to investigate the relationship, this chapter examines how the feminine or femininity is presented and/or constructed by the cookbooks and connects to food practices and the embodiment of gender. Drawing on long-standing research which links together food and feminine practice, collective cultural notions of femininity will be addressed by interrogating corporal cues and daily life practices associated with performances around food (Charles & Kerr, 1998; DeVault, 1991; 1999; Inness, 2001; Lupton, 1996; Swenson, 2009; Cairns and Johnston, 2015b).

Previous discussion has revealed notions of femininity closely coded to the domestic within the cookbooks [see chapter 5]. This chapter will extend the analysis by focusing on baking and cake, and how it is ‘performed’ not only via images of women, but through the placement of elements that provide a source of social ‘feedback’ connecting to wider social narratives of expected and/or preferred gender expression. The repetitive nature of these images, alongside the recipes, pictured sweet food, and presentational aspects, indicate a persistent narrative that projects an ideal or an aspiration, where a type of natural performance of femaleness is consumed within the context of baking. Lastly, this chapter seeks to uncover how persistent projections of ‘natural’ and idealised performances in the cookbooks expose hegemonic expressions of femininity that both sustains, and is sustaining of, food practices and wider social notions, encapsulated by the term *food femininities* coined by Cairns and Johnston (2015b).

## **6.2 Naturalness and baking practice**

The cookbooks present ideal images of desired food reproductions, and implicitly assume that readers will be able to follow and easily interpret the processes, and although never explicitly stated, this pervasively communicates the assumption that an embodiment of femininity provides such naturally and automatically. *The Baking*

*Collection* (2014) and *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015) demonstrate implicit assumptions of a natural aptitude with baking tools and implements. Most recipes are accompanied by an assortment of baking implements pictured without baked goods within them: including pans and tins, both standard and specialised; baking paper, of various colours and patterns; wire cooling racks; rolling pins; mixing bowls; measuring cups, spoons and jugs; food processors; and patty tins and papers of all types. Many of the reproduced food images are also pictured with decorating equipment, such as spacers, palette knives, pastry brushes and icing smoothers, implying their use in creating the presented effects. The repetitive inclusion of these elements is not the main focus of the pages and are posed or presented in a haphazard manner yet indicate to the reader the required tools of baking practice. Guided by research that assumes activities around food preparation—whether the buying, cooking, baking, or providing of—to be a natural extension, concern, or obligation of feminine practice (DeVault, 1991; 1999; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Duruz, 2001; Parkin, 2006), these presentations signal a feminine know-how and discernment of how each implement functions to recreate such sweet foods.

If we consider Inness' (2000) examination of juvenile cooking literature and her conclusion that they repeatedly communicated how “girls... should have a ‘natural’ affinity for cooking. Girls were supposed to grow up with a ‘natural’ love of cooking, a love that was passed down from mother to daughter” (p. 126), then ideas of a specific type of femininity are being conveyed. The cookbooks reveal an implication that feminine coded domestic spaces bring forth a ‘natural extension’ of comfort, reinforced by having all the necessary tools and inherent aptitude to use them effectively. The omnipresence of baking implements throughout the cookbooks function to affirm how ‘natural’ a love of cooking is to feminine performance, and how this performance

assumes knowledge of the proper use of each implement in order to create the pictured visions of highly decorated cakes or appealing treats represented.

An assumed 'natural' affinity can also be seen in the way instructions and recipes are configured. Significantly, this is demonstrated by the cookbooks containing glossaries that focus on requisite ingredients and equipment yet fall short in providing elaborate instructions on each step of the recipe or what the outcome of each step is supposed to look or feel like. For example, the simple index-based glossaries include only basic techniques and explains how less commonly recognised ingredients are used. Some variants exist, such as a full colour photographic glossary of techniques in *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016, pp. 472-477), and the section of 'Baker's Notes' at the beginning of *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017, pp. 13-18), which includes extra tips on 'How to Read the Recipe' and 'After You Bake'. While there is information in these glossaries on the use of implements or tools specified in the recipes, the methods required in the cookbooks pre-suppose an inherent or natural knowledge that is closely linked to feminine practice of baking. It becomes apparent that the associated jargon of baking is considered sufficient enough explanation and that any feminine performance of this recipe will bring along a 'natural affinity' for guaranteed success. To demonstrate, instructions common to many of the recipes include details on what the outcome of each step should specifically look or be like if followed precisely. *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) provides three telling examples of this. Firstly, the recipe for 'Pineapple Upside-down Cake' instructs the need to "beat butter and sugar in a small bowl with an electric mixer until light and fluffy" (p. 438) yet gives no explanation as to what exactly 'fluffy' means or might look like. Similarly, 'Apricot Choc-Chip Cake' directs readers to "beat egg whites in a small bowl until soft peaks form; fold into cake mixture" (p. 28) yet gives no insight into the look or timing to

achieve such ‘soft peaks’. Lastly, instructions for ‘Champagne Mini Cupcakes’ urge to “spoon butter cream into large piping bag fitted with a large fluted tube. Pipe swirls of butter cream on top of cooled cakes” (p. 112), fully assuming that the reader has a ‘natural’ affinity to understand how to use a ‘piping bag’ effectively, as well as having the knowledge to use a ‘fluted’ tube to produce required ‘swirls’ of decoration. Each example –as well as numerous others throughout the cookbooks—work to build a pervasive idea that the reader has an assumed background or natural knowledge of all contained information. In order to recreate the recipe precisely a cultural conception of femininity is reflected that relies on perceptions of the ‘obligations of feminine practice’ to include this know-how of baking. Whether the knowledge is assumed to be passed down or ‘natural’ aptitude, the language or jargon of baking becomes something that should be or is expected to be part of the performance of femininity.

Implications of an assumed familiarity within the cookbooks indicate the experience of baking and the required tools of practice becoming carefully tethered to feminine practice. Representations in the cookbooks that confirm an ease of practice resemble how magazine catalogues or advertisements present domestic spaces yet are used here to display certain lifestyle experiences connected to the ease of baking practice. These representations function to emphasise the social value of demonstrating successful food femininity in practice (Cairns & Johnston, 2015b), revealing perceptions around the “meanings and norms around motherhood and femininity” (Lupton, 1996, p. 38) and how performances and duties are conducted in domestic environments. By exposing the assumptions of a ‘natural’ affinity and familiarity of practice in such environments, the examination finds parallels to Lupton’s (1996) findings that “in most households in western societies, the purchase and preparation of food for the family is the major responsibility of women” (p. 38), as well as to Warde and Hetherington’s (1994) study,

which concluded that “a woman was seven times more likely to have cooked the last main meal, ten times more likely to have baked a cake” (p. 764). The cookbooks demonstrate and embrace these findings and assume that readers not only have knowledge of the materials and implements associated with baking but are willing to use them in order to show success in practice. Social narratives constantly confirm how this success can be exhibited and shapes the performance of femininity communicated in the cookbooks.

*Afternoon Tea* (2010) has many examples embedded in the narrative that show the connection of successful practice and naturalness explicitly. For example, within its accompanying narrative, *Afternoon Tea* (2010) provides a motivation for the included compiled recipes, seen in the dedication which reads “to all the mums and grandmas who taught us how to cook our favourite treats” (p. 1). This narrative clearly anchors the content of the cookbook to a past conception of femininity which moved its editors and contributors to celebrate this specific performance above or in spite of others. *Afternoon Tea* (2010) exposes a point of view that codes food and baking with ‘feminine’ characteristics such as care-giving, acts of love and affection (Daniels, Glorieux, Minnen, & van Tienoven, 2012; Inness, 2001; DeVault, 1991; 1999). The inclusion of ‘Contributor Memories’ as a section to “share their childhood cooking memories” (pp. 90-6) demonstrates this effectively as each are connected in some manner to the women in their lives and display specific performances of femininity relevant to the cookbook’s theme. These Memories are all accompanied by a photograph from childhood with their mother or grandmother, which affirms clear representations of love and affection in the recollection, as well as infusing fond sentiment into the recipe and ‘treat’. In this case, the sweet food becomes a tangible remnant of the relationship. Though this discussion touches on the importance of memory to cultural conceptions of femininity, the chapter

will later probe the value that recollection and reminiscence play in constructing specific performances of feminine practice and success [see Sections 6.3, 6.4 for further elaboration; and 7.4, 7.5 for connections of memory to enhanced food experiences].

*Afternoon Tea* (2010) contributor Pip Lincolne highlights the connections between acts of care-giving, sweet food, and feminine practice, “When I was a little girl... My nan would bring me afternoon tea on a tray. It was a sugary assortment of treats... Baking = Love” (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 39). The baking practice and behaviour described here is coded feminine—‘my nan would bring me afternoon tea on a tray’—and is indelibly connected to the performance of the relationship, ‘Baking = Love’. Considering Lupton’s (1996) suggestions that emotion is a key factor that perpetually connects femininity and food, “particularly maternal love... routinely constructed [by]... demonstrating her affection and caring approach... via the food she serves” (p. 38), this example from *Afternoon Tea* (2010) provides a clear link to how the maternal care-giver, ‘nan’, conveys care via sweet treats. Tied closely to this is the expectation that sweet food will be baked especially by her ‘nan’ in order to sustain the relationship and bolster emotional connections of ‘love’, conforming to wider perceptions of successful feminine practice [for further discussion of the emotionality of food refer to Section 8.5].

Further evidence of this expected practice is found in contributor Prue Vincent’s recollection of ‘Nanna’s Peppermint Chocolate Cake’, where “...sometimes I’d open my lunch box at school and find a slice of this cake as a treat... seeing it tucked neatly away always reminded me of how much I loved my mum, and how much she loved me” (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 60). Again, cultural understanding functions to confirm that practice strengthens relationships and shows maternal love through forethought and pre-prepared sweet treats. Care-giving is here coded as “routinely constructed” (Lupton,

1996) and expected through the assumed knowledge that only ‘mum’ is expected to pack the lunchbox. The time, effort, and particulars of practice associated with this lunchbox surprise indicate affection, and the natural constituents of feminine care-giving and nurture are thereby connected to the quintessential role of mother or grandmother. To draw on Lupton’s (1996) assertions further, “femininity is idealized as being caring and working for others...Cooking for women is thus an intensely social undertaking, performed for others” (p. 40), the cookbooks present success as anchored to the feminine performance of baking practice. Expressed as naturally achieved or aspired to, roles associated with baking practice like mother, care-giver, or a hostess who serves and presents the baked goods, expose a lasting effect felt when done successfully to leave impressions of how such femininity should be or is expected to be performed.

The type of gender performance and femininity presented seems to be a ‘natural’ presumption of femininity but is carefully constructed and staged to reflect a narrative connected to prevalent social notions, reminiscent of Butler’s (1988) suggestion that “through repeated invocation and repudiation” a gendered norm is created, to become timeless truths universally accepted as a key component of gender practice and expectation (p. 140). These ‘gendered norms’ are instinctively expressed by the contributors, who underscore the importance of the proper practice of a mother or grandmother in their fond remembrances, “My mum hardly ever bakes anymore but when I was a kid she used to make cookies every weekend” (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 95). Here, the practice of a baking, and therefore, loving and care-giving mum is created through the repeated behaviour, ‘make cookies every weekend’, and even includes a note of repudiation for the sense of loss—of action and attention—felt at the halt of that practice.

Notions of baking as essential and expected feminine practice are a type of successful food femininity, that shows links to hegemonic performance. Cairns and Johnston's (2015b) suggest that hegemonic food femininity "...can hold significant appeal as... [it] can engender social and emotional rewards for women—as seen in positive evaluations of the 'good mother'..." (p. 27). This presents the implicit idea that enacting 'food femininity' is necessary to the role of motherhood, and it is through the successful practice and performance of such that emotional rewards—love, affection and fond memories—are recognised and through 'repeated invocation' come to be expected. An interrogation of *Afternoon Tea* (2010) suggests that emotional and social rewards work as a type of feminised legacy that is passed on through the female members of the family, "She had a recipe box full of hand-written cards passed down from my grandma" and "Her recipe book is full to the brim of hand-me down recipes" (p. 93/95). This reveals that culinary connections provide a source of collective memory and identity that strengthen and sustain relationships (Theophano, 2002), indicating another dimension of practice that becomes both idealised and expected. In particular, concepts of culinary legacy work to affirm sentimental memory and in the case of these examples, become a part of how female ancestors are memorialised. A proper practice of femininity and motherhood provides not only a lasting memory of being provided for, cared for, and baked for, but also requires a continuing sense of essential practice as a necessary extension of feminine performance.

Narratives of legacy and learnt baking practice as essential feminine behaviour seems entangled with notions of infused love and affection particularly in the practice of baking together. The act of imitating or recreating a special dish as part of a feminine legacy indicates pleasure, while still connecting to prevalent notions of serving and care-giving to bring happy memories. In *Afternoon Tea* (2010), Nadia Saccardo

describes the essential practice of her mother baking to ensure the family was “never without a slab of ‘Simplicity Chocolate Cake’” (p. 93). This casts feminine practice involved as an expected action, to ensure that all in the household were cared for by providing through repeated invocation, ‘never without’. The memory ends with Nadia attempting to recreate the recipe, “When I decided to take the baking reigns [*sic*], *Simplicity Chocolate Cake* was the first in the mixing bowl” (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 93), suggesting that the cake itself too was a part of the experience she wished to emulate. Connecting back to wider ideas of feminised naturalness in baking, it further emphasises how skill also represents something to be admired and emulated, and echoes findings of the implicit ‘learning’ that occurs within households, particularly the way food “conveys strongly held beliefs about family, suffused with emotion” which “women seem to learn from their mothers’ practices” to then practice themselves as natural or engrained (DeVault, 1991, p. 110). The narrative here tells of learnt—or implicit—feminine practice entangled with affection and memory and communicates the complexity in attempting to recreate happiness felt in being nurtured by an encompassing and devoted feminine practice.

### **6.3 Memory, generational recipes, and feminine practice**

The legacy of feminine practice is venerated by many of the cookbooks, noticeable via the constructed narratives of recipes that have generational value and/or a timeless appeal that elicits pleasurable memories—whether ‘real’ or transcendent—of maternal proficiency and care-giving. *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) provides a personal anecdote from the editor:

My mother was famous for her boiled fruit cake and apple pie slice, both treats were legendary in the family. No one ever knew my Mum's recipe for the apple slice, which is still known as 'Jeannie's Apple Pie Slice'. (p. 7)

The narrative demonstrates the value of both the legacy and maternal practice of the recipe. Firstly, a mythic quality is implied due to its 'legendary' standing and the way it has been closely guarded, gaining a symbolic status that relays the importance of the practice and its wider connections to identity. This too is confirmed in the way maternal proficiency in baking without cookbooks is lauded, "she just 'threw it together'...Not so many years ago I decided to try to copy Mum's recipe – you can see my version on page 214, it's pretty close, but could never be quite the same" (*Retro: The Complete Collection*, 2017, p. 7). Secondly, this example also exposes how essential the practice of baking—whether the act itself, or the supplementary extensions and accessories—is to feminine identity and performance in the cookbooks, particularly when generational dimensions are attached, 'I decided to try to copy Mum's recipe'. In view of Duruz's (1999) examination of myths of the 1950s which suggest that the baking of 'delicious dainties' was a "a requirement of femininity" used to "define and control meanings of feminine identity" (p. 246); the recipe, in this case, becomes mythic because it can never truly be replicated and therefore able to transcend maternal identity across boundaries of time, place and memory.

The depth of emotion felt towards the maternal figure in the anecdote from *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) is heavily connected to the practice itself and strengthened by the ability to 'throw it all together' without the conventional need of a recipe. This works to heighten the admiration—and feminine skill—involved in making something that is difficult to recreate or emulate, "This is my version... it's not exactly the same" (p. 214). The recipe itself is prized as an extension of her mother's identity, uniquely

appreciated for the ‘treat’ it provided, as well as the impression it made on others, as an epitome of lasting feminine practice, ‘still known as Jeannie’s Apple Pie Slice’. Much of the reverence found in this example can be recognised as an expected component of generational recipes, cherished and valued precisely because of the markers of feminine identity attached to it, as well as the depth of emotion connected to memory and legacy. Drawing on Duruz’s (1999) contentions that success in baking became the “public face of femininity”, “with women positioned within the privatised, domestic domain and engaged in unpaid and mostly hidden work associated with the daily rituals of feeding and caring, ‘delicious dainties’ took on excessive symbolic significance” (p. 247), the narrative reveals how esteem attributed to ‘Jeannie’s Apple Pie Slice’ in the cookbooks takes on symbolic significance because it is intimately connected to Jeannie herself and the memory of her baking, sharing and providing for her family and others. This performance also denotes a conformity to the ‘public face’ of femininity, here expected to be multidimensional, inter-generational, skilful and mysterious, yet still achievable feminine practice.

Deeper evaluation of *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) demonstrates how ‘symbolic’ values attach to generational recipes. In the introduction, the editor declares “Memories of favourite food seem to grow out of all proportion to reality – no one made better scones than my great grandmother!” (*Retro: The Complete Collection*, 2017, p. 7). The confessed disconnection to reality here is indicative of a space where impartiality is discounted because of attached memory and maternal legacy, and the worth of a generational recipe becomes based on a value-scale that is personal and symbolic. The “excessive symbolic significance” (Duruz, 1999) attributed to generational baking goes towards explaining the appreciation that is still attached to legacy recipes, perhaps even enhanced by the inability to reproduce the original baked

good, where only imitation can exist due to temporal and social shifts. To further interrogate how the esteem attributed to feminine ownership or identity markers of recipes functions in the cookbooks, an examination of *Afternoon Tea* (2010) reveals many entries that specifically highlight maternal origins, for example: ‘Nelly’s Apple Shortcake’ (p. 12); ‘Nanna’s Biscuits’ (p. 23); ‘Betty’s Caramel Tart’ (p. 31); ‘Lorraine’s Small Eclairs’ (p. 43); ‘Mummy Biscuits’ (p. 48); ‘Grandma’s Fudge Cake’ (p. 55); ‘Nanna’s Peppermint Chocolate Cake’ (p. 60); ‘Deb’s Meringue’ (p. 63); ‘Ruby’s Coffee Cake’ (p. 76); while the last page of the book reads, “We’d just like to say thanks...to all our fantastic contributors and their loving mothers and grandmothers who shared their treasured cooking memories. This book wouldn’t exist without you” (p. 96). These specifically named inclusions show clear links to the importance of maternal heritage and legacy of care within the symbolic practice and ownership of each recipe, not only to the individual contributors, but to the reader’s own experience—or perhaps social understanding of—with similar treats and memories.

Beyond the appreciation for the treat itself, the skill shown in creation of it, or the maternal connections attached, the way such recipes have been/are adopted and/or adapted into ongoing contemporary practice is also significant. Reminiscent of Theophano’s (2002) exploration of how “recipes signify an ongoing connection to the past” (p. 50) as a way to strengthen relationships through affection and the binding together of generations of women, whereby “taking her mother’s book is symbolically taking that maternal presence with her” (p. 87), these legacy recipes are described in the cookbooks in a manner that invites a maternal connection, whether real or symbolic.

*The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) contains examples that expound the value of maternal legacy and go towards broadening it. ‘My Mum’s Bran Loaf’ (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 104) from contributor Lyndey Milan, is described as

“a treasured recipe in my family”, part of ongoing familial baking practice through her son, who “loved it and asked for it every time he went to Grandma’s”. In sharing the recipe with this attached narrative, she, as well as the book’s editors, invite readers to relate the anecdote to their own familiar and familial experience or culinary favourite, while participating in the extension of the ongoing practice—or adoption/adaption—of this generational connection and maternal care-giving. On another page, the cookbook includes a recipe for ‘Orange Butter Cake’ from contributor Alex Herbert, who explains its origins:

I’m not sure where I found this simple recipe...I am sure I owe it to Margie from Agostini’s...it became a weekly customer favourite...People always commented that it reminded them of a cake that their grandmother used to make.  
*(The Great Australian Baking Book, 2017, p. 64)*

This narrative is paired with a very simple presentation of a cake in an old-fashioned round mould with drizzled icing. Again, an invitation to relate it to personal experience is specified, and the connection to the past enhanced by the cake’s simple presentation that could easily be expected in a grandmother’s repertoire. Yet here, the legacy of the recipe is more diffused and generalised than in previous examples, and although there is some attempt at tracing the origins, the significant symbolism is attached to the familiar ‘reminder’ or evocation of the recipe, its appearance, and even in the imagined taste of the dish.

The constructed narratives in the cookbooks around generational recipes affirms an enhanced status or standing to ancestral elements attached to the food, providing a type of timeless or inherent value that functions to demonstrate how essential this aspect is to cultural conceptions of femininity and baking practice [see Section 6.5 for discussion on

Bourdieu's concept of status and the performance of femininity]. When one examines the cookbooks, what Neuhaus (2003) describes as 'domestic womanhood' and cooking as an "opportunity for creative expression, for experimentation, and public and private appreciation" (p. 2) is compounded by the number of recipes or dishes that are lauded for their generational value and subsequent 'public appreciation'. *Baking Day* (2012) specifies that 'When Friends Drop-By' "What better to serve friends than blueberry muffins or pumpkin scones. Familiar recipes such as these, handed down through generations" (p. 139), and depicts a laid table of baked goods being eaten with tea. The "public face of femininity" (Duruz, 1999) shown here encompasses an ability to impress using the attached familiar and familial heritage. It also actively encourages the opportunity to be creative and experimental with 'blueberry' and 'pumpkin' to increase the esteem gained by baking and display of approved 'domestic womanhood'. Another indicative example in *The Best-Ever Collection* (2013), specifically in the accompanying narrative for 'Featherlight Sponge', demonstrates the ascribed advantage added by familial origins of a dish:

Of the hundreds of sponge cake recipes created in the Test Kitchen, this heirloom recipe from the family of Cathy and Wendy Lonnie wins our vote hands down, as our best ever. (p. 256)

By describing this cake as 'best-ever' while labelling it an 'heirloom' recipe, the cookbook provides parameters for such a statement, and an indication that such origins deem recipes that have an assumed history of continual practice—and therefore, a type of perfection or precision of outcome—more valuable and necessary to feminine practice as a whole. Taking note of Theophano's (2002) suggestions that cookbooks exist as "a test of a women's craft, [and] an archive of memory and knowledge" (p. 123), the cookbooks in the thesis intimate how significant the role of 'passing on' or

dispersing ‘necessary’ knowledge is to ensuing generations of women, for their own success in baking practice, and for the expectation of its appreciation in attached feminine performances.

The importance of generational connection to recipes is not just about passing on the knowledge or know-how of an award-winning method, the cookbooks also attach significance to a type of learned practice that is showcased effectively via inherited tradition. In *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017), the opening paragraphs compare baking ‘Then and Now’, and describe shifts in practice and knowledge, “Mothers and grandmothers around the world are famously remembered for handing down family recipes using the ‘at your mother’s knee’ technique; that is, teaching you the recipe verbally as you grew up helping them. These days we know better and write every recipe down before it is lost in mists of time” (p. 7). It is this passing on of practice, and therefore the ‘archive of memory and knowledge’ that assures and assumes an ease of naturalness only able to be learned ‘at your mother’s knee’, significant when considering the entangled ideas of feminine legacy and publicly appreciated or expected performances of such. The cookbooks designate generational recipes as a passing on of knowledge of practice, of expectation, and of the act of care-giving that baking a ‘favourite’ or special treat provides, sustaining an assurance of ‘maternal proficiency’ attained through continued practice and reverence of legacy. The introductory narrative in *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) has Margaret explain herself the cherished childhood memories of watching her mother baking in the kitchen, and assuredly affirm that “I’ve continued the tradition, as has my daughter, Suzanne” (p. 6), indubitably tying together the substantial role generational recipes play in building a narrative of feminine practice—grandmother to mother to daughter—in the cookbooks, and one that is required to continue and be taken up by the reader in their own performance.

## 6.4 Baking with nostalgia

Previous discussions of nostalgia [see Section 5.6] framed the connection to cultural and national themes, and how it functioned to mythologise conceptions of a historical Australian femininity. This section will expand on the discussion and concentrate on probing nostalgic themes attached to examples of learned maternal practice and how the cookbooks use nostalgia to shape perceptions of feminine practice, while commodifying them accordingly.

The cookbooks all rely on the consumption of nostalgia in some form, and whether they emphatically call back to a past time to provide motivation for the recipes presented, as seen in *Retro Baking* (2015), *Recipes to Remember* (2016), *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017), *Baking Day* (2012) and *Afternoon Tea* (2010), or whether the nostalgic connotations are heavily implied in narrative and presentation, as in *The Baking Collection* (2014), *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016) and *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015). Regardless of the underlying intention, the cookbooks put forth a representation of particular ideas and stereotypes about a lost past of sweet baking memories, reminiscent of Jameson's (1991) description of a "contemporary lament" (p. 25). Through the narrative, the constructed aesthetics, and the recipes themselves, the cookbooks overtly transmit a constructed traditional feminine performance encapsulated within baking practice. *Afternoon Tea* (2010) anchors its blatant reflection of nostalgic remembering in each of its recipe contributor's photographs and whimsy-filled recollections, which all connect to women in their lives. This creates a feeling that each recipe has been pulled from childhood reminiscence, providing a 'historical' link that grounds the reader firmly in the past. Contributor Lauren Brisbane recalls alongside her recipe:

The smell of Mummy Biscuits baking always brings back fond childhood memories of me and my sisters helping (or hindering!) Mum in the kitchen...Now, whenever I bake them myself, I can't help but get nostalgic when the sweet, delicious smell starts wafting from the oven. (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 93)

The narrative connects the sweet food to childhood comfort and a 'contemporary lament' for imprinted feminine practice—of past and present—recalling the domestic happiness and maternal proficiency of her mother providing 'training' to her and her sisters, all the while reaffirming the feminine legacy that becomes naturally assumed and passed-down.

Within these examples the reader/consumer is also invited to reminiscence and experience anticipated emotional evocations associated with memories of a care-giving feminine legacy. Drawing on Jameson's (1991) suggestions that the need to experience and recreate the solace and happiness associated with—and expected from—nostalgic reflections are a "symptom of the waning of our historicity, [and] of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" (p. 21), the cookbooks present a reproduction of nostalgia that drives readers to experience 'history' by constructing anachronistic fantasies and ideal images of a particular feminine performance. Examining the introductory narrative of *Recipes to Remember* (2016) demonstrates a deliberate focus on 'Then and Now':

Mid last Century... the mother concentrated on looking after every aspect of the home for the family's well-being. Meals were simple, wholesome and hearty... Today, households are smaller and quite different... whatever happened to taking the time to smell the roses or bake a cake? (p. 6)

The idealised feminine performance revealed in this example centres on the home and family, ‘looking after every aspect of the home’, yet reads as though disconnected to reality or history by embracing a particular rendition of nostalgic fantasy where the past was simpler and feminine performance concentrated on having time to ‘bake a cake’ to ensure ‘the family’s well-being’.<sup>12</sup> McRobbie (1994) too makes assertions about how “nostalgia indicates a desire to re-create the past faithfully, and to wallow in such mythical representations” (p. 147), revealed through the assured and candid tone of this commentary to unveil a particular historical narrative. Such is made to seem plausible through a sense of entangled whimsy that allows readers to ‘wallow’ and express ‘lament’ for the loss of such idyllic conditions, left instead to experience the ‘different’ and perhaps dire contemporary situation, ‘whatever happened to taking the time to... bake a cake?’.

The distorted ‘reality’ of recollections in the cookbooks that connect heavily to childhood experience further express Jameson’s (1991) theories on the “mesmerising lost reality” of a bygone era. Presented in the cookbooks are vividly described processes and baking practices recollected purely from a child’s perspective, where a ‘real’ understanding of how the food or baking actually happened does not exist. *Afternoon Tea* (2010) indicates this distortion of reality and reproduction:

When I was a little girl, I used to sit in our lounge room after kindergarten and watch *Sesame Street*. My nan would bring me afternoon tea on a tray...lamingtons, jelly cakes, coconut tarts and chocolate chip cookies!

(*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 92)

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<sup>12</sup> The performance of ensuring the ‘well-being’ of her family as a Mother’s primary concern by providing ‘simple, wholesome and hearty’ meals connects closely to already discussed ideas of care-giving and love through food found in section 6.2 of this chapter.

The expectation of afternoon tea as a natural component of the relationship this contributor had with her grandmother features heavily in the ideal imagery of feminine practice reproduced by the cookbook—watching TV while being served varied treats—as does the disconnection to the reality of any time, effort and labour required to produce these sweet treats ready for her enjoyment.

The childhood memories presented in *Afternoon Tea* (2010) are closely correlated with the special food they recall and hold dear, in this case, food that appeals to children—jelly cakes, cookies—which in itself demonstrates a distortion of the particular mode of remembering in the cookbooks. Jameson’s (1991) deconstruction of nostalgic commodification describes a loss of a connection to history, communicated within the cookbooks it as a yearning for cherished remembrances of “first naïve innocence... condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach” (p. 25). As discussed earlier in the chapter [see Section 6.3], the ability to recreate a past recipe proves challenging, particularly if the recipe is intimately tied to specific performance of feminine practice and identity. Many of the reminiscences connect their enjoyment to the maternal practice itself, which places the recreation even further out of reach. For example, *Afternoon Tea* (2010), contributor Kaitlin Baker ties her mother’s ‘Rocky Road’ recipe to Christmas celebration and family fun, “I still help mum make it every year” (p. 96); while contributor Natasha Linskill remembers making ‘Afghan Biscuits’, “Baking with Nan was always an afternoon-long ritual” which would see them “...enjoy[ing] the fruits of our labour together for afternoon tea” (p. 95). In each of these remembrances, the pleasure of the treat itself as well as the memory is closely anchored to the feminine practice involved, ‘baking with Nan’, ‘help mum make it’, and the conviviality of doing the activity together, which indicates a yearning for the recreation of the experience

beyond the actual treat itself. The cherished remembrances of ‘naïve innocence’ are at play here and emphasise the whimsy around the experience, while keeping the specific construction of the femininity in the performance essential to the memory.

The cookbooks commodify and sell the bright longing of a nostalgic past as a vision that resides in the collective imagination. *Afternoon Tea* (2010) presents a vivid need to recollect an imagined past time, stressed from the outset, where even the title of the book, *Afternoon Tea*, is deliberate in its connotative purpose, reminding readers of a particular experience of sharing sweet treats with a nostalgic-coloured lens, and of the particular person—usually female—who baked or indulged them [see Section 5.5 for discussion on the historical links to afternoon tea traditions]. Throughout, *Afternoon Tea* (2010), seeks to reinforce the idea of experience that all readers should be able to relate to their own precious childhood experiences. By seeking the ‘History’ that Jameson describes, one which is permanently anchored to another era and only exists in memory, not able to be recreated in any tangible contemporary sense even as the cookbook stylises the recipes in a coded way that evokes the past.

Components of the cookbooks are presented and related to a time that is over and gone, no longer able to exist unless in memory, and elements contained within such as old-fashioned baking ephemera, add to the collective narrative that the loss of this time brings about a yearning for what is missing and “remains forever out of reach” (Jameson, 1991, p. 25). This too, is certainly linked to a presentation of the feminine legacy of baking performance enacted/re-enacted through consistent reiteration within the cookbooks, spelled out in the title pages, and based on an ideology of feminine practice. *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) contains a connection from learned maternal practice and anchors it in a contemporary experience, “My earliest memories were in the kitchen with either my mother or my gran. When I trained as a chef, all the

things I had been taught previously by those two women were now explained technically...” (p. 14). By representing specific ideology of how a mother, or a grandmother should act, connect to, provide for, and value, demonstrates how profoundly feminine practice has shaped happy recollections of childhood, and urges the reader to apply the same connections to their childhood. Examining how the cookbooks indicate hegemonic stereotypes of feminine practice reveals the kitchen to be a place of learning, training and production. Cairns and Johnston (2015b) suggest that:

Femininities become hegemonic precisely because they serve to uphold patriarchal relations of power—such as the expectation that women are ‘naturally’ caring and thus primarily responsible for the labor of social production, prioritising the needs of others before their own needs. (pp. 27-28)

Interrogating how reality is distorted in the cookbooks unmasks how an idyllic imagining of fulfilling a feminine legacy determines the kitchen as a feminised domain, and the core expectation that proper/true practice of femininity means providing at all costs—time, effort, labour—a memorable childhood full of baking, sweet treats, and care giving.

Expectations of feminine practice are conveyed in an *Afternoon Tea* (2010) contributor memory, “Mum baked all our afternoon tea sweet treats and they were delicious” (p. 93), demonstrating how the distortion of the memory is intimately entwined with the understanding of feminine practice and legacy. The ‘reality’ and ideology of the recollection places a value on the food prepared, ‘delicious’, as well as the feminine performance associated with it. As studies on nostalgic foods have found, the memories of being cared for by another were very strongly linked to certain foods—usually sweet foods—and while “the actual presence of the mother is not necessary to evoke the

feelings of being cared for...it is the memory of the caring mother evoked by the food object” (Locher, Yoels, Maurer, & van Ells, 2005, p. 281) that reproduces and strengthens this ideological expectation of feminine practice.

Extending on this, the cookbooks display a certain ideological value of feminine practice through memory and evoked emotion drawing on Barthes’ (1968/1986) concept of a ‘reality effect’. Using the ideas that the aesthetics of realism are destabilised by showing the pre-representational nature of reality, which aspires to be a faithful imitation of ‘real’ representations, a set of complex and artificial rhetorical codes become apparently constructed in the cookbooks (Barthes, 1968/1986). The intricate presentations of certain recipes, images, or particular narrative recollections indicates the coding of feminine practice via the use of ideological representations. By directing and exploiting nostalgic whimsy, femininity can be seen to be performed ‘authentically’ in the cookbooks through the packaging of baking practice, uncovering the existential function of this ‘reality effect’ and distortion. If nostalgic emotions and experiences are said to aid in the ability to cope with existential fears (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004) by allowing for the comfort and solace of an idealised past, then this distortion can provide a solid grounding of identity and self-assurance. This further extends the effects of nostalgic commodification to reproduce and shape representations of traditional femininity in the cookbooks, as well as in wider social perception.

To clarify these connections, examples of nostalgic commodification in *Retro Baking* (2015) show carefully posed images of heavily stylised women, baked goods, and domestic implements positioned to present a consumer fantasy heavily connected to the glamorised and idealised performance of an ‘imagined’ 1950s femininity. The introductory narrative gives insight into the persistence of this imagined 1950s feminine

imagery and practice, “Retro and Baking are words that just naturally go together” (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 7); thereby indicating that this connection specifically seeks to recall past baking styles and traditions by featuring various representations of women—both ‘real’ and symbolic—dressed in ‘retro’ styles. On the cover, a ‘cut-out’ is pictured and posed in a style reminiscent of the 1950s. This image—and other similar cut-outs—persist throughout the cookbook, each pictured in certain poses or actions that relate to the recipes or sections - a ‘cut-out’ dressed in pink and holding a pie smiles out at readers. The cookbook also contains photographs of ‘real’ women dressed in similar styles to the ‘cut-outs’, again indicating through the dress, make-up, hairstyles, and behaviour, an imagined 1950s rendition of femininity. Modern nostalgia, described as “a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values...the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (Boym, 2001, p. 8) is deliberately depicted in this cookbook—and others in the thesis—as a fanciful projection of the ‘loss of an enchanted world’ to reflect a picture of femininity that is comforting to readers when intermixed with the production of sweet goods and ideas of traditional domestic practice ‘with clear borders and values’.

Further contextualisation of these ideas within wider western social discourses adds a layer of complexity to how nostalgia is used in contemporary media to recall a past that contained representations of ‘real women’ to indicate, as Whelehan (2000) posits, a “retrosexism” employed to be “defensively reinvented against cultural changes in women’s lives” (p. 11). This idea gains merit when comparing the number of wider published texts on baking and cake that employ nostalgic themes—and even within the cookbooks included in this thesis—by completely engaging and packaging ideas of past tradition. These recurrent representations move towards idealising a depiction of an ahistorical or imagined feminine pleasure that comes naturally from assuming the

proper mode, expectations and practice of femininity, particularly in contemporary terms or equivalence.

## 6.5 Status and performing femininity

To consider the full implications of heavily stylised images present throughout the cookbooks, concepts of ‘status’ can be applied as a guiding framework. In particular, how the ‘material culture’ of baking functions within the cookbooks becomes pertinent, as does Bourdieu’s (1979/1984) claims that:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar. (p. 6)

Although, not completely applicable in this case, the concepts that Bourdieu proposes of classification and distinction, in social terms, are revealed within the cookbooks. The stylish images of scenes with delicate and decorative touches centring on beautifully presented sweet food ready to share certainly communicates ideas of distinction and status. Additionally, Brown’s (2000) notions of ‘clutter’ also apply here, and in this case, makes such connections to Bourdieu’s notions of status clearer, indicating that such functions by “competing...for the attention of the viewer in much the same way that ‘accessories’ are sold to women to augment their garments” (p. 46). Ideas of ‘status’ are conveyed via the assortment of objects, whereby the sweets presented became ultimately an ‘accessory’ of feminine performance, that is purposely made for attention of others.

To explain this further in relation to stylised sweet food in the cookbooks, *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) contains a recipe for *Linzer Biscuits* (pp. 42-43). The

heart-shaped biscuits are accompanied by narrative that clarifies how their original round shape was changed to produce “something different” for readers (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 43). The narrative underscores the thin and delicate nature of the biscuits, the placement of the jam inside, and the careful dusting of powdered sugar depicted in the photograph. In the background, there are empty biscuit cut outs and a jar of jam, as if ready for assembly. The way these biscuits are presented indicates their suitability for a gift, to purposely elicit positive and complimentary reactions from guests, an idea supported by the narrative, which tells the origin of the recipe, “I had a friend from Linz who gave me this recipe and talked about how important their jam was and how they liked to show it off” (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 43). There is value placed on having others appreciate the effort and expertise undertaken in baking the sweet food, as well as a sense of pleasure connected to the ‘status’ of baking for others that extends beyond just aspects of care and affection previously discussed in this chapter [see Section 6.2]. Implications of ‘showing-off’ the craft of homemade jam also draws on Charles and Kerr’s (1988) suggestions that women perform food femininities as a way to enhance or indicate status, revealed here and in the cookbooks through baking practice, socially sanctioned for others in mind. The notion of a reward gained in demonstrating such behaviour and stylised skill also recalls wider theoretical investigation into conflicting ideas of duty and selflessness that are associated with consumptive practices to encourage narcissistic and hedonistic desires of self-indulgence (Caldwell, Kleppe & Henry, 2007; Woodruffe, Burton & Ireland, 2012). Interrogating these concepts begins to uncover the appeal at the core of hegemonic feminine behaviours, and how effort and practice become part of valued status, made more abstruse when considering the cycle of reward and pleasure outside of the actual act of eating the sweet food.

Furthermore, the cookbooks have many connotations that tie questions of status in a tacit way to the produced good. In *Baking Day* (2012), ‘Rosewater Meringue Kisses’ (pp. 42-43) are perfectly shaped to display a vibrant red filling with no spillage or mess. The *Kisses*’ recipe is quite challenging, with specific instructions to ensure meringues are beaten properly; a long and very precise baking time; and a caution to confirm the proper consistency of the cream filling—which requires the use of a piping bag—also with specific size and shape directions. The recipe warns that putting the *Kisses* together will take a delicate and precise touch. Such a procedure, that requires skill, confidence, and time, surely indicates that the successful production of this recipe ensures a heady impression when served and adds to the idea of such representing an ‘accessory’ of feminine performance made for attention, pleasure, and praise.

Concepts of status and expected feminine behaviours connect to long-lasting cultural assumptions which contend that women “employ sweet foods to achieve otherwise unattainable objectives” (Mintz, 1985, p. 150). These notions have been contested by Mintz (1985)—although not deeply interrogated—yet remain a profoundly cultural perception, as Perianova (2013) notes, “the belief that women like sweet things more than men and use them to ‘achieve’ objectives...is still with us today” (p. 55). The consistency of stylish and ‘cluttered’ presentations in the cookbooks function to enhance the appeal of the imaged sweet food and seem to suggest that the showing of skill in baking involves notions of status. In this case, ‘otherwise unattainable objectives’ can apply to the value of or judgement of ascribed status, heavily connected to expected and socially sanctioned performances of femininity. The cookbooks communicate that the baking and sharing of sweet food is able to attribute certain distinctions and classifications to women who participate in or are culturally affected/aware of the concerns connected to achieved/ascribed status.

To look further at the implications in the example from *Baking Day* (2012), the setting of the imaged *Kisses* is matched perfectly to the stylised sweet, as the foreground focuses on the finished sweet on a pink, flowery, tiered serving platter; while behind, and slightly out of focus, are raspberries and a vase with flowers. Off to the side, there are stacked teacups and saucers, ready to partake in along with the *Kisses*. Clearly, consumption of the look and presentation is what matters here, and the actual eating secondary. The challenge and ability needed to recreate this recipe categorises it outside of the everyday and ordinary, and the demanding performance of putting together such a stylised presentation demonstrates the role status plays in baking—and the creation of sweet food—as a hegemonic feminine behaviour. The examination of cookbooks suggests of food and eating what Warde and Martens (2000) call, “the shared affect associated with competent participation in a collectively constructed event gives some of the highest of social rewards” (p. 210). In this case, the presentation and skill shown is more complex than it seems, demonstrating how ‘social rewards’ and achieved status are ensured via participation in this hegemonic behaviour of femininity. Moreover, the implication that the purpose or underpinning motivation for the baking of this particular sweet—and other similar recipes—is to garner praise of skill and effort from an audience underscores how such rewards can be an expected part of feminine performance.

## **6.6 Feminine pastiche**

The cookbooks in this thesis depict a precise image of femininity through the use of instinctive associations, construed through colours, presentation and composition of images, whether in the photographs or illustrations, the fonts and typeface used, or in the placement or association with domestic elements. For instance, one of the most

basic symbols utilised throughout the cookbooks is the colour pink, which presents a widespread and immediate cultural connotation to femininity. Koller's (2008) investigation into the use of pink as a marker of visual communication reveals frequent cognitive associations to "femininity and its stereotypical features, such as softness and delicacy...childhood and innocence as well as with vanity and artificiality" (p. 396). These ideas can be recognised throughout the cookbooks, particularly when closely associated with feminine practices in domestic spaces. In *Recipes to Remember's* (2016) 'Ladies Who Lunch' section, the presentation accentuates the 'ladies' component of what is to follow (p. 42). The dining area is decorated in shades of pink and white, from darker checked floors, to soft pink pillows, window dressings, napery, tea cosy and tea set, all culminating in the pink roses at the centre of the table. This is further expounded by the accompanying narrative that observes:

It's not so long ago that ladies stayed at home to look after the domestic scene. It wasn't always easy to travel to a friend's place for lunch, so when they did it was a special gathering with quite a bit of time and effort put into the event by the hostess. (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 43)

The heavily curated scene connects to the stereotyped features associated with femininity and the colour pink, by indicating 'softness' and 'delicacy' in the décor, as well as a sense of 'vanity' and 'artificiality' in the need to host an inspiring event. The pages that follow are full of challenging recipes, such as 'Coconut Panna Cotta with Mango and Coconut Wafers' (p. 68) and 'Tiramisu' (p. 70), presented immaculately and ready to serve and make an impression on guests.

The way each symbol is put together visibly constructs a representation of a social understanding of femininity, and in this case, creates expectations about the feminine

and what might be considered ‘natural’ behaviour. Baudrillard’s (1981/1994) concepts of simulacra apply here as these constructions are not based upon an original image or essential notion of femininity. The representations in these books instead become a distorted imitation, or a pastiche connected to social and cultural aspects of expected feminised performance. The gendered representations can be seen as a simulacrum as they exist only as an elaborate construct that cannot be embodied in totality by any real person. The concepts of the feminine presented within the cookbooks instead provide insight into ideal models of behaviour, appearance, and desire that connect to wider social conventions.

The cookbooks present carefully constructed and created images of femininity that reflect a certain narrative connected to prevalent social notions, yet one that cannot be fully or completely performed, similar to what Butler (1990) suggests, in that no real gender or true essential truths exist. Closer inspection uncovers deliberate representations of femininity depicted to reveal that “gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1990, p. 278) yet with added levels of meaning. The gendered performance in the cookbooks functions merely as an ideology of expected and socially scripted conventions that make up a simulacrum of what is feminine or masculine. The representations of baking, cake, and the domestic in the cookbooks fit neatly into these socially scripted conventions of feminine practice, which has long associated food and food practices to feminine characteristics (Daniels et al., 2012; Inness, 2001; DeVault, 1991; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Lupton, 1996; Allen & Sachs, 2012/2007; Cairns & Johnston, 2015b). The conventions that underlie the perception of femininity are sustained and reproduced continually via a skewed understanding and distorted expectations that provide more valuable insights than any truth or essentiality. It

becomes apparent that the widely mimicked, imitated and repeated precise constructions of femininity, found in images, commentary, and narratives of feminine expectations and practice are intentionally exhibited in the cookbooks to be celebrated and esteemed. Thus, the construction of baking and food practice has ‘real’ world applications and associations to any ‘real’ expressions of the feminine. In the case of this thesis, the cookbooks function as a lens to see how material culture encapsulates and enriches wider perceptions and conceptions of feminine performance.

The construction of the feminine in the cookbooks is accepted without much reflection, query, or dispute because wider social distortions have been naturalised via thorough and recurrent immersion of imagery, coded behaviours and performance based on imitation and this pastiche of ‘real’ gender expression (Baudrillard, 1981/1994). The pastiche depicted in the cookbooks further evokes Jameson’s (1991) theories of a series of emptied-out ahistorical stylisations that can be commodified and consumed as a stand-in for the real; an imitation which has no original truth or essence. An example of this distorted construction in action occurs in the presentation and connotations around cake in the cookbooks and in wider social perception. Leaving aside the historical connections with cake and feminine practice [see chapter 5 for in-depth discussion], as well as the way sugar has historically been associated with femininity [this will be addressed in Section 8.3], instead a focus can be made on the way cake itself is a stand in for the feminine. In *Afternoon Tea* (2010), most of the contributed recipes are from women, who recollect their childhood and the favourite treats made special by the women in their lives. Within the book the treats are presented in a very simple, but heavily stylised manner. On the surface, this seems to be contradictory, yet when connected to the constructions of femininity discussed in this chapter, concepts of a staged feminine performance are revealed throughout all of the cookbooks. In further

examination of *Afternoon Tea* (2010), full page spreads show baked goods on table coverings in various shades of pink, red, white, yellow, with flowers, decorative lace, dots, checks, stripes or pictures of fruit, most which contain patterns that connect to an older period or fashion [further discussion on vintage trends and associations in Section 6.6 of this chapter]. Most of the cakes are ‘dressed-up’ in some way to enhance the idea of staged deliberateness to make them appealing to the reader and to emphasise the feminine connotations or performance behind the cake. ‘Grandma’s Fudge Cake’ is covered in coconut on a pink and gold plate, atop a colourful tea towel and a striped table covering (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 54). These items depict a different era and connect to past fashions and ideas, while attributing ownership of the recipe to ‘grandma’, emphasising the recipe’s disconnection with contemporary design and perceptions. There are coded behaviours indicated within this representation, of simplicity connected to another era, and of feminine ownership and behaviour, purposely staged to evoke a pastiche of feminine performance.

This is further presented in *Afternoon Tea* (2010) by added embellishments, whether through the use of a plate or serving platter, or in icing—which is simple, emphasising the type of valorised performance—or with other implements that depict past eras or concepts of feminine practice connected to the past. Often the colours used correlates to feminine imagery, in particular, the ownership of the recipe is emphasised—the relationship to the contributor, or the female name of the creator—and each is decorated specifically to encourage the feminised connection and convention. However, it is only when examining the exceptions to this pattern closely that the process of deliberate construction is revealed.

Two recipes in *Afternoon Tea* (2010) are ‘masculinised’, in that the colours are subdued with shades of blue, green and brown interspersed with white, to create a more neutral

picture. The pictures of these cakes do not come accompanied with the usual delicate accoutrement or platter; ‘Macadamia Beer Cake’ (p. 46), is placed on a plain white plate with no icing or garnish. In the case of this recipe specifically, there are also immediate connections present with the word ‘Beer’ and the subsequent masculine coding that occurs. In another instance, ‘Nelly’s Apple Shortcake’ (p. 13) is covered in whipped cream and placed without a dish atop the table covering. Both recipes have male contributors, and although most other recipes that feature seem to have less of the trimmings present in most of the cookbooks in this thesis, these examples seem starkly unadorned in comparison to the other baked goods presented and styled in *Afternoon Tea* (2010). This reveals a type of masquerade in the imitation or evocation of the feminine, which is noticeable when contrasted with the opposite or dissimilar. If the construction of femininity is based on social convention and cultural conceptions, then careful scrutiny unveils Heath’s (1986) suggestions:

In the masquerade the woman mimics an authentic—genuine—womanliness but then authentic womanliness is such a mimicry, is the masquerade ...; to be a woman is to dissimulate a fundamental masculinity, femininity is that dissimulation. (p. 49)

To clarify this further, the ‘dissimulation’ present in the cookbooks depict cake in a particular way that mimics or imitates the stylisation or construction of feminine practice or connotations. This can be seen in the cultural associations present and the way such are contrasted with in more neutral representations. The cookbooks present cake as appealing and pleasurable, as alluring to the senses, yet also adorned and ‘dressed-up’ in a similar way expected of feminised performance. The femininity presented seems to be an imitation, or a masquerade that is embellished and decorated. The garnishes, embellishments, and ornamentation that accompany the recipes enhance

the pictures yet can be dismissed as ‘frou frou’ or frippery, in much the same way that decorative and heavily stylised elements of femininity, or perhaps the masquerade of femininity, can be. Although elements of feminine masquerade are touched on here, more critical discussion that examines links between masquerade, femininity and voyeurism in the cookbooks can be found in later chapters [see Section 7.3].

Referring back to Koller’s (2008) study [mentioned on p. 177] which found solid links between cultural associations of pink and ‘stereotypical features’ of femininity, each of the aspects listed could easily be used to describe the cakes in this thesis’ examination of cookbooks. ‘Softness’ and ‘delicacy’ are viewed in the decorative elements—the use of platters, tableware or serving elements, and even in the icing and garnishes present. An association to ‘childhood and innocence’ is more than overtly implied in *Afternoon Tea* (2010), in fact one could assert that this is the main intention or desired simulation for its audience. Lastly, to address stereotypical attributes of ‘vanity and artificiality’; the creation of a cake itself could be considered as a vanity project, particularly if the cake is specially made or designed to connect as an identity or a birthday expression. Significantly, inspection of the cookbooks can surely be seen as an exploration of the artificiality of stylised constructions to sell an image or idea in order to generate profit.

The staged performance and stylisation observed in the cookbooks presents the simulacra of femininity, reminiscent of Brownmiller’s (1984) definitions of a cultural femininity which incorporates:

...the decorative and the frivolous into its definition of style... function[ing] as an effective antidote to the unrelieved seriousness... femininity operates as a value system of niceness, a code of thoughtfulness and sensitivity that in modern society is sadly in short supply. (p. 17)

These attributes of “niceness”, “thoughtfulness”, “an antidote to seriousness” and frivolity could be applied to the making of, decorating of, and styling of baked goods and cake, and the picture of decorative wholesomeness that is consistently presented within the cookbooks as natural expressions or performances of femininity.

## 6.7 ‘Kitschification’ of femininity

The construction of anachronistic images and decoration in the cookbooks connect to wider categorisations and ‘definitions’ of femininity to provide both overt and underlying implications to analyse and explore. Many of the texts depict a performance of the past that purposely evokes standards of beauty and cultural connotations of another time, recalled explicitly by *Retro Baking* (2015), *Baking Day* (2012), *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017), *Recipes to Remember* (2016) and *Afternoon Tea* (2010)—which heavily feature and describe this nostalgic connection to vintage style and methods—or more implicitly featured in *The Baking Collection* (2014), *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015), *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017), *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016), *The Great Australian Bake-Off Companion* (2016) and *Planet Cake: Love and Friendship* (2015). An idealised fantasy of feminine performance is constructed in layers, which begin with culturally associated feminine colours—pinks, whites and pastels—and continues through into the fashion depicted, the posed physicality of the models or renditions of women, the culinary ephemera—many of which seem to recall vintage patterns, designs and materials—or the design of the food itself, with icings and decorations typically associated with older trends. This staged performance is central to the consumption of the books, as well as the feminine fantasy they induce, and create expectation for.

The presentation and symbolic interpretation of the implements of baking in the cookbooks are addressed consistently throughout the thesis discussion. It becomes useful here as the discussion relates notions of kitsch to femininity and feminine practice and the use of vintage styles [see Section 8.2 for discussion of culinary material culture and performances of indulgence; and Section 3.9 for scholarly review of kitsch and nostalgia in post-modernism]. The way objects—or culinary ephemera—are assembled and stylised within the books to conjure notions of femininity is significant in this examination, as is the imagined processes or actions of the spaces presented, and namely, how domestic spaces are specifically tailored to depict different actions or ideas. Within the constructed domestic spaces in the cookbooks, certain representations of femininity become recognisable via the ornamentation, accessories of baking and the kitsch of the kitchen. This representation works to produce a cultural short-hand or substitute for notions of feminine domesticity and practice that can be understood and sustained without the need to show photographs or renditions of women. In *Recipes to Remember* (2016) spaces are coded to indicate different purposes or gendered expectations. For example, sections on ‘Tea Time’, ‘Ladies who Lunch’ and ‘Fetes and Cake Stalls’ are clearly designated as female-centred activities, so their depictions of kitchens, dining space and cake stalls are adorned with canisters, teapots, old recipe books, patty cases, flowers, thrift store kitchenware and mismatched tea sets, all in differing reds, pinks, whites and pastels. For sections that are family centred or more general in purpose, such as ‘Family Dinners’, ‘Late Night Suppers’ and ‘Take-a-plate’, the spaces depicted and the ephemera becomes more muted and rendered in darker shades, with pink and green accents replaced by deep blues and wood finishing; and while the spaces are still adorned with decorative affects and flowers, the scenes invite a different anachronistic reading, of a subdued feminine performance in a neutral space.

In a similar way, elements of the domestic environment in *The Baking Collection* (2014), work to reveal a space that evokes a hyper-feminine aesthetic, as dishes, cups, napery, and spoons are placed very deliberately next to or on top of decorative lacework and delicate doilies, to project a seemingly haphazard style, where colours, objects, backgrounds, and of course, potential food products blend and match together harmoniously. The objects here function to not only evoke feminine associations, through notions of delicacy, but also allow for an association with past values, philosophies and practices via the connection to the increasingly pervasive ‘vintage’ trend observed throughout consumer culture (Dirix, 2014) and harnessed within the cookbooks.

The books rely on a *kitschification* of the feminine in order to verify a precise depiction, in particular, their construction of ideal practices and aesthetic aspirations of femininity are marketed/promoted through the use and presentation of vintage kitsch. The objects and domestic ephemera presented in the books are understood as vintage and from the past by interpretation of certain stylistic signs and aesthetics (Hodkinson, 2012), reminiscent of Jameson’s (1991) concepts on the weakening of historicity, and the ability to “...understand the past...as a repository of genres, styles, and codes ready for commodification...approach[ed]...through stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image...” (p. 19). In *Afternoon Tea* (2010), the reader is directed by *coded* words on inside blurb to think of “scrumptious *old-school* afternoon tea treats” that have been “hand-picked and *handed down* through generations”, inspiring nostalgic recollections—whether ‘real’ or culturally-infused imaginings—of an idealised past imbued with feminine characterisations, which can only be realised or embodied in practice by the use or consumption of appropriate objects, as the blurb specifies, “put your apron on and set the table”.

The vintage associations in the cookbooks are utilised to *kitschify* a femininity that is imagined in an ahistorical yet immensely commodified manner and made recognisable through stylistic placement of objects, which can be connected to wider cultural consumer trends in fashion, craft and design. The packaging—and commodification—of nostalgic traditions in the cookbooks is further demonstrated in the presentation of different trends and contemporary patterns and showcased in the use or exclusion of certain ingredients, methods and flavours. Significantly, the “increasingly popular and all-pervasive ‘vintage’ style witnessed in consumer culture” is seemingly identifiable in the cookbooks, to encourage a “sentimental and emotive nostalgia” (Dirix, 2014, p. 88, p. 91). The popularity and continual publication of nostalgic and vintage themed cookbooks is perhaps an attempt to reconnect to a past femininity that was more recognisable and identifiable, and able to produce sentimental and emotionally expressive artefacts, in the comfort of baked goods and cake. This can be seen within *Afternoon Tea* (2010), which was compiled by *Frankie Magazine*, a publication that “relies largely on the effective commodification of indie cultural values and practices” (Zhao, 2013, p. 143). From the outset, the cover of *Afternoon Tea* (2010) conveys information about the expected contents, but also about the way this book should be consumed, read and understood. A definite impression is placed on readers, subtly extended and built to form a precise picture or image of a particular lifestyle, presented by a red apple patterned linoleum—a home fashion symbol of the 1950s repeated throughout the book—which inspires a sentimentalised reminiscence of childhood kitchen décor, as well as the teapot and tea cosy which tell of an old-fashioned—and long-lost—craft. Even without explicit narrative support, these pictured utensils anchor the reader to a particular experience centred and focused on the past.

*Afternoon Tea* (2010) presents patterns, designs and decorations heavily reminiscent of 1940s and 1950s styles, with shades of pink in table coverings, plates, and other frippery, as well as repetitive textual elements suggestive of patterned linoleum in reds, greens and blues and fashioned with apples, stripes, dots, checks and flowers. Drawing on Dirix's (2014) explanations:

that vintage style became removed from a genuine historic original and instead a new–old style was developed which stylistically owed little to the aforementioned historic styles and a lot to very carefully chosen elements of 1940s and 1950s domestic and fashion styles. (p. 91)

*Afternoon Tea* (2010) also places baking implements amongst its pages and food imagery that evoke a 'vintage' association. There is a hand-crafted tea cosy (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 5), a strainer that looks rusted with a tarnished wood handle (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 8), an old-fashioned metal tray and silver serving spoon (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 34), and what looks to be a hand-painted cat platter, which suggest that it may be from a personal kitsch collection (*Afternoon Tea*, 2010, p. 49). The eclectic style of baking ephemera in the cookbook further utilises Dirix's (2014) notion that:

Vintage does not focus on the reality of the decades it revives; instead, it draws on idealized versions of those decades...Glamorous housewives, carbon copies of 1950s illustrations for ...adverts, which in their own time were idealized abstractions, are transplanted...and presented as a reality which can be achieved through the consumption of the right vintage-style goods. (p. 91)

*Afternoon Tea's* (2010) use of such vintage-inspired styles reveals complexity in the construction of a femininity firmly rooted in 'past'—illusory—feminine practice. The 'abstractions' realised here, and in the other cookbooks, are made recognisable and

aspirational via the presentation of kitsch yet rely heavily on evoking sentiments/connotations that exist purely in the collective imagination, and becomes, through simulation, reproductions of a carbon copy of femininity detached from history or truth, instead creating a hollow and artificial construction.

Furthermore, the presentations in the cookbooks recall Baudrillard's (1970/2016) notions of kitsch in comparison to aesthetics of beauty or originality, where he asserts that "kitsch opposes its aesthetics of simulation: it everywhere reproduces objects smaller or larger than life; it imitates materials...; it apes forms or combines them discordantly; it repeats fashion without having been part of the experience of fashion" (p. 111). The eclectic haphazardness design of *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016) presents this via a mix of immaculately presented and messy, interrupted food scenes, some which stress the contemporary—by including ingredients, techniques and decorations that seem current—and some which seem to reach back to the past. The combination of both creates a sense of discord, detached from truth and history.

Alongside depictions of baked goods, there are what *Baking: The Complete Collection*, (2016) calls "a collection of utensils" just for baking, such as jars full of baking ingredients—Meringues, sugar, baking beads—rolling pins, age-weathered mixes, that allow for success, and to "be well-equipped to go down the rewarding path of baking" (p. 6). Although messy, the presentations are still very stylised and deliberate in disarray to project a sense of perfection and an aesthetic that is carefully cultivated and connected to a 'staged' feminine performance. The proper materials and utensils—or the *kitsch* of feminine practice—are needed in order to produce the food pictured with ease and style, as though the work of this performance is hidden or concealed underneath a perfection that seems inherent or transcendental.

Within the cookbooks, a theme of learned preciseness becomes prominent, that is recognisably feminine, but that offers a different impression than the nostalgic or sentimentalised kitsch as previously described and analysed. Distinctly homely and welcoming yet constructed with a deliberateness and a thoughtfulness distinguishable from earlier characterisations of ‘vintage’ or ‘retro’. Closer review of the cookbooks exhibits Dirix’s (2014) assertions of “something very pretty and seductive decorated with cabbage roses and cute bows that apparently celebrates a less sexualized and more wholesome femininity, but which in fact has more problematic roots and consequences” (p. 89). *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) induces readers to “find recipes that showcase Australia’s beautiful ingredients and cosmopolitan heritage”, exposing a sophisticated, culturally entangled, and difficult to separate ‘pretty and seductive’ setting amongst pictures of native fruits, flora, shots of outback landscapes and ‘wellies’ by the backdoor. The cookbook is full of bright colourful scenes of food and domestic spaces to convey a sense of conviviality and rustic-ness that fits the narrative of a “quintessential collection of contemporary Australian baking”, with all the “favourites” adjusted to fit “the modern Australian baker’s repertoire [which] includes quandongs, quinces and quiches, Kindlech and Baklawa...” (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 8). However, amongst the descriptions of Old ‘favourites’ given a ‘new’ spin, cultural adaptations and ‘natural and native’ ingredients in recipes, there is an impression of a sentimentalised feminine performance that is entwined with contemporary trend and set to appeal in a certain way. One such recipe for ‘Apple Pie’ is accompanied by a narrative that speaks of ideals better situated in the past than in contemporary understandings:

The old-fashioned Bramley apple, which...is perfect for making apple pies...  
are planted at Essington Park, our home in the country...we make pies with

these when they fruit every year. (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 152)

The narrative here, and throughout *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) reveals nostalgic sentiment, particularly within presentations that call back to quintessential ideas like ‘home’, seasonal planting and baking, however, when examined carefully urges a different type of feminine performance. Closer reading suggests a “wholesome femininity” (Dirix, 2014) by recalling past traditions, ‘old-fashioned Apple Pies’ still set against a backdrop of a practising femininity yet with a markedly contemporary approach. Trends in popular culture of a return to ‘domestic femininity’ [see Section 2.5] are entangled with notions of a past feminine performance that romanticises the simplicity of domesticity, home-making skills, and lifestyle.

This sensibility can also be noted in *The Great Australian Bake-Off Companion* (2016), which depicts its kitchen in a shed in the outback, with native flora everywhere, as well as the expected baking ephemera. The introductory narrative too evokes something that ‘celebrates a wholesome femininity’, encouraging readers as “nothing allows creativity and generosity like the homemade bake”, whereby using this book will enable “a celebration of everything that’s great about Australian baking” (p. 11). There is an eclectic mix of products, second-hand and recycled homewares throughout the cookbook, paired with bush-kitchen colonial impressions, with refurbished pieces, built shelves, in a wide, open space that also gives off a distinct industrial vibe. It is perhaps in this clash of different depictions—bush-kitchen versus industrial—and of the recipes themselves, conceived “throughout the show [as] the bakers...experimented with flavour combinations from around the world, and sometimes challenged what we perceived as unchangeable and traditional” (*The Great Australian Bake-Off Companion*,

2016, p. 9), that creates the duality of reaching back into the past while including some truly contemporary interpretations to the practice of baking.

The depictions in *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) and *The Great Australian Bake-Off Companion* (2016) feel largely more contemporaneous than some of the other cookbooks discussed in the thesis, but the practices presented within are heavily couched by kitsch and the ‘proper’ implements of baking. At first glance, the cookbooks might seem more neutral in approach, yet they still contain implications and expectations of how the domestic space is used and perceived that connects baking practice with traditional notions of femininity. The presentations direct readers to consider or take on a preciseness in practice that contains a highly stylised and constructed aesthetic value. The use of vintage trends and kitsch in these cookbooks presents a “seductive” (Dirix, 2014) picture that is highly problematic, as they “may suggest a predisposition or inherent social conservatism that cleaves to the values and mores of the past” (Guffey, 2006, p. 10) and can be connected to the popular embrace of traditional gender roles and the comfort of reconnecting with a time gone by where things were simpler (Palmer, 2005). This narrative of a preciseness or perfection in practice, an embrace of valuable past traditions, and of a lifestyle that is matched to enact this performance, ‘our home in the country’, ‘creativity and generosity’, ‘quintessential Australian baking’, ultimately functions to present a femininity that is just as unattainable or rendered in fantasy as in any other cookbooks in the thesis.

## **6.8 Summary**

This chapter discussed cultural conceptions of femininity and how baking is constructed as a natural, essential, and expected component of feminine performance. It focused on the traits, qualities, practices and behaviours connected to baking practice. The chapter

examined perceptions of domestic space and how such is constructed and coded as feminine to indicate social aspects of status, maternal obligation, and the enacting of successful food femininities. Lastly, it explored how the cookbooks present imagery that suggest notions of feminine pastiche and a simulation of an embellished, decorated, and ahistorical femininity that is packaged and commodified yet links to wider social narratives of expected and/or preferred gender expressions.

## 7 Sexuality, sensuality and feminine identity: baking for consumption

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...reading a cookbook is like following a sensate trail to another place remote from us in space and time...a path to the present...The recipe is a copy of the original... and each subsequent attempt to reconstruct it, a copy of a copy. It is the closest we can come to another world. By its reading we are momentarily transformed... Without ever preparing a dish, reading with one's imagination is a satisfying act. (Janet Theophano, 2002, p. 271)

### 7.1 Introduction

The interplay and influence of gender on consumptive behaviour has garnered significant theoretical scrutiny and inquiry into the process of negotiation that occurs when consuming an object or experience. In particular, consumption is thought to be one of the key ways individuals present and construct gender identity, as well as informing the formation, maintenance, and position of social relationships (Aiken, 1963; Allison, Golden, Mullet & Coogan, 1980; Firat, 1991; Goulding & Saren, 2009; Otnes & Zayer, 2012; Schroeder, 1998, 2003; Stern, 1988; Fischer & Arnold, 1990; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). This process gains further complexity when focusing on food and the behaviour around consuming food, arguably the significant factor used to indicate gender differences in everyday social activities (Cronin, McCarthy, Newcombe, & McCarthy, 2014; Chaiken & Pliner, 1987; Hollows, 2008). Therefore, consumption is a key component when analysing the presentation or construction of femininity in the cookbooks, and more precisely, the implications of pleasure/s associated with consumptive behaviour in wider social narratives.

Previous discussion chapters have revealed how mythologised and historic Australian feminine practice is consumed alongside ideological feminine expectations. This chapter extends on ideas of a consumable femininity by contextualising elements of sensuality, temptation, and productive pleasure encoded within the cookbooks, including notions of consuming *experience*, beyond depictions of goods or material culture. The key concept of ‘aesthetic knowledge’ is crucial to understanding contemporary consumption experiences where images become a central—and swift—way of transmitting culturally recognised and/or stereotyped meanings to consumers (Appadurai, 1986; Featherstone, 1982; Keat, Whiteley & Abercrombie, 1994). The chapter will address larger implications in the transmission of this ‘aesthetic knowledge’ by examining presentations of ‘feminine identity’ centre on idealised performances to associate particular expressions of femininity with the pleasures of baking, creativity in the kitchen, and serving others.

The saturation of images in contemporary consumer culture and their significant role in externalising and constructing consumer identity and lifestyle practices will also be explored in-depth. In particular, the value that society places on these images can determine how they exploit and manipulate cultural meanings of gender to fit a certain consumptive experience (Lury, 1996; Jameson, 1991; Warde, 1997). Accordingly, the chapter will also consider consumptive processes as suggested within the cookbooks—of bodies, of sensuality, of visual representations—and of the encoded and implied values of passivity, desirability, and complicity. Lastly, the tensions and contradictions present in such depictions will be interrogated, in addition to the crucial roles food practices play in constructing/deconstructing concepts and ideals of femininity in broader social narratives.

## 7.2 Consuming a narrative of pleasure

Significant to this discussion is the guiding contextual theoretical framework that underpins the major terms and concepts drawn upon in the chapter, namely, Foucault's (1985/1990) notions of pleasure as a transformative mechanism that encourages receptivity to taking pleasure within a structure of practice that is productive. Within the cookbooks a narrative of the pleasure of production is alluded to via ideas and notions in pictured food, by the environment where the food is posed, and perhaps less ambiguously, through images of women baking, serving, or interacting alongside the food pictured. The sense of pleasure repeatedly implied within the types of feminine performance is central to the consumption of the books, as well as the feminine fantasy they induce, and create expectation for. For example, *Retro Baking's* (2015) depicts performances of feminine pleasure by using fantasy and expectation before a recipe is even presented. Illustrated blonde smiling cut-outs and images of freshly made pies shine out amongst the pink of the titles and assortment of baking implements positioned on the cover. Other cookbooks in the thesis include similar cover depictions indicating a method of engaging readers via an expectation of production and anticipation of greater pleasures to be encountered inside.

Notions that imply pleasure through production are reaffirmed in the cookbooks via implications that 'baking is fun'. Many introductory narratives explicitly use such to entice a particular expectation in readers, made obvious in *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017):

...don't be afraid to have fun with your baking. The more you bake, the more you'll get to know the basic methods and processes, and before you know it you'll find yourself experimenting with flavours and ingredients to create your own personal favourites...happy baking! (p. 18)

Implicitly, this narrative encourages a Foucauldian sense of receptivity, ‘don’t be afraid’, ‘the more you bake’, and implies the transformative experience to be had via the pleasure of production itself, leading to greater pleasures in the success and satisfaction of creating favourite baked goods. It also indicates that within a structure of practice, better understanding and ease with the methods, processes, and creativity of baking, a sense of joy can be attained and pleasure, not before experienced, reached for.

The cookbooks create an idealised view of culinary performances by conveying an assured perception of pleasure within and/or at the end of the process. This further reveals Foucault’s (1985/1990) concepts of subjectivity whereby an understanding of ‘the self’ can develop through an “ethics of pleasure, of intensification of pleasure” (p. 380). Foucault (1985/1990) descriptions of a transformations of the ‘self’ attained in the work of pleasure, the use of pleasure, and the action of living in and through pleasure, aids in deconstructing how the cookbooks demonstrate notions of femininity. The sense of pleasure and joy displayed in the work of baking also functions to point out how such might be lacking or still required in the reader’s own lifestyle. By entangling concepts of pleasure and feminine performances of baking, the cookbooks signal the intricacy involved in transforming the ‘self’ to match or reflect the femininity demonstrated in their pages.

The images show what might happen in the spaces between baking, working like a shining advertisement of what could be possible for readers. *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) contains images of a smiling blonde woman spreading frosting on a cupcake, the picture enhanced by her flowery dress and bright blue nails (p. 239).

Decorating here becomes a feminised space, made obvious by accessories associated with femininity—painted nails, lips, dress—but also through connotations of cake decoration to twenty-first century conceptions of feminised popular culture (Levine,

2015). This representation offers a promise that the labour of baking can be the work of pleasure, felt only by 'living it' in order for a transformation or an 'intensification' to occur. Smiling while in the productive work of pleasure reaffirms this and can be found abundantly throughout the cookbooks. More explicitly, are repeated images of women holding platters of sweet food greeting each other with wide smiles. The transformative pleasure in the consumption process revealed here, functions to complete a feedback loop where aspired pleasure can be acutely tied to baking culture, and indicates the value placed on a particular type of feminine performance (Shapiro Sanders, 2008). Furthermore, the transformative cycle of production, consumption and pleasure relates closely to contemporary theories of neoliberal post-feminism, which simultaneously urges women to seek "reinvention or transformation" by "practising appropriately modified consumption habits" in order to become "more 'successful' versions of themselves" (Gill, 2008a, p. 441; see also Cairns & Johnston, 2015a; McRobbie, 2004). The consumption of pleasure imaged and alluded to in the cookbooks relies on readers to see pleasure as something required to seek, work for, 'practice' via the baking of sweet food, use, live in and through, by placing 'successful' versions of feminine performance at its core.

Images that depict pleasure in baking emphasise how everything made will be appealing and assures that any labour involved will produce joy and worthwhile satisfaction. Considering Rosalind Coward's (1985) research on food photography and the simulation of female desire reveals how such images function to "promise...future perfection, [and]...the lure of achieving ideals", gratification and reward (p. 26). The lure attached to the cookbooks works on principles of inspiring desire for the food, the experiences, the lifestyles depicted, through the construction of pleasure and "promise of satisfaction" (Coward, 1985, p. 28). To demonstrate, *Retro Baking* (2015) explains

that “baking is back in fashion in a big way, and home bakers are cooking up a storm, with the level of excellence and expectation rising to a high standard” (p. 7); seen again, in more explicit terms in *Baking Day* (2012), “Baking is fun and rewarding...” (p. 7). Both of these examples show the appeal of lifestyle and experience, and the pleasure to be had—and being already had by other ‘home bakers’—in the production, and in the feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment, ‘rising to a high standard’, that such provides. The desire simulated here again signals Foucault’s (1985/1990) dynamics of pleasure and desire, or *aphrodisia*—the acts, actions, practices, gestures of pleasure—where the desire for something “leads to the act, the act that is linked to pleasure, and the pleasure that occasions desire” (p. 43). It is in inspiring a desire that resembles a Foucauldian lack or deprivation (see also Plato, Aristotle), where some feeling or need is lacking or interrupted—in this case the need or the craving to achieve ideals and enact a satisfying performance of femininity through the promised pleasure of baking production—that encourages the cyclical act of pleasure to be sought out, consumed and imagined.

Concepts of neoliberalism and post-feminism can also be interrogated here to reveal the lack and required transformation in consumers, and the promises of pleasure and desire expose constructions of femininity in the cookbooks to be multifaceted. To investigate further, let us label this an ‘aspirational desire’ and perceive it to be deliberately depicted by explicit descriptions of a reward or satisfaction attained when participating in the production. *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016) demonstrates this by declaring to readers, “disregard all the negatives and make something basic, then keep making it until it’s perfect...in no time at all, you’ll be baking like an expert” (p. 7). All cookbooks show an enticing end reward—the baked good—and in some circumstances, the way it can be enjoyed/consumed. The depiction of this particular lifestyle in the

cookbooks, ‘you’ll be baking like an expert’, is one that seeks to build a narrative that indicates reward and satisfaction, used to stimulate “the production of desire...with more recipes for the satisfaction of that desire” (Shapiro Sanders, 2008, p. 156) by promising improvement in practice and a craving for the pleasure contained/found in transformation. The consumption of this pleasurable transformation in the cookbooks seems to be targeted at women and female desire, idealising the pleasure and delight of baking. Guided by Coward’s (1985) conclusions that female desire is “constantly courted, stimulated and endlessly defined...everywhere it seems female desire is sought, bought, packaged and consumed” (p. 26) via advertisements, magazines, recipe books and specifically delivered media, then the pleasure narratives revealed in the cookbooks become another function for defining, packaging, and consuming femininity. Furthermore, Coward’s (1985) notions of desire, pleasure and the promise of satisfaction are indicated in a series of photographs featured in the ‘Big Cakes’ section of *Retro Baking* (2015, pp. 63, 74-5). In the first of the series, there are two women, one seated with flour on her face and arms—although not on her dress, pearls, and coiffed hair—looking up at an immaculately presented woman beside her, dressed in white with a multi-coloured apron, who seems to be overseeing the mixing of a batter while staring serenely into the camera. A sense of calm pervades the shot, even though they are surrounded by the messy ‘reality’ of baking a cake, with strewn egg shells, loose flour—on the table top and on the aforementioned face and arms—and used baking implements. The next few pages contain recipes and pictures of all types of cakes, which function to stoke the desire for satisfaction, as a way to incite participation in the productive elements of pleasure that can lead to creation of such appealing sweet food, culminating in a double spread of the two women decorating the now baked and mostly iced cake together.

This example presents how the pleasure of production—working together, following the recipe, mixing, icing and decorating—works to create an ideal cake or baking experience that specifically targets, and is packaged for, female desire, demonstrating how it is sought—by presenting a feminised domestic scene—courted and craved—via pictures and recipes promising a pleasurable experience—and sold via the glossy images of an appealingly decorated cake flanked by women depicting a production of satisfaction in process and result/reward.

The example further demonstrates aspects of desire and pleasure that seek to deepen the experience. The final spread (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 74) shows the women smiling while decorating, with one woman overseeing the placement of a strawberry by the flour-covered other. The strawberry is held precariously over the cake, in order for the action to be properly imagined in real-time by the reader, with the final touch left to be imagined alongside the satisfaction of a ‘good’ cake experience that has been had, regardless of the ‘rough’ start—or in this case, receptivity to a pleasurable experience, where a mastering of ability ensures satisfaction—in the previous picture. The presentation contains overt signs that increase the anticipation of the reward of this ‘good’ experience. As the woman looks to place the strawberry, she bites her lip and leans forward to ensure it will go where she wants it to, her shiny pink nails are clenched cautiously, underscoring the precarious nature of the task. The spread contains glimpses of shiny red, which adds to the sensory experience—shiny red lips and nails, red strawberries that top the cake and the bench-top, the red of the jam from the centre of the cake, spilling down the side—enhanced by the sexual connotations from biting her lip, in anticipation of a reward. To again reference Foucault’s (1985/1990) notions of *aphrodisia*—which loosely translates to ‘sexuality’—the described examples display the pleasures of sensuality and sexuality in “acts, gestures, contacts” around baking a

cake to produce “forms of pleasure” (p. 40). Different forms are evoked in the example above—connotations of sex, pleasure, and desire—the circular dynamics of pleasure (Foucault, 1985/1990, p. 40; see also Beckman, 2013). The pleasure in baking, interaction, decorating, and in placing the strawberry on top create a fully satisfying picture, although not quite the type of sexual act that Foucault perhaps refers to, the pleasure of the ‘act’ is explicit. Also revealed is the desire for reward that a good baking experience can bring, surrounded by the ‘gestures’ and ‘contacts’ of pleasure—the shiny nails, bright colours, the biting of the lip, the interaction of the women—that all work to depict a deeper experience and pleasure that goes beyond just the production of a cake. This production of gender is extended in the next picture in the series (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 75) which shows the completion of the activity, where the cake is cut, and two forks split the slice being shared. The women are engaged in conversation and the pleasure of the cake and the experience is clearly shown, palpably expressing the satisfaction and reward of consuming their labour to the reader.

Extending on this, the narrative of pleasure, desire and satisfaction at work within the cookbooks reflects a type of *gastroporn*, and Smart’s (1994) research into revealing parallels between manuals on sex and cooking, demonstrated in the vivid, glossy and high-colour representations to heighten “excitement and expectation” in the reader, only to ultimately depict an “imaginary or unattainable” form of gratification (p. 170). The “strategic and liberal use of glamorous images” (Smart, 1994, p. 170) employed in *Retro Baking* (2015), and throughout many of the other cookbooks in the thesis, present a gratification whether or not intended by the author, publisher or photographer, with a recognisable eroticism to the interaction of the women and the food, and similar to pornography, these representations show and encourage a desire to experience the

pleasure of producing the end result, as well as the reward and completion reached by the consumption of the food itself.

The evocations drawn from food and reader response can also be found in narrative descriptions of the food itself and extend on the cultural connotations of eroticism and pleasure. Taking Probyn's (2000) suggestions that "practices of preparing and eating food are, of course, highly sensual and sometimes sexual" (p. 86) into account, examination of the cookbooks communicates "corporal experience[s]" of sweet food and draw on readers' past reactions (p. 88). *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) displays images of 'Vanilla Cream Doughnuts' (p. 128) ready for readers to consume—the fluffiness of the doughnut seen and imagined, a generous sprinkling of sugar glinting and hinting at texture, and the vanilla cream filling. The elements work together to evoke a fantasy of what biting into it will taste like, feel like in the mouth and on the tongue, and the expected ooze of the cream on fingertips. The words that describe the process of filling each doughnut, "poke the nozzle into the slit in each doughnut and squeeze in a generous amount of filling" (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 128), deepen and intensify the response in the reader/consumer by alluding to sex - poke, slit, squeeze. The connotative aspects invite reaction and draws on wider cultural associations of food to sensual and sexual pleasure (Freud, 1914/2014; MacClancy, 1992; Kaufman, 2005; O'Neill, 2003) conveyed by these cookbooks via ideas of consumption to induce a craving that goes beyond the food pictured.

Interrogating evocations of pleasure and desire in the cookbooks can be connected to wider cultural constructions or rules, norms, and behaviours that are expected in the female experience of sexuality and sexual expression. Scenes demonstrate cultural connotations that tie together women's interaction with food and expressions of sexuality. The depictions in the cookbooks are subtle, as they purportedly function as

manuals of cookery, yet within the images of women shown interacting with food and with other women, elements of sexual expression can be interpreted. In particular, following Bordo's (1998) suggestions that culturally an "eroticized conception of women and food" is fuelled by wider media representations, and images in the cookbooks imply women are "...sensuously voracious about food" to depict their longing for sweet food as a "metaphor for their sexual appetite" (p. 18). Referring back to *Retro Baking* (2015) once again, and a double-page spread (pp. 180-181) in 'Cookies & More', this metaphor becomes clearer. The first page presents an image of a woman with a large smile—although only the top part of her face is shown—opening a large jar full of chocolate chip cookies. The image directs the focus to the jar, large against her torso, and the words 'freshly made' painted onto the surface. The second page presents the woman still holding the jar with her wide smile still present, yet now with more of her face visible, looking down at the open jar in her hands, while another woman reaches in, 'caught in the act' of choosing a cookie. Within this scene, certain elements can be taken to imply eroticism in action, perhaps evoking ideas further linked to Foucault's (1985/1990) 'acts, gestures, contacts' of pleasure. The scene depicts the second woman with a hand on the first woman's shoulder, her red nails gleaming in contrast to the bare skin and top of the dress in her contact. As she leans in to look into the jar, the top of her torso is pressed against the bare arm of the first woman and their faces are shown in close proximity, their hair tangled together. Perhaps not as 'sensually voracious' as Bordo (1998) alludes to in other media representations, the subtle elements still function to depict a certain idea, both women in the scene interacting with all their attention focused on looking and reaching into the jar, their points of contact connecting to reach a singular purpose. Although the eating of the cookie is not depicted, a type of voraciousness for the food in question can be felt that pushes the

depiction into presenting these small points of contact, of gestures into the erotic, and displays metaphorically a longing for food and other pleasures.

Amongst the recipes in *Retro Baking* (2015), there are other full double spreads featuring women eating or a simulation of eating or biting into food, that can be read as layered with symbolic and subtle interpretation, working to build a narrative of pleasure/craving/desire. In a prominent example (*Retro Baking*, 2015, pp. 280-283) of this built narrative, a variety of doughnuts are featured in many different types of icing and decorations, in chocolate, pink, and white, with stars, hundreds & thousands, coconut, and nuts. When this spread of doughnuts is shown again—as a title page for the section on *Doughnut Toppings*—a large bite has been taken out of one. The next two pages have pictures of two women interacting with decorated doughnuts. In the first photograph, one woman looks down at the doughnut in her hands, her red nails hold the pink iced and marshmallow topped doughnut, with a red-painted smile on her face, as she holds the doughnut close to her mouth. Next to her, another woman stands in a yellow cardigan and a pink and white apron around her waist. She has her mouth open indicating her next action is to take a bite out of her doughnut. The women stand close together, their arms touching, and the camera acts both a participant—as the woman in yellow is staring straight into the lens as her mouth is perched around the doughnut—and a voyeur—the other woman is looking down at the doughnut—enhancing and building this idea of the pleasure and craving for the imagined taste/sweetness of the food, and the sensation of contact in pleasure while being watched. The last picture in the series has both women huddled close together, a hand on a shoulder, an upper torso pressed to an arm, with the doughnuts still in their hands, one woman—yellow cardigan—picking a marshmallow off the top of the doughnut held in the palm of the

other woman, while still holding her doughnut in her other hand [further discussion on cultural perceptions of doughnuts can be found in Section 8.5].

There are sensorial and erotic connotations in the images that consumers/readers are encouraged to imagine [further discussions of appetite and desire in the cookbooks can be found in Sections 8.3 and 8.5] particularly aspects indicating that the camera or photographer is part of the construction of the image. The images present a playful eroticism containing seductive elements that extend beyond taking pleasure from eating a donut to depicting deeper metaphors of sex, eroticism and pleasure (Baudrillard, 1979/1990). The desire inspired in readers/consumers is not just for a productive baking experience and sweet result, but also for the reward that displaying the certain performances of femininity might conjure.

### **7.3 Consuming voyeuristic pleasure**

The cookbooks demonstrate correlations to 1950s pin-up imagery in both explicit—representations, poses, colours and reminiscent imagery—and implicit ways. Studies of pin-up imagery subscribe to concepts of representing “an innocent reminder of femininity past” (Buszek, 2006, p. 260), and connect the appeal of this particular performance of a productive and pleasure-seeking/evoking femininity to what Buszek (2006), describes as “the sexual display of oneself for popular consumption” which “has been historically associated with women” (p. 365).<sup>13</sup> This is presented in the cookbooks in the persistent employment of 1950s idealised femininity, in dress, style, materials, and culinary ephemera, posed to underscore a stylised and desirable ease of an ideal ‘natural’ feminine performance [see Section 6.6 for further discussion on tying together

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<sup>13</sup> This was previously addressed in regard to how World War II pin-up imagery works in a similar way to cookbooks to confer certain gendered boundaries and affirm feminine domestic practices [see section 5.7]

vintage themes, kitsch and masquerade evident in baking practice]. These performances seem to contain voyeuristic representations that link to narratives of pleasure and reward, and although the images may not intentionally be a simulation of pornography or pin-up imagery, the pleasures of consumption represented function in a similar way.

The prominent use of persistent decorations, colours and styles that are culturally and stereotypically associated with the feminine and feminine practices, show an affinity to Myers' (1986) discussion of how advertising draws on devices of *feminine masquerade*. In particular, Myers (1986) suggests that the devices present consumers with ideas and ideals of the 'work of femininity', engaging them as active participants in consumptive practices by presenting them with a way to perform and play with personal identity (p. 145). This is particularly significant when addressing the correlation to 1950s pin-up imagery and the ties to performances of productive and pleasure-seeking femininity seen in the cookbooks. *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017, p. 375), presents a woman dressed in bright yellow, shades of blue and pink make-up and pearls, a colourful tea towel across one shoulder, and an apron. Arguably, these all represent cultural aspects—make-up, delicate jewellery, bright colours, domestic elements—that create an instant association with the feminine. The image has her bending towards the camera and, therefore, towards the reader/consumer, offering up a tray full of blueberry muffins held in her hands with a red oven mitt. The woman smiles down at her creations, projecting satisfaction and pleasure at her labour. The elements of feminine masquerade here reveal the 'work of femininity' (Myers, 1986) within a narrow lens that connotes to a particular performance open to 'popular consumption'. There is a sense of careful construction in the performance that connects closely to fantasy, productive desire and pleasure, as well as conformity to a particular idea. Taking note of Baudrillard's (1981/1994) notions that the ubiquity of a representation infiltrates our

perceptions and ideas to create associations to a socially 'pre-shaped' mindset, depictions in the cookbooks reveal cultural connotations to pin-up imagery where the 'image' precedes the 'gaze' (p. 166). Social perceptions of pin-ups have visual and cultural resonance, both in historical and contemporary terms, due to the popularity of vintage fashion and design. The cultural understanding of pin-up imagery therefore impacts the interpretation of scenes, as well as how such has been conceived of, posed, and set to be consumed.

The wide publication and circulation of cookbooks and the images contained within them exhibit similar principles to the 1950s pinup, by displaying "explicit contemporary femininity and implicit sexuality... synthesized and intended for wide circulation and public display" (Buszek, 2006, p. 12). Referring back to the example described in *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017, p. 375), aspects become obvious that are used to encourage a voyeuristic view of the constructed scene. The woman is posed and styled in a very particular way to entice the reader to consume the performance and gain pleasure from it, as much as any imagined pleasure from the sweet food. There are accentuated aspects of her appearance that draw the eye to hint at an erotic or sexualised consumption of this image. She is posed leaning in, her cleavage directly in line with the tin of muffins she holds. Her pose is welcoming, focused on drawing in the reader to taste her wares. Drawing on Coward's (1985) view that "voyeurism is a way of taking sexual pleasure by looking at rather than being close to a particular object of desire..." (p. 76), this image, along with many others contained within the cookbooks, enhances the experience of the reader and highlights how consumptive practices are often used to evoke a hedonistic reaction that fits into dominant patriarchal structures of desire (Lury, 1996).

Theories of how hedonistic pleasure works as an instinctive and intrinsic motivator for all human action have been interrogated since antiquity (see writings of Plato; Aristotle; Hobbes' *Leviathan*, 1651; and Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920/2003; and many others), and can go towards explaining how the cookbooks have been constructed in a particular way that connects them to patriarchal notions of the feminine, packaged, posed and styled to be tacitly pleasing, much like the pin-up. The type of feminine performance depicted is familiar and comforting because it conforms to wider patriarchal notions seen throughout wider media landscapes. The playful, desirable and aspirational performances represented in the cookbooks—which shows a correlation to how the pin-up can be also perceived—are consumed alongside the unconscious associations, structures and limits of a western feminine identity, stylised and framed as, Shapiro Sanders (2008) posits, the “object of desire, ready-made for the consumption of the heterosexual male audience” (p. 156). This connects to other media representations, particularly in advertising, which customarily use sexual objectification of the feminine to sell products as well as historical links to the way pin-up imagery has been exploited in a similar way (Buzsek, 2006; Staiger, 1995).

The cookbooks reveal their version of feminine sexual objectification by displaying representational ‘renditions’ of women in illustrated imitations, ‘cut-outs’ or dismembered parts—hands with painted nails, bare arms, lower parts of the face, painted lips. Here, symbolic representations of femininity are made desirable and pleasurable in the cookbooks and in broader media consumption through a pervasive and consistent association to these concepts of sexualised and imagined fantasy. What Foucault (1985/1990) describes as the subjectivity of sexuality through a “system of rules and constraints” which “assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations” (p. 4) gains additional meaning when

examining the construction of a femininity in the cookbooks commodified to perform traditional feminine qualities like “passivity and sexual attractiveness as objects of the heteronormative gaze” (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 231; Butler, 1993). Even rendered as literal ‘objects’ or ‘pieces’ of women, narratives of pleasure and fantasy are required elements.

The construction in the cookbooks of feminine pleasure uncovers how female interaction with systems of consumer culture ensures images doused heavily with voyeuristic values. This connects to wider implications about the expectation of femininity and baking, but also how the consumption—and the pleasures, feelings and sensations drawn from this consumption—of these images is largely accepted through the lens of the male gaze. Drawing on Mulvey’s (1989) seminal work on filmic representation and “the voyeuristic pleasure experienced by spectators” (p. 837) which privileges a male audience, interrogating the cookbooks reveals how women can only be “the receiver of the gaze, never the producer, the viewed, never the viewer” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 310). Assuming that the target audience for the cookbooks are female, the specific pleasure taken/consumed by these types of constructions can be elaborated on. All of the books have women listed as the main producers, as either editors, publishers, food directors, art directors, designers, stylists, or photographers, and although there are men involved in the production, particularly in marketing or operational capacity, their roles seem to be auxiliary to the actual realisation, creation and ultimate display of the materials presented. Applying Foucault’s (1985/1990) notions of a system of cultural rules and constraints—in this case, those placed around consumption—encourage an understanding of self in relation to the larger media messages. The producers of these books exist within a system which Bowlby (1993) suggests promotes the ideal modern consumer to be “a receptacle and bearer of sensations, poser and posed” (p. 23), whose

hedonistic imaginings are precisely marketed to by advertisers. The wider social framework has impacted and played a part in the shaping of, packaging, and selling of these books to audiences that perhaps expect, accept, and take pleasure from them.

*Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) contains imagery throughout of Paper Dolls—figures cut out of paper or thin card—which depict mostly women, but some men and children too, dressed in vintage styles. Notably, a double-page spread (pp. 292-293) shows a collection of the dolls in various states of dress, with women posed in vintage style underwear, aprons, short jumpsuits, and swimsuits. The resemblance of the dolls to pin-up imagery is significant, and considering the retro theme of the book, it has no doubt been intentionally constructed. That the dolls have been posed in a similar fashion how one expects to see pin-ups works here to reinforce the objectification of the male gaze, while encouraging a narcissistic and consumptive pleasure of the fantasy of femininity, in much the same way as pin-up imagery functions to affirm this (Higashi, 2002).

Female interaction with consumer culture has long assumed to be based in *narcissism*, whereby “female subjectivity is acquired through learning-to-look as well as learning-to-be-looked-at. Indeed, the latter is made possible by the former” (Parrington, 1991, p. 54). This operates while also courting aspects of *masquerade*, and the allusions represented in the pin-up, where feminine pleasure can be seen to be created in relation to the male gaze, and by means of a Freudian ‘feminine narcissism’ (see Freud, 1914/2014). Considering Radner’s (1995) examination of ‘feminine narcissism’ through its utility in advertising, and McRobbie’s (2009) suggestions of a ‘post-feminist masquerade’, full of empowerment, choice, and pleasure; the constructions of femininity in the cookbooks become more intricately and difficult to precisely unravel. If only some of the performances of femininity seem to be constructed solely to project

the male gaze, then others exist as positive source of feminine pleasure. This goes towards explaining how even while the majority of the producers behind the cookbooks were women, as subjects of the gaze, they can actively be involved in the creation, the conception, and the construction of particular performance/s of femininity presented in the cookbooks. What is also revealed by the performance/s of femininity present in the cookbooks is a source of pleasure contained within the active role of looking, further connecting to Mulvey's (1989) notions of pleasure evoked through voyeurism. The Voyeur here experiences pleasure in looking without being seen, asserting power and control over the image they consume, as well as negotiating the *feminine identities* presented in the cookbooks. This negotiation occurs through the projection of the productive pleasures of baking, the representation of particular womanly ideals, and the ability to take pleasure in the images and ideas without actively taking them on, enacting them or shifting one's behaviour, or even baking at all.

## **7.4 Consuming fantasy and feminine identity**

The glossy images presented in the cookbooks play with the connections of fantasy and food in an overt way. The photographs in *Retro Baking* (2015), of food, of kitchens or of action-shots where women are in the progress of creating, consuming, or serving food, are quite casual yet the mix of bright and deeply evocative colours—yellows, blues, greens, pinks—and the delicate stylisation of borders, typography, and patterns of each page, make the experience heady and dazzling. Revealed via these heady depictions of food and creation/consumption behaviours are suggestions of fantasy and Barthes' (1957/1972) descriptions of *Ornamental Cookery* as “openly dream-like” (p. 90). The detail of the ingredients, the methods described, and the pleasure guaranteed seem to create a fantastical product and a promise of perfection, that seems somewhat

detached or 'dream-like'. Within these representations, the fantasy depicted highlights a distortion of reality and offers readers a distinctive experience of a *magical* kitchen to create an appealing fantasy to affirm Piatti-Farnell's (2011a) suggestions that "cooking is offered as a highly embodied activity whose outcome is seen as 'magical' because it provides the women with a sort of 'historical comfort'. It gives them a sense of identity" (p. 94). It is precisely through the displays of idealised fantasy and performance in the cookbooks that a *feminine identity* becomes apparent, expressed in desirable way that is consumed willingly, eagerly, and with pleasure.

The type of *feminine identity* communicated is distinctly sensorial in nature and appeals both aesthetically and aspirationally to readers. By transmitting a certain lifestyle, notions of a feminine identity are formed that repositions the kitchen not as a place of drudgery but one of allure, magic, and sensuality. Narratives of female interaction through the joyful experiences of food are conveyed in the sensorial images/descriptions of sweet food and representations of feminine pleasure. Displaying in part what Hollows (2002) calls "productive aspects of fantasy", the cookbooks demonstrate the complex pleasures of a femininity where "readers can have the freedom to imagine themselves as domestic goddesses without having to become them" (p. 188).

Demonstrated via the cover of *Baking Day* (2012) and within *Retro Baking* (2015), a woman is pictured holding a pie near her face simulating the idea of smelling the waft of sweetness coming from it, her eyes downcast and focused on the plate in her hands (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 9). The tea towel she uses to carry the pie suggests the heat of the pan and weight of it held carefully in her hands (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 9). Guided by Probyn's (2000) exploration into the sensorial and tactile nature of food, to evoke "memory, fantasy, necessity or appetite" (p. 88) via a remembered sense of touch or sight or smell, readers are signalled to experience the phantom sensation of food just by

looking. Unconscious images triggered by constructed sensory narratives found in the cookbooks are consumed through the eyes, through the imagination, and via simulating the senses. Here, the visual experience becomes an active process of consumption itself, and not just a step towards consumption (Evans & Thornton, 1989), connecting to the plethora of work that associates visual language and memory together (Sperber, 1975; Proust, 2006; Benjamin, 2008; Lupton, 1996; Sutton, 2005; Piatti-Farnell, 2011a).

The cookbooks encourage *feminine identity* and pleasure to be consumed in very precise and symbolic ways. The recurring images of women posed interacting with the sweet food, noticeably emphasise the ‘feminine’ aspects for the reader to consume. For example, the woman holding the pie has painted lips and nails and flowers on her dress (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 9). This indicates a deliberate gendering of the kitchen and the domestic spaces that present as feminine, whether through the images of women, or the accentuated use of colours, implements and cultural accessories that demonstrate and classify it as feminine. Taking note of Bourdieu’s (1998/2001) assertions that the “strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it” (p. 9); the cookbook’s continual ‘justification’ and ‘legitimation’ of femininity and feminine space becomes a purposeful construction. Every part of the image is constructed—or staged—carefully to highlight femininity; from the small green earrings and pink necklace to the rouge, eyeshadow and mascara, to her bared arms and décolletage enhanced by an up-hairdo to accentuate her face and neck and the pie in her hands (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 9). Continually, the careful constructions indicate and spell out the ‘discourses’ that legitimise a feminine reading of the scene and the space.

The image described above also seeks to encourage the pleasure of consuming the pie via the senses—a sight that is visually appealing, the imagined smell of sweetness, the memory of taste and texture, and the tactile sense of heat and comfort—as well as, or alongside the consumption of the *feminine performance*. The consumption of the entire scene—imagined sensuality and visually expressive components—demonstrates the links between food, the senses and memory (Korsmeyer, 2011, 2012; Seremetakis, 1996; Lupton, 1996; Sutton, 2001; Classen, Howes & Synnott, 2002), and Parasecoli’s (2008) suggestion that “food provides us an unusual point of entry into the functions of the brain, emotions and memories... enough to pause and recall our liveliest memories related to taste, smell, and sensual pleasure ... they are vivid, profound and emotional” (p. 16). The stylised feminine elements, domestic space and the sensorial experience triggered by the familiarity of the scene and the association to a more personal eating experience encourages a resounding, lively and vivid consumption.

## **7.5 Consuming with the ‘senses’**

Previous discussions have established how the cookbooks promise pleasure in consumption of food images and in the fantasy of eating and the specific descriptions of a feminine identity and performance. Though the sensorial nature of food was mentioned earlier, as well as the way memory and imagination function to deepen consumptive experiences [see Section 6.3], this section will elaborate on and interrogate these concepts to a greater extent by examining the specific elements—and the specific senses—at work in the cookbooks.

Recurring patterns can be observed in many ways within the cookbooks that seek to maintain a heady sensorial state and consumption of images, colours and a projection of an aspirational lifestyle. These patterns seem to infuse the depicted feminine

performances with a sense of playfulness: the red of the lips, nails and dress are seen in the shiny red of garnishes—cherries, raspberries, jam—the pink of a flower brooch matches the serving platter, tablecloths, napery, serving spoons, the serving plates held by the models in posed pictures then glimpsed again in the next recipe pages holding the finished products. The use of vibrant colours and patterns shows an affinity to studies of advertising and findings which suggest that “colouring affects the perceptions of sweetness in foods”, in particular, one study of note concludes that “greater sweetness and flavour were ascribed to a cherry-flavoured solution that was coloured red... than to uncoloured but flavoured samples” (Pangborn, 1987, p. 56). Colours are used to create visual appeal, and draw on imagined fantasies of sweetness, producing a type of pleasure that Lupton (1996) suggests is “derived from its aesthetic form and consequent evocation of emotional states rather than... taste or texture” (p. 27; see also Coward, 1985). In advertising, colours are carefully considered by food photographers—and food producers—to ensure that the ‘right’ colour is used to ensure the food evokes appropriate emotions or feelings, connected closely to “people’s relationships with food” (Ripe, 1993, p. 152) to ultimately entice consumers to want to ‘eat’ it (Visser, 1986).

The aesthetically pleasing experience projected in the cookbooks includes bright colours and glossy photographs of carefully presented baked goods that accompany recipes. Photographs of baked food appear in ways that sharpen and highlight colours, drawing and enticing the eye to notice the layers of a cake, the fluffiness of a cream filling, or the bright, sticky red of a raspberry garnish. *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) includes many recipes that use a honey or syrup glaze to create a shine or gloss able to highlight the appeal and enhance the edibility of a baked dish. Some of the recipes call for the finishing touch of a blowtorch to caramelize the sugar topping on the fruit for “a

delicious crisp brown crust” (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 185).

Drawing on Coward’s (1985) inquiry into “beautifully lit” (p. 103) food advertisements that were often “touched up and imperfections removed to make food look succulent and glistening” (p. 104); examination of the cookbooks reveal ‘touched up’ depictions of each recipe’s result where ‘imperfections’ are posed and styled in a way that increases the sensorial consumption of ‘succulent’ scenes. Creating a pleasurable aesthetic entices readers to see how simple fruit garnishes such as figs, raspberries and/or blueberries are used to bolster the freshness or ripeness of the dish and made to ‘glisten’ and look appealing enough to re-produce.

Further parallels between the way food is depicted in advertisements and in the cookbooks can be recognised in the “incongruous artifice” of “Ornamentation” (Barthes, 1957/1972, p. 49). Allusions are found to Barthes’ (1957/1972) study of *Elle Magazine* and the “obvious endeavor to glaze surfaces, to round them off, to bury the food under the even sediment of sauces, creams, icing and jellies... as the background for unbridled beautification” (p. 49) expressed through commentary in *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) that “icings add flavour to cakes, give textual contrast, help them stay fresh and moist and, of course, enhance their appearance” (p. 92). The ‘artifice’ assures an aesthetic appeal of the food presented to ‘stay fresh and moist’ and ‘enhance their appearance’, while promising that the fantasy of such experience, both the imagined eating and creating of it, can be consumed with pleasure.

Evocations of enticement and pleasure are indicated in *Retro Baking’s* (2015) depiction of three models posed in various ways interacting with sweet food (p. 17). One woman—dressed in white and flower-patterned blue—stands while drinking ‘pop cola’ from a bottle with a straw, her red lips and nails shine in contrast with the red ‘pop’ drink; another woman sits on a stool—in a flowery summer dress, with light pink

lipstick—holding a pink ‘pop’ drink in contrast to her green nails, and looks over her shoulder at the third woman who has on a patterned colourful apron and holds a plate of ‘Rosewater Meringue Kisses’, pink and small, ready to share (*Retro Baking*, 2015, p. 17). The scene is appealing and projects the idea of fun, the meringue poised delicately in the woman’s hand, an expression of joy on her face as she offers it to be eaten. The allure of the pleasure pictured here through the interaction of the women sharing food relates back to Probyn’s (2000) suggestion that the basic sensorial response to food and eating is the ability to experience and understand it through “different parts of our bodies” (p. 88). Different elements of the scene—the conviviality of the interaction, the dazzling effect of the colours and patterns, the imagined pleasure at the taste, sweetness and texture of the drink and food shown—are all experienced through the simulation of bodily association and memory. The way the image and visual language represented here works to inspire such sensorial effect and displays Walter Benjamin’s (2008) notions of the power of images to enchant and interact with the senses, functioning more profoundly to encourage the reader to revel in an experience of the senses. Experiencing the scene signals a transportation of the senses to another place within the imagination, a “synesthetic exchange” felt bodily and evoked/interpreted by the “cleverly-painted image[s] of food” to inspire fantasy or call on memory (Korsmeyer & Sutton, 2011, p. 465).

*Retro Baking* (2015) further presents playfulness and sense memory in action, depicting a woman lying on a pink carpet listening to an old record player, with eyes closed and in mid-bite of a chocolate-chip cookie (p. 2). Her fingers are covered in chocolate, as though she has already indulged, with cookies—artfully—strewn around her, and more on a plate off to the side, next to a glass of pink lemonade. She is dressed in a pink and blue dress, with a pink bow in her hair, blue eye makeup and pearl earrings (*Retro*

*Baking*, 2015, p. 2), a recurring pattern of colours, designs and accessories which the cookbook uses to imply as a style of the past, accentuating the ‘retro’ theme. The image directs the reader to imagine upbeat music playing from the record player—again connecting the sensorial to memory and experience—and to connect the scene to a past time as a ‘teenager’—or at least the popular idea of a teenage experience—in order to consume this sensory experience, enhanced by the music and the pleasure apparent in the woman’s behaviour (or pose), crowned by the imagined sweetness of the chocolate. Taking into consideration Coward’s (1985) theories on fantasy and the allure of this “‘other place’ of the mind. Fantasy is like a secret room or garden, to be visited in a spare moment” (p. 199), this scene exhibits how the cookbooks utilise memory or sense of shared cultural experience and imagination to communicate a seductive message of pleasure strongly based on a separation from reality. Through the fantasy of the sweetness and the chocolate, the music, and the ability to be as carefree as the depicted image, a heady and playful fantasy prevails on the senses. The pleasurable imaginings allow for a possession of an act or recollection that may not actually be connected to genuine experience, as Sontag (1978/1999) suggests, images “are so important, so powerful, because they furnish us with knowledge disassociated from and independent of experience” (p. 81). Griffin (2015) further extends on Sontag’s notions by explaining that “images give control: control to the observer to redefine their knowledge and experience and control over the thing being recorded, scrutinized and surveilled” (p. 70). The retro-tinged lens of the images in *Retro Baking* (2015) may direct the reader towards a particular type of fantasy or memory, but the sensorial connections are the readers’ own. Whether it be the sounds of the imagined music, the softness of the carpet, or the crunch and sweetness of the cookies, the reader is able to control, define and interpret the exact felt experience conjured by the images.

The consumption of imagined sensory experiences can be readily applied to the way the food is posed and photographed in the cookbooks, and although less overt in presenting a feminine sensuality, the connection is implicitly read and consumed. *Retro Baking's* (2015) double spread on 'Ice Cream Sandwiches' (pp. 160-1) shows simple instructions in a few different varieties—Neapolitan, Hokey Pokey, Minty Choc-Chip, Caramel Choc Swirl—and posed in a tantalising manner with perfectly shaped ice cream centres 'sandwiched' between two cupcake halves, topped with whipped cream and chocolate—or caramel—sauce oozing down the sides. The spread is full of decorative elements and pastel colours associated with the feminine and the cakes are positioned on a light green surface with a patterned light blue background, allowing for the pinks, whites, and light browns to contrast against the dark shades of chocolate.

The way the chocolate stands out is crucial to the sensorial consumption of the images, as it adds another dimension to the experience, a "pleasure aroused by its tactility", where "chocolate, unlike most other foods, literally melts in the mouth" (Hamilton, 1992, in Lupton, 1996, p. 31). The imagined sweetness of the melting chocolate adds to the fantasy experience. The examples of chocolate mentioned throughout the thesis indicate a substantial number of recipes that include it in some form—title, main ingredient, decorative aspects—and show how extensive and expected the use of chocolate is in relation to sweet food and baking. Chocolate has a lengthy history of widespread popularity and enjoyment, since its transformation in the 1700s from a bitter stimulant—much like tea and coffee—due to the addition of sugar as a sweetener (Mintz, 2012). The wider symbolic and theoretical connections of chocolate have been explored by Richardson (2004) who discusses how chocolate has been "overwhelmingly equated with happiness" (p. 255); and other scholarship links it to notions of romance, fulfilment, relaxation, luxury, reward, affection and femininity

(Barthel, 1989; Benford & Gough, 2006; Chen, 2008). While previous discussions have provided a contextual frame for its ubiquity in cookbooks and considered how it relates to nostalgic reminiscence [see Section 6.4 on ‘Baking with Nostalgia’], this chapter further establishes Chocolate’s ability to deepen imagined sensorial experiences in the cookbooks [see also p. 223 of this chapter].<sup>14</sup>

Further focus on the decorative touches around the ‘Ice Cream Sandwiches’ reveals pink and rainbow-coloured patty tins, patterned napkins, doilies, square and round cut-out shapes (*Retro Baking*, 2015, pp. 160-1). Each cake is garnished with sprinkles, chopped honeycomb, peppermint crisp, or jersey caramels, and topped with red, shiny maraschino cherries (*Retro Baking*, 2015, pp. 160-1). These elements combine to simulate a sensory response of experience and memory through the imagined texture, taste and feel of the pictured food—the creamy sweetness of the ice cream, the moistness of the cake, the crunchiness of the honeycomb or peppermint, the fluffiness of the cream, the stickiness of fingers and mouth after eating—while also providing a vaguely sexual sensation, the red of the cherry pops out, and recalls the dispersed red accents on previous pages—red lips, flowers, nails, fruit, jams, mini cherries, patterns.

Within the cookbooks, many elements closely connect to the pleasures of oral consumption and the role the mouth and the tongue play in eating and finding pleasure in sweet foods. There is the consistent implication of an enjoyment taken or to be had from the taste of a product, shown in examples where eating is obvious. In *Recipes to Remember* (2016), many of the pictured foods are photographed with bites taken out or pieces missing, implying the dish has been tasted, and is ready for further enjoyment.

This begins from the outset, with a half-eaten cookie visible on the Contents Page

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on Chocolate’s connections to experiences of indulgence and intense desire, see section 8.3.

(*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 5) and continues throughout many of the recipe pages. For example, ‘Neapolitan Meringue Cupcakes’ (*Recipes to Remember*, 2016, p. 32) are pictured in silver patty shells, with one unwrapped and missing a bite sized piece, while the process of eating is implied via a remnant-laden spoon left nearby. The image of something eaten yet waiting for the eating process to complete converges with Kormsmeier’s (2012) examination of the relationship between vision and taste, where the visual element “summons anticipation of flavour, which begins the process of taste experience” (p. 463), and it is this “ever-anticipated first bite that arouses appetite” and “the desire to eat and the experience that follows” (p. 467).

The imagery of a bite taken out of the food guides the consumption—or in this case the imagined consumption—to be deeper and more effective, as ultimately, “expectation heightens taste” (Kormsmeier, 2012, p. 467). The way this anticipatory technique is employed consistently throughout the books enhances the sensory effects, and the pleasure of imagined taste. This can also be seen in the image of ‘Creamy Coconut Cake’ (p. 35) which has been cut, served onto nearby plates and tasted, suggested via a gap missing next to a fork. The sensory connotations that come from these examples, bring forth anticipation of eating and imaginings of the taste experienced. Sensations are strengthened by the readers/consumers own recollections of taste, to heighten and evoke appetite and a strong desire for the pleasures of the taste experience, revealing Coward’s (1985) assertions that “the mouth seems to be the organ where some of the most intense sensations are located” (p. 117). Experience and knowledge are drawn on and enhanced, all driven by the expectation, enjoyment, and the fantasy of the taste.

Examination of the cookbooks uncover the use of fantasy and expectation in recipes that contain narrative descriptions to evoke sensations of anticipated sweetness, or other deeper and more complex perceptions of taste. *The Great Australian Baking Book*

(2017) evokes fantasies of intricate tastes in ‘Belgian Lemon Tea Cake’ (p. 100), displaying a cut cake with a piece missing to show the curd that sits inside, and accompanying exposition to explain that “we adjusted the curd to be extra zingy!”. The description here functions to add more sophisticated elements to the imagined sweetness and intensifies the fantasy of what the cake is expected to taste like. The knowledge of the taste of lemon and past sensations of what ‘zingy’ feel like indicates Seremetakis’ (1996) concept of “mnemonic processes” (p. 12) which draw on the material connotations of food and drink, both past and present, to act as “passageways” into the “entanglements of everyday experience” (p. 14; see also Piatti-Farnell 2017, p. 193). The memory of the sensory aspects of food—here, the taste of zingy—renders it familiar and allows for an imagined sensation to be consumed.

*The Great Australian Baking Book’s* (2017) ‘Blossom’s Best Chocolate Cupcakes’ adds to the expected sensory experience and taste triggered firstly by the use of ‘Chocolate’ in the title and bolstered by instructions to “make sure to add the coffee also – you can’t taste the coffee in the final cupcake, but it has an amazing effect of deepening the chocolate flavour. Yum!” (p. 126). The fantasy of a deep, sweet, creamy flavour is created and consumed, while the described nuances of taste and flavour enhance the experience. Drawing further on Seremetakis’ (1996) theories on the traces of sensation that food and drink leave on one’s memory, the recipe exposes deliberate prompts for readers to recollect the nuances of flavour in their experience, as “when something leaves, it only goes externally, for its body persists within persons” (p. 2). The traces of tasting and experiencing chocolate and coffee are surely present in memory, as is the effect of nuance—or deepening of flavour as the narrative explains—alongside the pleasure that is recalled.

Recollections of flavour and taste sensation work to deepen and intensify the degree of sweetness bodily remembered, as although it may physiologically be handled by the tongue, taste it is not simply in the tongue at all, as “each taste experience is an elegant orchestration of all the sensory organs working together, with our brain guiding the whole affair” (Chen, 2008, p. 2). Further interrogation of the cookbooks unveils an ‘elegant orchestration’ deliberately conveyed by descriptions and words to crucially enhance the fantasy through the memory, expectation of taste and sensation alongside the visual elements. A recipe that contains an accompanying written description alongside a stylised photograph seems to intensify the sensorial evocations, allowing for ‘all of the sensory organs to work together’ and deepen reader/consumer experience.

The connection of pleasure and tactile evocations of sensuality are alluded to in recipe instructions and images within the cookbooks. A connection to touch is found at the outset of some cookbooks, which include varying textures on their covers. The book jacket cover of *Baking Day* (2012) includes an illustrated scene of a woman in the kitchen with a tray in her hands ready to be put in the oven and baked. Around her waist is an apron and it, along with the apron strings are made from red felt, making them stand out from the rest of the colour-filled, yet flat scene, providing a pleasing texture and extra dimension for its reader to discover. In a similar fashion, the cover of *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) features a milkshake that has red syrup oozing down the side of the tall glass and a red cherry on top. The red syrup and cherry are both raised indents, so while most of the cover feels smooth and shiny, these red garnishes stand out visually and texturally. Lupton’s (1996) suggestions of an emotional response brought on by the “physical nature of food” exposes how both these covers indicate a highly sensorial experience to be had in “the actions of touching it, smelling it, preparing it, taking it into the mouth, chewing and swallowing” and demonstrate how

“particular emotions on both the conscious and unconscious levels” are evoked (p. 32). The importance of smell to sensory experience is revealed in the cookbooks, beyond just the imagined sensations evoked in the images. *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) emphasises the sweet flavour and smell of strawberries in ‘Glazed Strawberry Flan’ via its accompanying narrative, “when choosing strawberries, an intense perfume is the best indicator of quality” (p. 190). The pictured flan is decorated with a whole punnet of strawberries which stand out in glossy red on the page and encourage an imagined overwhelming fragrance and ‘intense perfume’ that would emanate from such a dish. Classen, Howes, and Synnott’s (2002) observations that smell “is not simply a biological and physiological phenomenon, smell is cultural, hence a social and historical phenomenon” (p. 3) is communicated by the specific detail given to the olfactory sense in this recipe, functioning to enhance the consumptive pleasure of food. The cookbooks play with the cultural power of aroma in sweet food by inviting readers to imagine the smell of the food, and its ability to “evoke strong emotional responses” (Classen, Howes, & Synnott, 2002, p. 2). Acknowledging concepts that surround “the Proustian phenomenon” and contention that the sensory experience of food unlocks “key personal and social memories” (Sutton, 2010, p. 470), it is difficult to imagine the effectiveness of the cookbooks without the potency of smell and the ability of readers to draw on past felt experiences in order to appreciate such constructed representations.<sup>15</sup>

The cultural transformation of raw ingredients into baked ones (see Lévi-Strauss, 1969), plays a large part in the sensory experience detailed by the cookbooks. In particular, the physical act of touch induces a particular emotional resonance that creates a sense of ownership of the recipe and baking process, and an embodied outcome in the finished product. The acts of kneading, rubbing, rolling, mixing called for by various recipe

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<sup>15</sup> See section 3.8 for further information on Proustian memory and food (p. 60)

instructions, work to evoke a familiar need to personalise the process, demonstrating a “sensory engagement with food’s organoleptic properties...concerned with its taste, smell, flavor, or texture” (Meah, 2013b, p. 172). Rather than just the imagined smell or nuances of taste indicated by the images and words of the recipes, the need to touch and feel, too becomes a crucial aspect of the experience. Images in *The Great Australian Baking Book’s* (2017) ‘Dough & Pastry Basics’ (p. 20) show raw ingredients ready for a ‘hands-on’ approach, a process that will undoubtedly be tactile, and also messy: squares of butter and egg yolk sit waiting to be rubbed into a well of flour, kneaded and squished between the fingers, culminating in the sensation of wet and dry coming together to create something new. The instructions reveal categories of Falk’s (1994) *sensory organization* and the efficacy of “close or contact senses” which deem touch, as well as smell and taste, as providing supreme sensory experiences (p. 10). The cookbooks use experiences of touch to evoke intimate and personal reactions in readers, communicated through instructing the need to “rub butter into flour mixture with your fingertips” and “press dough into prepared tin” when putting together ‘Millionaire’s Shortbread’ (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 40), making the ‘hands-on’ contact crucial to the enjoyment of the recipe.

The sense of pleasure presented by touching, beyond or perhaps different to, taste and eating, demonstrates how the cookbooks utilise the visceral and cultural connections of food to the pleasures of sex. Touch functions on such a primal level to reveal Probyn’s (2000) notions of the “real food orgasm” elicited at the sight of celebrity chefs sucking their fingers, licking spoons, and engaging in the messy process of cooking (p. 6). The sensual and sexual delight garnered in preparing and “experiencing the textures” of food remain culturally constructed, similar to those around the experience of chocolate and its association with erotic pleasure (Meah, 2013a, p. 83). A messy image of melted

chocolate dripping off a mixing spoon, as shown in *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017, p. 26), alludes to erotic pleasure and sex, but only because of cultural connotations—bolstered by advertising—that connect the sensory qualities of chocolate with notions of indulgence, desire, and seduction (Milne, 2013).

Recipes also use descriptions to augment consumption of imagery and sensorial experiences. ‘Raspberry and Almond Mascarpone Cake’ describes ingredients as “velvety Mascarpone is sweet and slightly tart, like the raspberries it accompanies in this sumptuous, layered torte” (*The Baking Collection*, 2014, p. 92). By including descriptors ‘velvety’, ‘tart’, and ‘sumptuous’, many of the expected notions of taste are specifically directed to create a layered experience, full of differing levels of sweetness and sensation. The inclusion of words to describe the expected experience reveals scholarship linking together talking and eating, words and taste; notably, Daniel’s (2006) suggestions that “food descriptions... produce visceral pleasure, a pleasure which notably involves both intellect and material body working in synesthetic communion” (p. 2) or in other words, as Vallone (2002) puts it, “we taste the words with our eyes” (p. 47). The words/descriptions are consumed alongside the visuals, the expectation of taste, and the experience of the cookbook itself. The descriptors ‘velvety’ and ‘tart’ communicate anticipation of taste and the pleasure of experience, but also work to encourage an intellectual consumption of the words themselves. Deeper examination of the cookbooks identifies how words can be used as a way to experience/consume/desire, and add relish to the texture of descriptions, indicating how “the mouth is the central character in outlining the corporeality of (modern) consumption, as the primary organ of eating, but also of speech” (Falk’s (1994, p. 10). The mouth and the tongue play significant roles in the process of consumption in the

cookbooks, denoting tasting and eating, as well as encouraging an articulation, enunciation, and overall consumption of the literary experience.

Consuming the words and descriptors in recipes occurs most clearly in the titles, where all subsequent fantasy and expectation is set up and enhanced by further visual and expressive elements. *The Baking Collection's* (2014) vivid descriptors for its baked sweets work effectively as a type of narrative; for example, 'Spiced Sponge with Pistachio Honey Cream', 'Little Salty Caramel Meringue Pies', 'Lemon Curd Meringue Cake with Toffee-dipped Blueberries', 'Choc-Orange Truffles with Boozy Prunes and Ginger'. These titles create a fantasy of eating the pictured glossy and stylised images, enhanced by the words included to evoke sensations of the taste, the texture, and the smell of the sweet food. Reminiscent of Barthes' (1975) theories on the pleasure of the text and the sense of "Jouissance" evoked through the reading of it—translated to mean ecstasy, bliss, or rapture—the descriptions in the cookbooks imply a purposeful and profound reader response that is "unspeakable" and found "between the lines" of a narrative (p. 38). Barthes' (1975) ideas rely on readers to draw on previous knowledge and understanding to "re-experience, from memory, certain tastes, smells, or tactile sensations" (Daniel, 2006, p. 75) that is produced in the cookbooks by titles of sweet foods. The intense pleasure revealed in the reading is heavily based on sensory connotations of 'Pistachio Honey Cream' or 'Salty Caramel' or 'Boozy Prunes and Ginger', prompting a savouring of the words in the descriptors as well as images, to encourage a sense of pleasure in the articulation and enunciation of such. The consumptive process expands here to include a profound ingestion of the words and descriptors, as well as cultural and sensorial associations.

There are many examples in literature that indicate a Barthian pleasure of the text, found in poetry—"He ate and drank the precious words" (Emily Dickinson)—and other

prominent works—Shakespeare often included references to devouring words, one memorable example occurs in *Much Ado about Nothing*, “his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes” (2.3.19-21)—that demonstrate a long-standing connection and cultural understanding. The sensorial value added by literary/locution elements function to embellish and magnify the enjoyment and consumption of the recipes communicating how “words fill the mouth as food does, they have their own savour and texture. They can be as biting, fiery, sweet, tough, tender, honeyed, sour” (Halligan, 1990, pp. 124-5). Serving suggestions also work to heighten the sensory in the cookbooks, ‘Best served warm’, ‘Serve with whipped cream’, ‘Serve warm as a dessert with cream or custard’, ‘Serve warm with whipped cream or ice-cream’; to provide an extra dimension to the expected taste and the way they should be consumed and savoured [for further discussion on the dimensions of consuming sweet food see Section 8.6; or on feminine expectations connected to serving sweet food see Section 6.2]. Through these added descriptors, the imagined consumption and taste of warm sweet food feeds the senses of taste, feel, and smell to produce a satiation or satisfaction that comes from *eating the words* themselves.

There has been much inquiry into the anthropological, historical, and cultural aspects of the mouth and orality (Freud, 1905/2017; Melanie Klein, 1975; Karl Abraham, 1927/1979; Julia Kristeva, 2002; and D. W. Winnicott, 1960); with attention centred on the psychoanalytical complexities of the oral zone to represent original sources of sensual pleasure and gratification that develop into manifestations of sexuality. Many visual examples and elements in the cookbooks draw attention to the mouth as a “site of sensual and sexual pleasures” (Coward, 1985, p. 118), and link together the sensation of taking in food and drink to erotic desire. This is revealed in the cookbooks—*Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017), *Retro Baking* (2015), *Baking Day* (2012) and *Recipes to*

*Remember* (2016)—in two ways. Firstly, in the use of a straw as a prop over many pages, in half-filled bottles of red soft drink, in paper and plastic of all varieties, and most notably, held by models between their lips while gazing at the reader/consumer. This brings forth allusions to the phallic nature of the straw, and of “the pleasures of the oral zone” (Coward, 1985, p. 117). While demonstrating how attention is drawn to the mouth—often accentuated by bright pink or red lipstick—in all articulations of women whether illustrated or photographed. The use of lipstick intimates Coward’s (1985) suggestions of “the eroticisms and the prohibitions around the mouth” (p. 117), revealing deliberate connotations to femininity, the erotic pleasures of the mouth and veiled links to sex.

Links to femininity can also be read in how the mouth connects to the articulation of the language of pleasure, appetite and eating. Considering Biasin’s (2017) notions that:

The human mouth is the ambiguous locus of two oralities: one articulates the voice, language; the other satisfies a need, the ingestion of food for survival first of all, but also for a pleasure that becomes juxtaposed with the value of nourishment. (p. 3)

This takes on a particularly pervasive dimension when connected to performances of femininity implied in the cookbooks. The cookbooks direct articulation of language in a specific way, and express femininity through the practices of baking, feeding or care-giving, as well as modes of pleasure in eating, which makes the vocabulary and terminology seem confined and restricted. The mouth plays a significant role in how ideas are given voice to, expressed and regulated, therefore, if Coward’s (1985) suggestions that “it is through the mouth, in speaking, that a person asserts her presence in the world” (p. 117), then the cookbooks demonstrate a very contained and distinct

articulation, which has wider and profound implications to the values society attributes to women's speech.

The links between the mouth, food and erotic pleasure is also suggested in the labelling of sweet goods as *Kisses*, as in *Retro: The Complete Collection's* (2017) 'Rosewater Meringue Kisses' (p. 32) and 'Chocolate Raspberry Kisses' (p. 56); or in *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016), 'Spicy Banana Kisses' (p. 418). Drawing on Foucault's (1985/1990) examination of the Aristotelian notions of self-indulgence and *akolasia*—the pleasures of the body, in sight, hearing, smell and touch—and the contacts of the mouth, the tongue, and the throat determines constructions in the cookbooks to urge consumption of “women's oral appetites” alongside the food and the words (Coward, 1985, p. 118). If the mouth is integral to “female erotic life” and delight in “food, kissing, verbal foreplay” (Coward, 1985, p. 118) then the cookbooks reveal an articulation of femininity that desires, that entices, that promises sweetness and pleasure, yet does so without depth or lasting experience—a fleeting delight that dissipates at the turning of the page.

## **7.6 Summary**

This chapter discussed implications of consumption as a key factor in identity making processes and how lifestyle, behaviour, and pleasure were framed to construct a certain conception of femininity in the cookbooks. It focused on consumptive connections of sensuality, sexuality, and aesthetic knowledge present and addressed the way such elements shaped the depictions of idealised feminine performances, particularly in reference to feminine identity and the baking/eating of sweet foods. The chapter uncovered the contradictions and tensions present in representations of femininity and

perceptions of fantasy and behaviours around sweet food, and how sensorial evocations aid in reinforcing wider cultural articulations of such.

## 8 Appetite and restraint: femininity and indulgence

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Although confectioners encouraged them to buy sweets, and people eventually came to laud women as ‘sweet’, it was simultaneously feared that once unshackled, women’s gustatory appetites, like their sexual appetites, might spin out of control and be the ruin of their households and, eventually, of the entire country. (Wendy Woloson, 2002, p. 144)

### 8.1 Introduction

Images and notions of indulgence bombard us daily across the media landscape: transmitted in advertising, for food and other consumable products; in entertainment of all varieties and modes; and, increasingly, in lists that count down the best ways for readers/consumers to give themselves permission to feast and gratify their desires with the sweet, creamy, glazed, luscious, and imaginative deliciousness put forth. This is undoubtedly encouraged by cookbooks—one may even suggest that this is their primary purpose—to provide the knowledge and know-how to make those sweet imaginings a reality. Cookbooks, further function as a consumable object that reach well beyond this, able to encapsulate implicit messages about social structures or patterns that seem to express and affirm Western cultural perceptions of bodies, appetite and control. They embody neoliberal discourses of “pleasing oneself or feeling good about oneself” (Gill, 2008a, p. 441) through consumption [see discussion in Section 7.2 (p. 198)]. These ideas are often communicated, defined by, and given meaning through contrasting elements or binary oppositions (Lévi-Strauss, 1955), and strengthened by similar representations throughout the broader media setting.

Previous discussion chapters have examined the cookbooks as a consumable object of culture and found links to historical and cultural notions that shape contemporary perceptions. This chapter extends on these notions by exploring how indulgence is framed and connected to cultural conceptions of ‘ideal’ body shape, appetite, desire, and how pleasure can be obtained by following the rules. Significant parallels can be found within wider cultural discourses that perceive the female body as defined by and understood in relation to other bodies – thin, average, fat (Hill, 2011), just as depictions of ‘feminine’ traits or performances can be delineated via contrast or comparison with what is marked as masculine or neutral [see Section 7.4 for further discussion on feminine identity]. Similarly, binaries or oppositions can also be used to strengthen notions of appetite, which are bound by implications of excess; and notions of desire, particularly in regard to feminine pleasure and indulgence seen/experienced through food and eating, which are informed by guilt, control and culturally coded forms of consumption. These allusions seen across wider society in advertising, popular entertainment and media, all seem to valorise elements of corporeal discipline (Foucault, 1977, 1985/1990; Bordo, 1993; Spitzak, 1990; Bartky, 1990), while maintaining a paradigm of “control without denial of pleasure” (Cairns & Johnston, 2015b, p. 92).

This chapter seeks to examine how cultural notions of feminine appetite, excess, and desire are implicitly transmitted within the cookbooks, and seemingly always tied to contrary ideas of indulgence and restraint, whether through the consumption of both the images and ideas presented, or the subsequent baking that may occur later. In particular, a closer look at this incongruity becomes discernible through pleasure-evoking pictures of women displayed throughout many of the cookbooks that project an aspirational ideal, in terms of appearance, dress, or manner. This can be recognised partly due to the

embodiment of a particular look, figure or weight associated with ameliorated ideals represented in wider popular media and revealed to be a tacit part of the consumption of the books themselves. The chapter addresses the way the cookbooks implicitly project wider social constraints on appetite and eating that are central to feminine behaviour (Lupton, 1996; Hollows, 2003a; Gill & Scharff, 2011), and focus on the subsequent conflict that arises in narratives of pleasure or indulgence heavily associated with sweet food. It will also explore how these ideas communicate—in an implicit manner—how women understand, or learn to understand, to maintain and ‘control’ their bodies, including knowing or being aware of the rules that indicate when and how to indulge.

The analysis further investigates how narratives of indulgence tie intimately to the feminine and feminine performance, and effectually communicate aspects of fantasy within indulgent behaviour, appearing to disassociate such from the reality of eating and actual food behaviours. Noting this, the chapter interrogates converging theoretical discussions around the performance of successful contemporary femininity, suggested to be dichotomous, unattainable—attractive and pleasurable, yet fatiguing and constricting—and to negotiate a “relatively narrow band of acceptable food behaviours” in order to perform “successful food femininities” while continually adjusting “to approximate idealised and elusive feminine standards” (Cairns & Johnston, 2015b, p. vii; 92; see also McRobbie, 2009).

## **8.2 An indulgent experience**

In order to explore how the cookbooks indicate notions of restriction and appetite, indulgence must be closely examined and connected to wider cultural perceptions. Through the carefully styled images, recipes and commentary, the cookbooks present particular lifestyle associations. *The Baking Collection* (2014) does not specifically

picture people interacting with food yet manages to create an expectation of who belongs in the spaces presented. Its cover spread poses many of the cakes and sweet foods found inside like an art display with precisely styled platters, serving ephemera, tablecloths and napery, pink and red roses, with hints of gold throughout—seen in tea and coffee pots, serving plates, spoons and napkin holders. In cultural terms, gold exists as a long-standing “symbol of wealth in spiritual as well as political-economic terms” (Scott, 2016, p. 120), and its use here, and in places throughout the cookbook—whether in dishware, or in patterns, borders or embossed fonts—works to accentuate the richness of experiences contained within, beyond implying that the sweet food is eaten from/with such extravagant implements. The symbolic elements of gold create implications for the reader to expect a sumptuous and indulgent experience.

Furthermore, the use of gold also affirms a ‘vintage’ association, as it conjures up connotations of tradition and past fashions in dishware and beyond, heightened by the inclusion of baking tools with old-fashioned patterns and styles. The use and symbolic value of implements in the cookbooks have been previously discussed in the thesis [see Section 6.6], where a *kitschification* of femininity and feminine practice was indicated and analysed. Here, this can be expanded on to examine notions of how the apparatus of baking is a type of material wealth, aiding in the construction of indulgence and feminine associations. By making note of the collections of baking implements throughout the cookbooks, a picture can be formed linking to Brown’s (2000) ideas of vintage ‘clutter’. The number of culinary implements imaged in the cookbooks becomes significant as they suggest a type of excess in the consumptive experience, particularly when connotations of the word ‘clutter’ are considered to imply ‘too much’. In addition to this, Brown (2000) suggests that ‘clutter’ consists of “objects... assembled in an attempt to signify wealth and taste” (p. 46), and that such seek to function symbolically.

Pertinently, this then brings Bourdieuan notions of taste into the interpretation and further indicates that the aesthetic experience of culinary ‘clutter’—applied similarly to the use of gold in the cookbooks—works as a ‘classifier’ or a way to amass capital, or ‘distinction’, through the act and the presentation of ‘collecting’ (see Bourdieu, 1979/1984). The collection of the ‘clutter’ of baking and domestic implements is a noticeable pattern throughout all the cookbooks—and although not all of them use/contain gold pieces—which goes towards strengthening notions of indulgence depicted by the amassed culinary objects.

Extending on this, consistent depictions of accumulative ‘collections’ of kitchen objects can be further seen to project indulgent behaviour. It is this ‘collecting’ of, as Casey and Martens (2007) label it, ‘material culture’—while drawing further on Bourdieuan concepts—that provides “necessary capital and value as judged by certain distinctive social groups” to enhance existing positions, satisfy the “desire for luxury” and the value of a consumption experience (p. 238). The cookbooks inspire readers to consume the experience of indulgence by constructing domestic spaces full of ‘clutter’ and ‘material culture’ of baking, to include many and varied collections of dishware, platters and baking tools beyond just the necessary. The cumulative effect of this is to project a continuing ‘desire for luxury’ that is consumed as an aspirational ideal that may extend into social ideology.

Examining this further, the ‘collection’ of baking ephemera or ‘material culture’ presented in the cookbooks can be tied to performances of indulgence. The steady projection of well-outfitted domestic spaces full of objects beyond the foodstuffs signified in the recipes function to code domestic spaces in a particular way that symbolically links to performances and expectations of femininity. For instance, Casey and Martens (2007) posit that femininity is seemingly “constructed and structured by

the everyday domestic performance and engagement with material culture” (p. 235), “where women seek to stimulate and enhance the experience of the household via their domestic consumption” while also seeking “pleasure, and the creation of a pleasurable space for themselves” (p. 236). Therefore, the construction of domestic spaces in the cookbooks, functions to firstly, allow for such spaces to be coded as feminine through the collection and engagement with ‘material culture’; while secondly, ensuring that the “visibility and display” (Casey & Martens, 2007, p. 238) of femininity in these spaces enhances a type of pleasure at their creation and a type of aspirational confirmation. This becomes pertinent as the cookbooks can be seen to represent a projection of ideal spaces full of objects that confirm the feminine engagement within it. Finally, this all serves to contribute to a sense of indulgence in the ‘clutter’ and symbolic notions of wealth and taste, and at the desire felt for such stylish visibility and space.

### **8.3 Indulgence and desire**

To further discuss how indulgent behaviour works in the cookbooks and how such ties to a desire for sweet foods and the experiences presented, wider theoretical frameworks need to be acknowledged (Lacan, Freud, Foucault) and although they are not quite completely applicable to instances described in the thesis, there are parallels of meaning to be found. Much of the inquiry into psycho-analytical notions of desire focuses on a want for something to be known/gained/restored as a sustaining force; indeed, for Lacan and Freud this referred to underlying sexual desire as a type of life energy—for Freud it was the libido, and for Lacan, a strive for enjoyment or *jouissance*—that seems unable to be satisfied, informing all forms of desire felt (Lacan 2013; Freud, 1923; Richardson 1987). While some aspects are useful to apply here—and become more applicable when considering assertions by Coward (1985) who suggests that the language used to

describe “the desire for sexual relations is like the desire for food” (p. 88)—these theoretical perspectives seem better embraced as a guiding context for connecting indulgence and desire together. For example, *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) introduces its offerings by describing, “Scones and sponge cakes with never-enough cream and jam. Desserts we love so much we are never too full for a second round – pavlova, apple crumble and sticky toffee pudding” (p. 8). The behaviour described here links to wider notions of a desire for sweet food that cannot be satisfied, ‘never-enough’ and ‘never too full’, while inviting the reader to draw from personal experience, ‘desserts we love so much’, of past encounters. It is this combination of desire for, and recollection of, the gratifying effects of indulgence that prepares the reader effectively for the images and descriptions of the cookbook to follow. Pertinently, if the concept of desire is seen as a force sustained by want, such can be viewed in the narratives of indulgence that encourage readers to imagine the gratifying effects of spreading ‘never-enough cream and jam’ on a scone, alongside the ability to for a ‘second round’ of sticky toffee pudding.

More specifically, examples that illustrate the way desire and indulgence are encouraged and sustained can also be seen in much of the commentary, in the ingredients, and the methods that accompany recipes throughout all of the cookbooks. The ‘Cakes’ title page in *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016), previews the section with “keywords: sponge, layered, chocolate, syrupy, indulgent” (p. 195), to explicitly create associations between cake and the gratifying aspects of the sweet food to follow—sponge, layered, syrupy—and builds a picture for readers to imagine before any visual materials are shown. By presenting just the words, the cookbook effectively evokes notes of desire, which both relies on the reader’s discerning understanding of the tastes or experience of the components mentioned, as well as an anticipatory indulgence

of what is to come. The words are written in bold type, indicating how the cookbook expects its reader to react, and directs an imagined experience of desire for the next pages of cakes to follow. Extending a little further on how desire functions as a sustaining force within the cookbooks, particularly in reference to seductive elements of sweet foods—and of sweet words—correlations can be found to Baudrillard’s (1979/1990) inquiry into the effect of seductive symbols and the way they challenge rationality; whereby “everything is reversed if we turn to thinking about the object. Here, it is no longer the subject who desires but the object that seduces” (p. 127). Similar to other theorists mentioned earlier in this section, this approach focuses on sexual desire—or for Baudrillard, the seductive symbols of feminine sexuality—yet can provide some understanding into how symbolic elements used in the cookbooks can evoke an all-encompassing sense of desire, that seduces and entices the reader to embrace indulgence.

To illustrate how seductive symbols can be perceived in the cookbooks, the connotations of the keyword ‘chocolate’ in *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016) provides evident examples of an object able to seduce and build on narratives of indulgence. Elements of chocolate have been discussed in previous sections of the thesis, namely in relation to memory and the way it has been constructed culturally to add pleasure or intensify a sensory or remembered experience [see Sections 6.4 and 7.5]. This section attempts to expand on the cultural notions of chocolate and further address how it is deeply entangled to experiences of indulgence and intense desire inspired by unconscious connotations. Chocolate is persistently used throughout all of the cookbooks, in recipes and ingredients, but also in the decoration, icing and finishing touches, as well as used as flourishes—both in solid block and melted forms—in title and introductory sections. To focus in on an instructive example, *The Best-Ever*

*Collection*'s (2013) 'Little Chocolate Hazelnut Cakes' (p. 287) evokes an indulgent response at every step. Firstly, seductive elements appear in the use of both visual and descriptive elements in the recipe, through the shiny and smooth chocolate ganache that accompanies the cakes when served, and the instructions which direct readers/consumers, "to decorate the cake...use halved chocolates, choc chips, or even slice up your favourite chocolate bar" (p. 287). This is accompanied by a visual display of the little cakes topped with ganache and decorated with halved hazelnut chocolates, emphasising the desire to eat chocolate cake and a chocolate bar in the one dessert, to satisfy and fully embrace the indulgent behaviour that is required to eat and enjoy the sweet experience. The indulgence both described and pictured here connects to an all-encompassing experience and focuses on an object that is seductive in the imagined sensory aspects of the sweet, and able to evoke desire for the multi-layered richness of chocolate—in the cake, in the ganache and finally in the addition of an indulgent 'favourite' chocolate bar.

The way 'chocolate' can enhance the indulgent experience in this example—and many other ones throughout the cookbooks—is worth examining closer. Chocolate has broad connotations to indulgence and has been linked to feelings of pleasure, commonly featured in advertisements surrounded by metaphorical images that invite temptation and desire in audiences (see Bordo, 1993; James, 1990). The recipe for 'Little Chocolate Hazelnut Cakes' (*The Best-Ever Collection*, 2013, p. 287) allows for a meditation of indulgent behaviour, particularly in the action of enjoying chocolate on many levels, baked into the sweet and found in the icing and the decorative elements, which create a singular focus on the richness of the taste, and the layers of enjoyment that would be experienced. The visual works together with the imagined taste to create a story of seduction, which is confirmed, or enhanced by the direction to use 'coffee-flavoured

liqueur’ (*The Best-Ever Collection*, 2013, p. 287) in the mixture, which reveals correlations to Lupton’s (1996) suggestion that alcohol is a “symbolic marker of relaxation and gaiety” that signals “self-indulgence and physical and emotional release” (p. 33), aspects which are surely encouraged in the consumption of these cakes. To have the ‘physical and emotional release’ that Lupton refers to one must embrace the full experience—the many layers of chocolate in the cake—to gain gratification, and the ‘gaiety’ that accompanies it.

As Baudrillard (1979/1990) reminds us, seductive objects compel audiences to concentrate their attention; the same principles can be applied to sweet foods, chocolate, or alcohol and even sex (see Thompson & Hirschman, 1995), revealing how desire becomes “overpowering, something to give in to...desire awakens, seizes, titillates and arouses. We battle, resist, and struggle with, or succumb, surrender to, and indulge our desires” (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2000, p. 99). Correlations to this overpowering feeling also reach back to Lacan and Freud’s descriptions of a force or energy that motivates action, connected to chocolate’s ability to entice and provide an indulgent satisfaction of desire in the cookbooks.

Notions of temptation, desire, and imagined experience can be further examined in relation to the placement and function of sugar throughout all of the cookbooks. Sugar is found in recipes as a required ingredient, but also in more tacit placement such as decorations on sweet foods, placed in bowls near the food, or simply sprinkled on the page. The repeated appearance of sugar injects ideas of indulgence and underscores how necessary a component sugar is to the process of baking. Sugar has been, and remains a topic of much interest in scholarship, particularly its significant historic and cultural impact [see Chapter 3 (p. 45 & p. 53) for further inquiry of scholarship]. The ubiquity of sugar in the cookbooks can be connected to historian Sidney Mintz’s (1985)

descriptions of its path from a luxury item in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to “a virtual necessity by 1850” to present day (p. 148). Its placement in the cookbooks reveal the significance of historical connotations that still connect sugar to notions of luxury and indulgence, as seen in *The Best-Ever Collection* (2013) which has many pages where raw, white, and brown sugar is sprinkled on pictured tablecloths and doilies and next to other decorative effects like flaked almonds and the messy remnants and crumbs of half-eaten cakes. The name of the cookbook—*Best-Ever*—indicates a level of distinction that sets apart the contents and encourages notions of judgement or hierarchical positioning of recipes, methods and sweet outcomes. Combined with the images of expensive napery and messy-but-stylish effects that surround the sweet foods, these ideas work to draw focus to the sumptuous nature of the experience. A fantasy is exhibited resembling Mintz’s (1985) assertions that “sugars began as luxuries, and as such embodied the social position of the wealthy and powerful” (p. 140), which again exposes the narrative of desired esteem constructed in the cookbook. In particular, the use of the word ‘embodied’ in Mintz’s assertion gains greater pertinence when applied to aspects of indulgence in the cookbooks and connotations of sugar to cultural constructions of the feminine.

The examples found in *The Best-Ever Collection* (2013) indicate a domestic environment that shows luxury and decadence. This environment is heavily constructed by the use of darker colours—grey, navy, deep red, bright whites and lots of patterns, shades, textures and materials—yet does not inspire masculine connotations. Rather the cookbook takes on an understated and elegant feel, and its spaces feel infused with a sense of warmth and wealth, as well as a feminised presence, seen through the accoutrements of feminine space—doilies, napery, tablecloths. This scene—along with many other similar depictions—is enhanced by the addition of sugar, which historically,

has been connected to the feminine. There is some contention and confusion over how this connection developed, as discussed by Mintz (1985), who criticises early social assumptions that tied together sugar and women’s participation in capitalism<sup>16</sup>, questioning how “one [male] observer after another displays the curious expectation that women will like sweet things more than men...and that sweet things are, in both literal and figurative senses, more the domain of women than of men” (p. 150). The cookbook affirms the idea that the domain of sweet food is feminine, and though the stylish spaces depicted may not be so obvious in drawing on the expected colours and patterns—like pastels, pinks and embroidered styles discussed in earlier chapters [see Section 6.5]—the reader is encouraged to code such as feminine, due in part to the underlying “literal and figurative” cultural expectations.

Even as Mintz (1985) attempts to critique and point out the dubiousness of the correlation or “the reasons for...[the] categorisation of sweet foods as feminine” (p. 104), the notion that sugar is strongly coded as feminine has cultural weight, beyond the tasks historically undertaken by women domestically to incorporate sugar into a repertoire of baking practice. The cookbooks display this notion in action by demonstrating a distinction between recipes that are savoury and sweet, beyond just dividing such into accessible sections. Many of the cookbooks in the thesis are compendiums of general recipes—*The Best-Ever Collection* (2013), *Baking: The Complete Collection* (2016), *Recipes to Remember* (2016)—and so are configured into separate sections, even those that are baking-focused often contain a section for savoury meals. Notably, these sections usually present images of the food pictured with less ephemera or surrounded by the ‘material culture’ of cooking [refer back to Sections 6.5, 6.7 and 8.2 to find connections to femininity and culinary material accumulation]. They

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<sup>16</sup> See German sociologist Werner Sombart’s (1913) *Luxury and Capitalism* for more on this perspective

are pictured in simpler spaces, with a serving implement, on a platter or plate with a fork, sometimes with a tea towel, or with chopped vegetables or spices. These spaces, while still heavily associated with domesticity and therefore culturally coded as feminine, seem to indicate a sense of neutrality when compared directly to the pages dedicated to sweet foods. Whether it is the use of brighter colours, in fruit components, in glazes, in the decorative elements; or the marked embellishment of the scenes, with ribbons, doilies, napery, implements of tea service, and of course, the pride of place given to sugar, in ingredients lists, pictured in bowls, and sprinkled with stylish ease across table tops and as the finishing touch; there is something more distinctly feminine about them. The recurrent placement of sugar contributes to notions of indulgence and reaffirms the cultural power of the “categorisation of sweet foods as feminine” (Mintz, 1985), which surely informs both the construction of the cookbooks, and the subsequent reading of them.

To extend beyond Mintz’s critique, other theorists have also commented on the “cultural gender coding of foods”, specifically, the findings from Lupton’s (1996) series of interviews showed that “sugar and sweet foods are depicted as indulgences...as decorative and pretty” and “types of food considered ‘feminine’ were described as light, sweet, milky, soft-textured, refined and delicate” (p. 106). These implications are also explored by Visser (1986) who conceives that some foods are “almost female in connotation” and describes the richness and ‘milkiness’ of ice cream served in “definitely womanly, rounded shapes” (p. 19) as an explanatory example. There is a contingency of perfection and performance to these descriptions—pretty, milky, delicate, rich, rounded—which illustrates how the indulgence factor of sweet foods often relies on a sense of timeliness in its consumption. These notions posit the feminine

as a consumable commodity, as though sweet food is a literal embodiment of femininity, and the pleasure of indulgence is experienced by the taking in of such.

More specifically, these connotations—of indulgence and the contingency of sweetness—can be found in the way optimum eating of the sweet foods is advised in the recipes. Usually found at the end of the instructions, many of the cookbooks include a tip to guide readers to the best way to consume the dish. This becomes explicit in examples from *Retro Baking* (2015). Firstly, ‘Lemon Meringue Pie’ is presented sliced, served and with a bite taken out, advising that “this pie is best eaten on the day it is made” (p. 13). Similarly, the advice accompanying ‘Raspberry Almond Crumble Tart’ details that “the recipe is best made on the day of serving as the raspberries will soften the pastry” (p. 14). Both these instances transmit an implication that eating and indulging needs to occur there and then—on the day—almost functioning as a prescribed way of consuming such food. There is a contingency baked into the mode of eating or serving, which builds on the impression of an immediacy in indulgence. Part of this contingency connects to the wider social implications of femininity and how the expectations translate to expectations of sweet food to be ‘decorative’, ‘pretty’, ‘delicate’, and to show the optimum appeal. Notions of an ideal—or perfectly performed—feminine become consumable, desirable, and contingent on finding the time of most appeal, and in these instances, the ‘best’ time for the food to be made, served and eaten. This too can extend further to implications of ideal performances of femininity that are attached to cultural worth and therefore, produce the most pleasure. Moreover, advising readers on when/how best to indulge in the sweet dishes supports a sense of urgent desire and appetite inspired by the food and recipes. The images and descriptions work to foster notions of instant gratification in the contingency of the consumption, that rely heavily on satisfaction occurring in the mode described/pictured,

and subsequently imagined. The indulgence here is reminiscent of Campbell's (2005) suggestions of 'imaginative hedonism', where pleasure is connected to an imagined response, participation, or feeling of enjoyment gained from satisfying desires. Campbell (2005) goes on to suggest that the contemporary consumer has evolved to function in a constant state of desire, where new wants are constantly created, and accordingly, these desires remain largely unfulfilled because the reality of the object focused on, or as Baudrillard (1979/1990) puts it, 'the object that seduces us', can never live up to the imagined idea. To demonstrate, *The Great Australian Baking Book's* (2017) guide to eating 'Chocolate Eclairs' has each pictured topped with glossy chocolate icing and perfectly piped creamy fillings, advising their readers/consumers to "not fill more than 1-2 hours before serving or they will become soggy" (p. 278). In order to consume the sweet goods at the optimal time and ensure the best look, taste and experience, indulgence in the moment is a must; yet the hope/desire that such consumption will live up to the imagined taste—of pastry at its soft yet firm best, of a creamy filling to ooze at the first bite, while silky, textured chocolate glaze tops the experience—seems unlikely. Consequently, this also shows parallels to the previously mentioned descriptions of desire that exists as a motivating force (see Lacan 2013; Freud, 1923), or in this case, makes the consumption of sweet food an urgent and overwhelming feeling centred on an object that seduces via the imagination — yet ultimately remains a longing for something unable to be satisfied. In short, the cookbooks indicate a narrative of immediacy and indulgence of sweet food that strengthens associations to wider notions of the feminine, sweet, soft, refined, appealing (Lupton, 1996) as a consumable ideal, while presenting an imaginative instant gratification that is incapable of ever being truly fulfilled.

## 8.4 Indulgence and ‘forbidden’ food

Examining notions of indulgence and gratification in the cookbooks brings about the need to contextualise implications of illicitness and restriction and how these are culturally constructed in relation to femininity. *The Baking Collection’s* (2014) introductory pages suggest that the ‘Tiny and Tempting’ subsection “is where you’ll find an amazing array of sweet treats...” (p. 6). This illustrates the duelling messages perceived throughout the cookbooks, where the reader is invited to be tempted by the indulgent images, yet simultaneously remain aware of how such are classified as ‘treats’. The connotation of ‘treats’ has links to historical ideas from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, where sweets and sugar were well outside the affordability of the masses, to the extent a sense of frivolousness was attached to spending money on them; accompanied by class expectations as sugar was reserved for upper class use and enjoyment (Mintz, 1985; Theophano, 2002). Furthermore, this cultural association lives on to influence contemporary perceptions, as Chen (2008) asserts, the “sweets-as-treats association has been locked securely into the deepest reaches of our brain” (p. 86). This is affirmed in ‘Tiny and Tempting’ treats, whereby the connection of sweet food is relegated to something gratifying but small and fleeting, an unnecessary superfluity—treat—infused with cultural assumptions of indulgence and reproach.

Additionally, the ‘amazing array’ serves to tempt readers, while reminding them, as Lupton (1996) suggests, that:

sweet foods are viewed as extras to substantial food... their consumption is constructed as subject to greater control: individuals do not ‘need’ these foods to stay alive and in good health, they merely ‘want’ or ‘desire’ them for purely self-indulgent reasons. (p. 110)

The tempting array of treats in *The Baking Collection* (2014) showcases varieties of Petit Fours, Cupcakes, Truffles, Tarts, Muffins, Cheesecakes, and Friands (pp. 246-295) and connects to engrained notions of self-indulgent behaviour by making clear that such should be seen as ‘extras’ and something to be constrained. This narrative functions to consign sweet foods to a taboo type of eating and one that tempts the reader/consumer into illicit behaviour, full of ‘self-indulgence’ that allows desires to be given over to, challenging social norms of self-control. Notably, these narratives reveal Foucault’s (1977, 1985/1990) descriptions of a desire that can carry people away, and the cultural constraints that are put in place—or as he labels them ‘strategies of modern governance’—to restrict and control unruly desires and bodily passions, which have been such a social concern throughout history. On a broader social scale, these concepts communicate an assimilated understanding that sugar and sweets are a contingency food, ‘treats’ or ‘extras’, and that desire for and indulgence in them, expresses illicitness, immorality, and potential danger. Within his theories, Foucault (1977, 1985/1990) expands on notions of illicitness and immorality attached to such behaviour, discussing the ethical concerns of over-indulgence and thus, the need for it to be consistently corrected or monitored. Developed further by Hill (2012) in her examination of historical notions of indulgence and excess, narratives of “moderate, modest, reasonable, temperate” exist to transmit “powerful and pervasive cultural interest in curbing what is considered to be excessive behaviour around eating and drinking” (p. 17). The cultural power carried by these pervasive messages discourages heightened desire for sweet foods, and therefore, what is seen to be over-indulgent and immoderate behaviour, casts them as ‘forbidden’ foods connected to ‘excessive behaviours’ subsequently required to be constrained and contained.

The messages surrounding the illicitness of ‘forbidden’ foods and discourses that urge indulgence and desire to be contained become apparent when connecting presentations in the cookbooks to wider ideas of femininity and the relationship women have with sweet food. Amongst the recipes in *Retro Baking* (2015) and *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) there are double spreads featuring women eating or at least the simulation of them about to eat or bite into food. Desire is built here by employing the recipe, showcasing the appeal of the finished product and then promising the pleasure of eating. The scenes can be read as full of the enjoyment of indulging in sweet foods, conveyed via the interactions of pictured women with each other, with the food or specifically directed at the intended consumer through contact in gaze and motion with the camera. Yet the act of eating itself—biting, chewing, swallowing, consuming—is not a part of this narrative. The indulgence and gratification of the foods is implied as a seduction via the object and the pleasure it seeks to bring is all imagined. The cookbooks depict ideas of ‘moderate’ and ‘temperate’ eating and behaviour using visual, descriptive, and tacit associations intimately layered and surrounded by feminine performances. The desire presented here is not overwhelming or all-encompassing, as the pictured women interact with the sweet food as though to eat it, and the consumption seems tempered and reasonable. Although it may lead to imagined ideas of what the indulgence and satisfaction of the pictured sweet foods may feel like, the food itself largely remains intact and uneaten. Essentially, what comes about are appealing and encouraging behaviours of indulgence which the reader can recognise as staged performance, without actively challenging notions of over-indulgence and containing desire.

The staged indulgence in the cookbooks finds parallels in marketing and branding specifically associated with celebrity chef Nigella Lawson, which according to Shapiro

Sanders (2008) is coded to “remind... consumers of the joys of giving into temptation” (p. 156), encapsulated by her performance around sweet food, laden with themes of desire and indulgence [see Section 2.4 for more commentary on Nigella Lawson’s influence on contemporary food femininities]. In a similar way, the cookbooks attempt to infuse scenes of women interacting with food and each-other with joy and pleasure with visually attractive colours, poses, the look of the food, depicting aspects of giving into temptation and desire, yet because the eating is not shown, the level of indulgence actually occurring is scaled down. There is a wider cultural narrative at work here, which demonstrates a thrill present in the indulgence of ‘culturally forbidden’ sweet foods or the performance around such. Specifically, feminine food behaviours and eating experiences are often “treated with both asceticism and moderation, and also hedonism and playful resistance” (Cronin et al., 2014, p. 380; also see Warde, 1997), or what Kimura, Wada and Dan (2011) suggest, a type of ‘hedonistic femininity’. There is playfulness and pleasure in the representations to encourage readers/consumers to imagine a gratifying and/or satisfying food experience, yet the lack of a complete eating experience from the narrative reinforces the ‘moderate’ or ‘ascetic’ aspects of indulgence at work.

To demonstrate further, *Recipes to Remember* (2016) describes the tradition of ‘Ladies who Lunch’ and notes that “the main course was often followed by a slightly wicked dessert” (p. 43). The connotation of the descriptor ‘wicked’ demonstrates a thrill of indulging in the forbidden, an act of ‘hedonism’ that somehow challenges moral boundaries and the upright behaviour expected from ‘ladies’ [for further analysis on connotations present in ‘Ladies who Lunch’ and how it directs the reader to specific ideas of feminine performance see Section 6.6 on ‘Feminine Pastiche’]. Within this narrative, the cookbook indicates strands of inviting temptation, playing with hedonistic

and illicit ideas of sweet food, and the connotations behind ‘forbidden’ consumption. Ideas about the specific feminine performance tied to the consumption and indulgence are also conveyed, converging with Bordo’s (1993) assertions that female eating is “private, secretive, illicit” (p. 157). To ‘indulge’ carries a highly coded set of rules or values for female eating, and particularly when sweet foods—or ‘desserts’ as the example classifies—are involved. Elements of a scaled down indulgence are underscored by the modifier ‘slightly wicked’, subtly reaffirming any attached performance. Pertinently, the narrative here reinforces ideas that eating foods attributed as ‘wicked’ and indulgent are seemingly acceptable only if there is an acknowledgement of such, as well as subsequent moderation of behaviour.

On a wider scale, much scholastic inquiry has been conducted into how women are especially affected by ideas and behaviours around the pressure to resist the temptation of sweet foods and embrace notions of severe self-control (see Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). The cookbooks communicate the entangled narrative of embrace/resist by labelling many sweet foods as ‘naughty’, ‘sinful’, or ‘naughty but nice’, marking them with a need to be contained or constrained. Drawing further on Foucault’s (1977) ethical concerns over-indulgence, and on Lupton’s (1996) interrogations of the sociocultural and personal meanings of food and eating, these labels indicate that “just as women are considered more vulnerable to emotional states... so too are they considered ‘open’ to temptations offered by self-indulgence in sweet food” and more “liable to give in to their bodily desires” (p. 110). By being ‘open to the temptation’ of sweet food and therefore ‘liable’ to their ‘sinful’ and ‘naughty’ effects, a sense of immorality becomes attached to the eating behaviour of women. *Baking: The Complete Collection*’s (2016) recipe for ‘Devil’s Food Cake’ (p. 247) presents an image of a layered and heavily frosted chocolate cake. The word ‘devil’

here indicates notions of sin, temptation, and illicitness—due in part to the connection to Christianity and religious mores—which implicate a sense of immoral indulgence, but also functions culturally to heighten the craving and desire for the food itself (Hetherington, 2001).

Accordingly, themes of indulgence in the cookbooks are seemingly attached to notions of illicitness and temptation, reminiscent of Daniel’s (2006) suggestions that “...Western culture’s prohibition on sweet food reveals a continuing preoccupation with immorality” (p. 83). If associating the consumption of sweet food with women in particular, placing labels of ‘naughty’, ‘wicked’ or ‘sinful’ deems such behaviour outside of proper moral boundaries and pushes it to be carried out either in full awareness of social constrain and given a public performance of illicitness and self-indulgence, or somehow mitigated in ‘private’ and ‘secretive’ fashion which is where most feminine eating and indulgence is thought to occur (Bordo, 1993). The descriptors may provoke a thrill of temptation but move to designate women’s eating of sweet food as ‘forbidden’, immoral, and ultimately guilt-inducing.

The persistent depiction of pleasurable sweet food is underlay with guilt and self-indulgence and revealed in the cookbooks as a way to consume such treats without drifting into decadent, immoral behaviour. Specifically, noticeable labels of ‘mini’ or some similar diminutive becomes obvious to connote only indulging a little and within boundaries. In *Retro Baking* (2015), there are ‘Mini Banana Blueberry Cakes’ (p. 156), ‘White Choc-Chip and Orange Mini Muffins’ (p. 240), ‘Mini Cherry Bakewell Tarts’ (p. 10), ‘Mini Chocolate Hazelnut Cake’ (p. 152) and ‘Mini Jam Drops’ (p. 170); and in *Afternoon Tea* (2010), with ‘Lemon Curd Tartlets’ (p. 75) ‘Small Cakes’ (p. 24) and ‘Lorraine’s Small Eclairs’ (p. 43). The recurrent pattern indicates that the indulgence of these treats must be small in order to satisfy a craving yet remain tightly controlled or

contained within the boundaries of moral or rational eating. This further extends to how consumption and eating are closely monitored, signalling Bordo's (1993) claims that contradictory messages are attached to male and female appetites, whereby nature affords men a voracious appetite, usually depicted in advertising via "mounds of cake and oozing frosting"; compared to women's appetites usually associated with words like "tiny" and "bite-size", in order to endorse the message to just "indulge a little" (p. 157). The pattern of labelling sweet foods as mini or small reveals contradictions in action and encourages a type of approved eating or controlled indulgence communicated persistently via similar language in the narratives, recipe instructions, tips, and in the images of small portions in the cookbooks. Recurring recipes for cupcakes and small cakes—of different varieties, ingredients and decoration—further emphasises how consistent communication of a sanctioned appetite of small indulgences is associated with implicit ideas of femininity. *Retro Baking's* (2015) 'Chocolate Heart Cupcakes' (p. 139) shows small, delicate cakes in lilac cases, with the tops cut into heart shapes and filled with raspberry frosting. Both the recipe and the presentation here imply feminine associations in the size of the treat, the shapes and colours used [for further discussion on feminine associations refer to Sections 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7], connections further expanded on by Nathanson's (2015) suggestions that cupcakes have "...been primarily associated with femininity" due to their function as "single-portion, aesthetically appealing desserts", whereby "the small indulgence works with, rather than against, contemporary definitions of ideal femininity" (p. 251). The examples refer to wider cultural assumptions of femininity, delicate, sweet, lilac, small, 'aesthetically appealing', which go towards confirming the primary associations present. Tying this with the concept of 'single-portion' as a defining ideal of femininity, as well as other examples already mentioned in this section that use similar tokens of mini and bite-size

extends on the idea of indulging in something small and appealing as appropriate and expected feminine behaviour.

To illustrate these connections further, many of the cookbooks contain a recipe for ‘Melting Moments’ (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 50; *The Best-Ever Collection* 2013, p. 311; *Retro: The Complete Collection*, 2017, p. 279). The recipes are for bite-sized biscuits full of sugar and butter and can be connected to cultural notions of feminine consumption and enjoyment, as just a ‘Moment’ of indulgence is encouraged—clearly alluded to in the name. Drawing on Lupton’s (1996) findings, Melting Moments indicate how “women were commonly said to prefer food that is small and sweet” (p. 110). Indicative of the venerable associations between femininity and restricted eating, ‘Melting Moments’ further reinforce such by encapsulating a sweet, single-portioned, aesthetically-pleasing indulgence, ready for culturally approved consumption.<sup>17</sup>

## 8.5 Sweet Food and emotional eating

Pertinent to considering the forbidden and indulgent nature of sweet foods are aspects of emotionality and how food and eating are deeply felt bodily experiences. Prevailing connections between emotionality and food can be perceived in the cookbooks, in the way images of food are presented, or in narrative—both written and interpreted—elements. Considering Lupton’s (1996) interrogation of the confluence of emotions—anger, happiness, guilt, comfort, love, anxiety—around eating, and inference that “humans’ relationships with food and eating are subject to the most powerful emotions experienced in any context” (p. 34); such become key ideas when analysing the impact

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<sup>17</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Melting Moments (p. 334)

of decisions around indulgence behaviours, food choice or rejection, and the way food is approached in the cookbooks. Expanding on previous discussions of love and care expressed via sweet food and feminine practices of nurturance and devotion [see Sections 6.2], this section examines how emotional responses or expressions are always set at a distance from ideas of hunger, and the interplay of desire and indulgence within this frame.

Theoretically, hunger is seen as related to, yet different from, the concept of appetite. Lupton (1996) suggests that “appetite is an emotionally flavoured hunger” where “desire, for a certain food may exist independently of a feeling for hunger, and hunger may exist without having much of an appetite” (p. 34). Emotionality and the embodiment of “being ‘in love’ are often associated with a loss of appetite” whereas “hunger is ...viewed more as a drive or instinct unmediated by social states” (Lupton, 1996, p. 34). The cookbooks encourage a version of appetite profoundly associated with joy and the giving of love through sweet food that asks readers/consumers to indulge and give over to fervent desire or craving, at least until the sweet food is experienced and eaten.

More specifically, this contained experience is indicated in *Retro Baking's* (2015) many recipes for *Kisses*—two small round cakes sandwiched together with a creamy filling. The cookbook has recipes for ‘Ginger and Lime Kisses’ (p. 127), ‘Caramel Apple Kisses’ (p. 128), ‘White Chocolate and Passionfruit Kisses’ (p. 131), ‘Chocolate Raspberry Kisses’ (p. 132) and ‘Spicy Banana Kisses’ (p. 124). The cakes are delicately presented, sprinkled with powdered sugar, or decorated with raspberries, next to tea cups or on pink doilies to show the value of giving away or sharing such delicacies. There is a delicate or inviting touch to the scenes, creating a connotation to the word ‘kiss’ itself, and thereby equating the sharing of such small favours to the manner that

one might bestow their actual kisses [for discussion on the Kisses recipe and status, see Section 6.5; for discussion on Kisses, sensuality, and eroticism of the mouth, see Section 7.5]. The repetition of the recipes builds a picture that links together the sweet food, the recipients of such food, and the implication of a kiss—something given with feeling behind it, to be accepted by the recipient—that reinforces the cultural significations around appetite and distances the application of hunger or need. This reaffirms how significant a role emotionality can play in sweet food and converges with Piatti-Farnell's (2017) contention that:

appetite, therefore, can be viewed as a form of conditioned desire. Hunger, on the other hand, presents itself as a primal need, and is expressed in a much rawer, visceral way. (p. 90-1)

There is no sense of urgency or 'visceral' need put forth or expressed by the presentation in the cookbooks; more likely an invitation to indulge in and to partake in an appealing and emotionally affecting experience. Sweet food in these cookbooks is a type of 'conditioned desire', operated at the action of choosing the recipe, recreating it with certain people in mind, and in the ultimate indulgence/eating of the end result.

In addition, the appetite or 'conditioned desire' expressed in the cookbooks can be contextualised in reference to 'emotional eating' or comfort food. An appetite for sweet food is encouraged in the cookbooks via the attachment of emotional connotations and contingencies. *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015) declares "there's something very comforting about small cakes, and the indulgence of a cupcake or small sweet treat" (p. 150). Cake and sweet food are revealed here to be associated with feelings of safety, comfort and nurture, to be eaten or indulged in to evoke an embodied emotional response. Taking into account Levene's (2016) assertion that "cake is the archetypal

comfort food...the helpings of love and nurture that often accompany it turn that dial a little higher still” (p. 5), the cookbooks indicate how treats have been widely and culturally constructed as definitive ‘comfort food’, likely to be “binge-eat[en]... in response to negative emotions” (Milne, 2013, p. 74).

Moreover, the “easy, safe, familiar—and sweet” (Chen, 2008, p. 35) nature of cake and baked goods can be culturally read as a cure or remedy for emotional states of being, where indulgence, craving and appetite for familiar sweet foods receives a type of social acquiescence. Even though the foods presented are highly-caloric and the notion of consuming them regularly designated a type of ‘forbidden’ behaviour, the connection of baked goods to concepts of providing comfort and nurture confirms findings from Locher et al. (2005), whose study suggests that “consuming these foods provides comfort because they place the individual consuming them and his or her emotional needs at the center, despite the food’s high caloric or fat content” (p. 285). Many of the recipes contained in *Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics* (2015) explicitly call for the use of ‘real’ ingredients; for example, ‘Chocolate Frosting’ made with cream cheese, butter and real dark chocolate (p. 122); and do not provide tips for substitution of lower fat ingredients or sugar alternatives that can be found in other cookbooks. This adds to the concept of providing comfort and pleasure in the moment, to focus on the emotional state and the full embodied effect of the indulgence experience. Following Chen’s (2008) suggestions that a craving for comfort in sweet food shares similarities to that of addiction, where one chases the ‘feel good’, or ‘feel better’ effects; the appeal of ‘comfort food’ stems from this notion in the cookbooks. Indulging in the sweet offerings depicted brings an end reward of pleasure, feeling comforted and nurtured to readers.

The recurring images and inclusion of doughnuts in the cookbooks can be closely connected to notions of craving/comfort. *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) contains inside cover pages full of doughnuts in baskets, heady in assorted colours and decoration, ready to be consumed, as Kronl (2014) puts it, “a fried lump of happiness” (p. viii). Doughnuts are pictured against backdrops of an old-fashioned diner, scenes with menus, shakers, table numbers that evoke the past and are reminiscent of the 1950s, to evoke a pleasant nostalgia for another era and sense of comfort and bring forth a fantasy of taste and sociality that connects to the experience (*Retro: The Complete Collection*, 2017, cover pages). In utilising the repeated decorative effects of doughnuts, the cookbooks reveal the sense of immediate comfort and appeal they bring, as Kronl (2014) explains, “...sweet, soft and cakey; rich without being greasy; dissolving into delicate crumbs with every bite” (p. 90). Looking deeper at the recurrent use, images, and doughnut recipes also communicates a more complex reading, particularly when considering the embodied emotionality of indulgence and craving. Kronl (2014) suggests that “we are genetically programmed to crave fat and sugar, and with good evolutionary reason: both are indulgent, which makes them doubly desirable” (p. 90). When paired with prevalent social perceptions that associate excess and emotionality with femininity—Foucault (1985/1990) wrote of the undisciplined and ‘immoderate’ feminine—then culturally, femininity can be seen to require a type of conditioned desire and craving. This narrative is conveyed via the images and recipes of sweet food to reveal an embodied emotionality that pervasively connects femininity to aspects of over-indulgence, excess, comfort, and the need for ‘conditioned desire’ that has very little to do with actual hunger.

## 8.6 Restrained indulgence

The discussion in this chapter has revealed how a continual narrative of indulgence in the cookbooks is tempered with associations that are culturally prevalent to food/eating and notions of femininity. Feminine practices around sweet foods have been explored in previous sections [see chapter 6] and how such function to build a picture of a specific baking, nurturing femininity. This section will expand on these notions and on feminine practice by exploring the way the cookbooks continually tell a story of food ready to serve and share, tying together a performance of mitigated indulgence and successful food femininities.

The cookbooks persistently indicate the eating of sweet food in social or family settings. *The Baking Collection* (2014) presents its pictured dishes accompanied by plates, forks, spoons, with cover narrative telling readers that it contains, “a selection of baked treats to share”. Sharing is further shown in the recipe directions or in accompanying narratives, or in posed pictures—of either people eating the food, or indications of eating—demonstrating that the collection of sweets contained within the cookbook—and throughout the dataset—remain never solely for individual use or consumption. There is a heavy implication that guests or visitors are invited into these environments, showed via serving platters of pies and cakes, pictured dishes, serving spoons or spatulas, and by imaged cups full of tea and varied beverages. The spread for ‘Pecan and Date Ripple Cake’ (*The Baking Collection*, 2014, p. 123) pictures a serving board with cups of tea, small plates and forks. This scene is not uniquely put together, as the ubiquity of its elements—sweet food, tea, serving implements—are a continual pattern throughout the cookbooks. Repeatedly, it becomes clear that the sweet food pictured is ready to be shared by more than one person. Considering Probyn’s (1999) suggestions of cultural expectations that stigmatise eating alone, the cookbooks repeatedly utilise

pictured eating suggestions as well as written narrative commentary to tacitly remind readers of the stigma of lone consumption. Connecting this to wider social expectations linked to appetite and indulgence already considered in this chapter, further conditions around the consumption of sweet food can be recognised.

To illustrate these conditions further, many pictured cakes have slices or pieces cut out as though in the process of being consumed. *The Baking Collection's* (2014) 'Banana Cake with Caramel Sauce' (p. 106), for example, has been cut into slices and topped with caramel sauce and a dollop of cream, ready to serve. Other pictures present slices on plates, or in the case of the 'Lemon and Poppy Seed Syrup Cake' (p. 120), a glazed slice is atop a stand, with a jug—of milk, perhaps—a spoon and a fork close by, all reinforcing the idea of the food ready to be served and eaten. Notions of indulgence are present—in the dollops of cream, caramel sauce, lemon glaze, bite-sized pieces missing—yet alluded to in a way that emphasises the social and sharing aspect. The repetition of images and phrases—such as 'serve immediately' or 'turn onto serving platter'—help to build the importance of the 'sharing' part of the consumption experience, and the conditions whereby indulgence and eating are acceptable and expected. The social aspect or value of the sweet food is emphasised here consistently, transmitting to readers that any negative connotations associated with eating sweet food—over-indulgence, illicitness—can be mitigated by sharing it with others. Considering Bordo's (1995) assertions that "constructions of femininity" rely on the ability of women to "feed others, not the self"; a narrative emerges within the cookbooks that continually communicates a type of socially approved consumption, functioning to constrain feminine indulgence and appetite, and to "develop a totally other-orientated emotional economy" (p. 171).

Guided by wider theoretical approaches that connect feminine food performance with devotion, sacrifice, corporeal control and oppression/repression of desire (Charles & Kerr 1998; DeVault 1991; 1999; Lupton 1996; Murcott 1983), notions of restricted behaviour are revealed and can be read both tacitly and explicitly. *The Great Australian Baking Book's* (2017) recipe for 'Egg-free Spicy Carrot, Honey and Pecan Cake' has contributor Belinda Jeffrey's accompanying commentary explain "...unlike many low-fat cakes, it's really moist and has a wonderful, homely, spicy flavour... It...is a lovely, not-too-sweet treat to have with a cup of tea or coffee" (p. 84). As previously discussed in this chapter [Section 8.4] the connotation of using 'treat' establishes an illicitness of the indulgence and attaches a codicil to the consumption of the cake. In this case, the indulgence is mitigated because it is "low-fat" and "not-to-sweet" and therefore the guilt that is assumed to be automatically attached to the eating of it is lessened. The narrative emphasises the recipe's classification of a 'treat' in the way it suggests it should be eaten, 'with a cup of tea or coffee', which sets it outside of the normal function/consumption of food [see Section 8.4 for discussion of treats and self-indulgence; and connections to afternoon tea culture in Section 5.5].

Additionally, the narrative attached to 'Egg-free Spicy Carrot, Honey and Pecan Cake' expands on certain behaviours that direct readers/consumers on how to enjoy the sweet treat, "there are no eggs in it, only ¼ cup of oil and no dairy products – as long as you don't ice it! My husband would die if he read those last words I wrote, as icing is the whole point of a cake for him!" (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 84). The indulgence factors are further mitigated here—eggs, oil, dairy, icing—and show that the eating of the cake contains parameters of acceptable consumption. Within these parameters, this example makes obvious the wider gendered and cultural contingencies associated with sweet food. For instance, her husband can indulge in the cake and the

icing, ‘the whole point of the cake’, without constrain yet her enjoyment comes from the ‘low-fat’, ‘not-too-sweet’, dairy and egg free assurances. The cultural understandings of indulgence, comfort and emotionality associated with sweet foods seem inextricably linked and predicated on the adherence to a set of gendered ideals and behaviours around the eating, baking and serving of them. The contextually contingent gender behaviours and relationships with food recalls Charles and Kerr’s (1988) findings where:

men can eat for pleasure and are expected to enjoy their food. Children, even, are given sweets and biscuits and puddings as treats, as a means of giving pleasure. And women see this as an important element of preparing food for others. But for themselves such enjoyment as somehow illicit, it induces guilt.  
(p. 153)

This reveals that for women food and eating comes laden with connotations of guilt and contingent indulgence, whereby consumption requires conforming to culturally informed behaviours. Such behaviours are unconsciously internalised and largely unexamined, connecting to dominant social ideas and gendered forms of unequal power relations in food and eating that bolsters hegemonic feminine behaviour around the selection of recipes, subsequent baking and preparation, and the eating/consuming of sweet food (Charles & Kerr, 1988).

The cookbooks demonstrate hegemonic feminine behaviour through a type of restrained indulgence which sanctions the indulgence of a cake that is ‘not-too-sweet and un-iced and connects closely to wider social censure around excess and untampered emotionality, particularly when connected to femininity. Drawing on theoretical notions posed by Lupton (1996) in that “like food and eating practices, the emotions are

traditionally linked with the feminine” (p. 32); and Hill (2011) who discusses the long history of associating “the social disruption of gluttonous activity with femininity” wherein “the threat of ‘becoming like a woman’ if one indulges one’s bodily desires too much” persistently confirms how Western Culture ascribes women with “irrationality, excess, and overindulgence” (p. 3), exposes how unrestrained behaviour or overindulgence is often tacitly referred to in the cookbooks yet never overtly seen. *Afternoon Tea’s* (2010) narrative praises Chef and Food Stylish Mark Core and “his superb baking skills [which] made our jeans tight and our mouth water” (p. 4). This commentary affirms the notions of over-indulgence as something to induce guilt—by making clothing too tight—and alludes to the way sweet food encourages over-consumption by producing such an irrational response, ‘mouth-watering’, and much like feminine behaviours, ultimately must be contained.

The cookbooks signal a containment of over-indulgence by encouraging the consumption of an ideal female form that seems to reinforce dominant cultural conceptions of women’s bodies witnessed throughout wider consumer culture. In *Baking Day* (2012), instead of pictures or photographs of ‘real’ women, there are drawn ‘renditions’ or cut-outs, which begin from the front cover onwards, dressed in a similar manner—in gloves, pearls, make-up—while their ‘shape’ conforms to constructed narratives of slimness that reflects Hill’s (2011) evaluation that “Western standards of female beauty demand a slim body” (p. 2). Versions of this ‘slim’ feminine form are seen in *Baking Day’s* (2012) repeated illustration of a woman in a vintage dress, her narrow waist accentuated by an apron—most ‘renditions’ have cinched waists with belts or aprons. In *Recipes to Remember* (2016), similar versions are depicted—on the cover and throughout—in a variety of dresses cinched and tied at the waist to accentuate her ‘slim’ and feminine figure. Noting Charles and Kerr’s (1988) conclusions of a

“dominant cultural view of ‘slim is beautiful’” that is “given significant emphasis in women’s magazines and mass advertising” (p. 149), the repetitive use of pictured women in form-fitting dresses and belts demonstrates how a ‘slim’ figure is accentuated in the cookbooks to indicate the pervasive ‘emphasis’ and approval of wider society.

Contextually, wider representations of the female body in Western culture “concentrate on a body image that symbolizes femininity...signified by thinness, which in turn connotes properly controlled desire and morality” (Daniel, 2006, p. 5). Many feminist theorists have written on the demands of contemporary feminine body ideals, notably Bordo (1993) in her seminal investigative text, *Unbearable Weight*, where she describes the cultural pressure to maintain a slim, “tightly managed body” (p. 187; see also Chernin’s ‘tyranny of slenderness’, 1981; Meagher, 2003). Bordo’s (1993) findings focused in part on advertising, converging with Evans and Thornton’s (1989) study which indicated that women’s consumption of mediated texts—magazines—occurs through a forefronting of “their desire to fit the measure of the... image, [and] practice a form of consumption that is both compliant and deviant” (p. 82). Similar practices can be applied to the cookbooks and the tacit consumption of recurrent feminine forms, and a persistently pictured slimness shown without alternative.

To demonstrate further, *Retro: The Complete Collection* (2017) contains several illustrated female forms which have variations in hair, dress and make-up, yet seem to consist of the same “tightly managed” measurements of form and shape (p. 50-1). The cookbook includes a collection of vintage Paper Dolls—figures cut out of paper or thin card—dressed in clothing of all variations—dresses, nightgowns, ball gowns, and the like. All the figures have their waists accentuated with belts, ribbons, aprons, or are pictured with hands on their hips. The attention placed on the form accentuates idealised aspects of femininity reminiscent of Murray’s (2008a) notions of the “normative

‘slender’ thinness” that is representative of the Western universal feminine experience (p. 34), considered by LeBesco (2004) to be part of wider socially ameliorated ‘normal’ body shape and/or behaviour, and a “compulsory thinness” that “excludes the fat-identified subject” (p. 16). Drawing further on Foucault’s (1977) theories on cultural discourses and the body, specifically how “power relations have an immediate hold upon it: they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (p. 25); and Bordo’s (1993) application to describe forms of control employed by gendered embodiment and ‘slenderness’ as the idealised aesthetic feminine form, functioning to constrain the “female body and its disgusting hungers” (p. 8); certain concepts of contained indulgence can be revealed in the cookbooks.

Significantly, closer examination uncovers a hyper-awareness of potential out-of-control behaviour connected to sweet food. *Recipes to Remember* (2016) is a prime example of this hyper-awareness in action, as each recipe includes detailed information on the nutritional value contained within each dish. The recipes give the exact numbers of total fat and saturated fat (g), kilojoules and calorie count (kj, Cal), carbohydrate (g), protein (g), and fibre (g) expected to be consumed, which gives readers/consumers the option to weigh up the potential impact of baking and eating the food. There is an expectation that the indulgence be carefully considered, and a ‘rational’ judgement made that keeps the guilt factor of consuming sweet food at the front and centre of any choice. The dual focus of a visual ideal—or “normative slimness” (Murray, 2007)—of feminine figures combined with the emphasis on the caloric values of each dish pointedly communicates that preparing/baking/eating should be evaluated prudently. Drawing on Hill’s (2011) assertions of a “pervasive and continuing strand of cultural thinking in the West that disparages overindulgence and privileges moderation and self-control” (p. 1), and O’Connor’s (2013) suggestions that dominant discourses bring

about a longing for “virtuous eating” brings about “self-imposed asceticism” (p. 277), uncovers how attaching the nutritional values to each recipe resoundingly indicates to readers/consumers the need to consume moderately, if at all. This turns reflection inwards, and ties to wider cultural connotations concerning feminine consumption, appetite and the need for constant cognizance of eating habits to monitor any loss of self-control.

Foucault’s (1977) writings on the docile body that “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (p. 155) are also at work here, motivated by health narratives, bodily discipline and control, intimately connected to feminine performances around eating. At the forefront of the feminine eating narrative is the fear of the overweight body, which Braziel and LeBesco (2001) contend has been “vilified in ways ideologically loaded, yet cleverly intertwined with concepts of nature, health and beauty” (p. 2). The overweight body and ‘fatness’ have been framed and repeatedly contextualised in opposition to being ‘healthy’, ‘feminine’ and disciplined, seen predominantly as products of an “excess of desire, of bodily urges not controlled” (Farrell, 2011, p. 10), full of “unrestrained hunger” (Bordo, 1993, p. 36). The pervasive promotion of the feminine docile body connected to notions of slenderness and restraint unleashes, in Bordo’s (1993) view, “a tidal wave of obsession with achieving a disciplined, normalised body” (p. xxii), where any hint of “softness or bulge comes to be seen as unsightly - as disgusting, disorderly, ‘fat’ which must be ‘eliminated’ or ‘busted’” (p. 57).

Many of the recipes in the cookbooks tacitly call attention to the need for asceticism and control by substituting ingredients in their sweet dishes. *The Best-Ever Collection*’s (2013) ‘Raspberry Loaf Cake’ raises the reader/consumer’s hyper-awareness in the accompanying description, “this delicious loaf is low in fat and sugar making it perfect for those watching their diet” (p. 268). This conveys wider cultural constraints around

women's eating behaviours—and notions of paying close attention to diet—and plays on the concurrent feelings of pleasure, 'delicious', and guilt that sweet food brings. The connotations of 'watching their diet' indicate how "the feminine body remains a site of surveillance, evaluation, judgement and regulation with the fear of fatness appearing as a backdrop" (Cairns and Johnston, 2015b, p. 108). The ingredients themselves add to this constant monitoring, specifying reduced-fat dairy-free spread, wholemeal flour, low-fat yoghurt; while the frosting specifies the use of light cream cheese (*The Best-Ever Collection*, 2013, p. 268), implying that 'surveillance, evaluation, judgement and regulation' are factors that need to be at the forefront of baking and eating concerns.

The consumption of the cake—and of sweet foods—can be framed by a type of Foucauldian Panopticism, conceptualised here to refer to women's eating behaviours, where 'voluntary' self-oppression and control is induced, reinforced and "regulated by the norms of cultural life" (Bordo, 1993, p. 91; Foucault, 1977). Though she is not specifically addressing feminine eating, Bartky's (1990) suggestions further reiterate expectations of the female form and aesthetics, as "the woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara run, who worries that the wind or rain may spoil her hairdo has become just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, self-committed to a relentless self-surveillance" (p. 80). By remaining hyperaware of ideals of 'slenderness' and the constant 'evaluation and regulation' of female eating, the substitution of ingredients 'low in fat and sugar' becomes part of the 'relentless self-surveillance' that occurs in the 'norms of cultural life'. It can take on wider significant implications, for example, if the cake is chosen/baked by a female reader and served to/shared with others, particularly other women, then surveillance—of the self and other women—and monitored indulgence fit into the consistent negotiation of "normative feminine behaviours"

(Davies, 2010, p. 34) throughout the process. This finds correlation with principles of neoliberalism, and Gill's (2008a) contention that women are its "ideal subjects", as "to a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (p. 443). The cookbooks reaffirm the prevalence of surveillance, evaluation, choice, and control in 'normative feminine behaviours' via the widespread use of 'healthy' or 'healthier' options—sugarless, gluten-free, vegan. *The Great Australian Baking Book's* (2017) recipe for 'Super Simple Banana Bread' has Nutritionist Tara Leong explain that:

it's the perfect snack for baby and me. It's ideal for lunch boxes – for both kids and adults...as it contains only a few ingredients, and it contains no table sugar – it's sweetened with bananas. (pp. 218-9)

The recipe, as well as the accompanying image of a baked loaf decorated with apple slices and dusted with cinnamon, presents a very particular picture of a sweet indicative of the contradictions present in consistent narratives of moderation, as well as the pervadingly loud and adverse warnings against sugar throughout popular culture. Firstly, the sweet food is classified as a 'snack' for 'kids and adults', which indicates something small and quickly eaten, much like a treat. The suggestion of its placement in the 'lunchbox' recalls descriptions by Cronin et al (2014) of the "paradox of maintaining a slim body while conforming to the selfless, caregiver ideal, femininity" (p. 370). The narrative monitors—or surveys—the indulgence present in both the baking and consumption of the cake and reassures the reader that 'it contains no table sugar', supported visually by decorative apples and cinnamon, not icing or dusted sugar as seen in other recipes, and therefore evaluated as acceptable to eat as a 'snack' and serve to the family without fear of over-indulgence or eating out-of-bounds. As well as

this, cultural perceptions of ‘fatness’ and “normative feminine behaviours” (Davies, 2010, p. 34) are further divided here, as DeMello (2013) asserts:

fat women are thought to be especially selfish. Women are expected to feed and nurture others. To feed oneself is to reject that exclusively feminine form of nurturing and, indeed, to reject femininity altogether. (p. 201)

By choosing the ‘healthier’ baking option, a maintenance of controlled eating can still occur, while subsequently providing room for a performance of care-giving femininity.

Extending further on the pervasive narrative of ‘healthier choices’ present in the cookbooks, *The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) begins by telling the reader that, “Of course, a modern baking inventory must also offer the ‘not-so-naughty gluten- and sugar- free treats for vegetarians, vegans and the very health-conscious” (p. 8).

Significantly, this type of narrative suggests that through considered and constricted parameters such as ‘sugar-free’ and ‘not-so-naughty’, attached indulgences of baking can be negotiated, or as Cairns and Johnston’s (2015b) found, “calibrated” to fit with idealised feminine food behaviours (p. 92). The negotiation of sweet food, indulgence and ‘health’ reveals dominant narratives which communicate the need to have a “healthy” diet while conspicuously emphasising female slenderness are responsible for producing the “most powerful normalising discursive strategies of our time” (De Villiers, 2000, p. 6).

*The Great Australian Baking Book* (2017) contains a section of recipes labelled ‘Not-so-Naughty’ to provide such ‘healthier’ options. One of the recipes in the section is called ‘Guilt-free Caramel Slice’ (p. 236), made with ingredients such as raw cacao powder, cashew butter, and Medjool dates. Significantly, the accompanying narrative elaborates the ‘discursive strategies’ at work:

Caramel Slice has got to be one of Australia's favourite sweet treats. Every bakery and café has one, but they are often loaded with refined sugar. I wanted to create a healthier version using ingredients free from grains, gluten, dairy and refined sugar. This slice has a slightly softer texture than a regular caramel slice, but the flavour is incredible. My secret ingredient? Gelatine. It helps to give the caramel layer a slightly bouncy texture AND it's good for your gut health. (*The Great Australian Baking Book*, 2017, p. 236)

The 'healthier version' of 'Australia's favourite sweet treat'—free from grains, gluten, dairy and refined sugar—is 'calibrated' here to ensure 'healthier' eating, with Murray's (2007) descriptions of a "normative slimness" always at the forefront. Examining the cookbooks exposes how "the cultural 'power' of the ideologically constituted, and normalised, slender body lingers in the margins of our perception as a referent for identification and arbitration of all our bodily encounters" (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p. 114) and indicates to readers that the cultural ties between health and slenderness loom in the backdrop of any encounter with sweet goods. The subtle negotiation of substituting 'healthier ingredients' demonstrates the 'power' of this perception in food choice and eating habits. The consistent and pervasive emphasis of powerful cultural messages that tie together restraint and indulgence, functions to reaffirm guilt with notions of bodily discipline, and moral concerns of over-indulgence and personal responsibility (Foucault, 1977), revealing that while "the svelte, disciplined body is rewarded as the successful neoliberal citizen... the fat body is pathologized as a site of failure" (Cairns & Johnston, 2015a, p. 154; see also Guthman & Dupuis, 2006; Guthman, 2009, 2011; LeBesco, 2011; Smith Maquire, 2008; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008).

Even the cookbooks which do not specifically have 'health-conscious' sections or explicit narratives, still manage to show concern that the reader make 'healthier'

choices. The recipe for ‘Gluten-free Dark Chocolate Cheesecake Brownie’ (*Baking: The Complete Collection*, 2016, p. 179) lists as ingredients: dairy-free dark chocolate, tapioca and gluten-free flours, and *Tofutti-better-than-cream cheese*. The recipe clarifies for readers that “*Tofutti-better-than-cream cheese* is a tofu-based dairy-free cream cheese substitute available in the refrigerated section of supermarkets and health food stores” (*Baking: The Complete Collection*, 2016, p. 179). A type of negotiation occurs closely connected to the cultural perceptions of sweet food which are seen to require a ‘calibration’ of indulgence—chocolate can be eaten but it needs to be dairy-free and made with tofu-based cream—crafting and strengthening a specific feminine performance around this ‘healthier’ choice narrative. As Lupton (1996) suggests, “femininity, but not masculinity, revolves around being highly interested in the attractiveness (slimness) of one’s body as well as health” (p. 110), and this is communicated via prevalent concerns of health and slimness, and ultimately, ensure that the guilt of over-indulgence and the consequences of such—becoming ‘fat’—function to ensure compliance.

To demonstrate further, *The Great Australian Baking Book’s* (2017) ‘Vegan Chocolate Sweet Potato Cakes’ (p. 232-3) are made with sweet potatoes, chia seeds, coconut sugar, and olive oil. An accompanying photograph frames a ‘slim’ woman’s torso holding a muffin-sized cake to put forth a certain image that reinforces a type of sanctioned consumption—a small treat with natural ingredients—to extend on notions of “virtuous eating” (O’Connor, 2013, p. 277) and control indulgence. The depiction of widely appealing and attractive—slim—images and anecdotes that show the ‘proper’ way to indulge and ‘calibrate’ consumptive behaviour privileges the cultural power and values of ‘health’. Readers can be reassured by the inclusion of healthier recipes that any type of indulgence present will be encompassed by notions of a better—or

acceptable—choice and avoid disruption of control or a body ‘out-of-bounds’ (Bordo, 1993). These messages seem to affirm and valorise a type of corporeal control built on “individual self-surveillance and self-correction” (Bordo, 1993, p. 57) in the cookbooks, communicated through a fear of ‘fatness’ and the cultural worth attached to health and feminine slimness, implicitly seen through elements of ‘calibrated’ indulgence, and abstractly connected to realities of eating and food behaviours.

## **8.7 Summary**

This chapter discussed cultural perceptions of the ideal feminine form and how such is connected to performances of femininity and the eating and baking of sweet food. It considered notions of appetite, indulgence and consumption in relation to sweet foods, and the deeply rooted implications of control, guilt, and desire communicated by the cookbooks. The chapter considered concepts of neoliberal post-feminism and their impact on modifications of the self and responsibility and uncovered the way the cookbooks reaffirmed ideas of illicit consumption around sweet food. Finally, it examined forms of feminine eating and over-indulgence which are tacitly suggested to be improper, outside of the boundaries, and unacceptable in relation to the performance of successful food femininity.

## 9 Conclusions

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### 9.1 Introduction

This study looked critically at cookbooks to expose how representations of cake and baking practice contain embedded cultural and political implications about social ideals of femininity. This chapter summarises the main findings of the thesis and dominant social notions packaged and consumed within the cookbooks. Moreover, it examines the strengths and limitations of the research conducted and makes recommendations for further areas and lines of inquiry.

The study was directed by two research questions:

- Firstly, by closely interrogating contemporary Australian Cookbooks, what could be uncovered about the relationship between cultural conceptions of femininity and representations of baking, cake, and sweet food?
- Secondly, what symbolic meanings could be revealed about baking practices, and the feminine performances around the consumption of sweet food in the cookbooks?

In order to investigate these questions, a qualitative thematic methodology was developed to examine a dataset of Australian cookbooks. By scrutinising the narratives, imagery, recipes, and other pertinent parts of the cookbooks, themes were categorised and coded to analyse and discuss the prominent ideas and implications that emerge.

### 9.2 Key findings of the thesis:

This thesis provided definitive evidence between baking and contemporary conceptions of femininity clearly found within cookbooks. It considered larger cultural notions that

tied together the practice of baking intrinsically to conceptions of femininity and demonstrated how the cookbooks harnessed these correlations to indicate very specific and restrictive notions of the feminine both implicitly and explicitly. The key conclusions of the study can be grouped together to provide evidence of an engrained culture of baking within Australian conceptions of identity and femininity; representations of a consumable and fantastical feminine performance that sustains traditional coding/s of gender; and, a specific framing of indulgence and feminine eating that is restrained, culturally informed, and pervasive.

### **9.2.1 An engrained culture of baking**

A prominent finding of this study determined through recurring narratives, images, and representations in the cookbooks is that baking can be seen as a way of ‘doing’ or performing femininity. Such a ‘performance’ embodies cultural conceptions, hegemonic expectations and behaviours to include different aspects of practice, such as notions of innate and assumed expertise, knowledge and use of proper implements and equipment; all within a presentation of a skilful, inter-generational, mysterious yet achievable femininity. The thesis investigated how the cookbooks consistently demonstrate the need/desire for this type of successful food femininity (Cairns & Johnston, 2015) and communicate how ideologies of naturalness; legacy; and baking as an act of care-giving, love or affection (Daniels, Glorieux, Minnen, & van Tienoven, 2012; Inness, 2001; DeVault, 1991; 1999); create a superior, meaningful, and aspirational performances of femininity.

A number of implications are revealed from this close association between femininity and a ‘natural’ affinity for baking. Firstly, that there are ‘proper’ or perfect performances of baking and feminine practice to be achieved, and ones that the cookbooks suggest can be remembered, learnt, and passed on through such

performances, implied to be a continual and cherished part of practice. This suggests that there are improper or flawed performances of feminised labour and practice of baking which expose how systematic and persistently coded imagery, staged performance, and behaviour/s work to construct ‘real’ or appropriate gender expression/s and what is considered ‘other’ or undesirable.

Connected closely to this, the study showed evidence of how the cookbooks display and reveal a relationship between aspects of identity, key ideas of culinary nationalism (Ferguson, 2010) and invented tradition (Warde, 1997), and cultural definitions of being Australian. Narratives in introductions and recipes in the cookbooks depict a heritage of claimed signature foods and sweets, like iconic Lamingtons, Pavlova, and Anzac Biscuits, made by a long line of Australian bakers to reveal how culturally important such—the practice of baking, eating, and the foods themselves—are to concepts of national character, as well as encouraging a collective culture and shared tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside this, the thesis demonstrates how the Australian character is celebrated through ritual, tradition, and unique innovations in practice, adaptation, or ingredients to romanticise historical and cultural aspects of baking, while confirming how engrained the practice of baking and sweet food are to conceptions of femininity and feminine practice. This can be seen through evidence of an ascribed historic Australian femininity, entrenched in practices of feminine labour and baking to reinforce collective identity through the continual commemoration of the Anzac Myth. The fantasy of a nurturing, baking femininity sustains ideals of Australian nationalism heavily connected to the Anzac myth and heteronormativity — men are brave and fight/sacrifice to

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<sup>18</sup> For further information see Appendix B: *Iconic Cakes* on Anzac Biscuits (p. 332), Lamingtons (p. 333), and Pavlova (p. 335)

preserve the comfort of domestic spaces, which are coded feminine and full of caring performances of successful food femininity.

This demonstrates how cookbooks remain largely critically unexamined for what they communicate about gender, domestic spaces, contemporary definitions of femininity, and the celebration of innate baking ability. The representations of nostalgic and idealised femininity are carefully upheld and recurring because of the sense of comfort such offer to readers, sustained by expression/s of feminine aptitude and love of practice via the giving/making of sweet food for others. Moreover, if baking is rendered heavily feminine in the cookbooks and perpetuated in wider cultural conceptions, this then implies that masculinity and men have no space to properly embrace baking practice, particularly of cake and sweet foods, without provoking social commentaries on the boundaries of gender performance.

### **9.2.2 A consumable feminine**

As this thesis demonstrates, the cookbooks are consumable products that harness a particular type of femininity that is, in turn, used to sell concepts of a consumable feminine in look, appeal, and practice. This is indicated via notions of the pleasures of consumption, both of the experience of looking at, reading, making, or eating the food, or in the imagined experience of doing so. By harnessing aspects of Foucault's (1985/1990) assertions that pleasure is a transformative mechanism, the joys of productive labour and indulgence are consistently shown to the reader, as a fantasy of what could be achieved or felt.

Considering the important role gender plays in consumption, particularly how dominant influences and ideologies are conveyed or used to inform both consumer behaviours and larger social frameworks (Casey & Martens, 2007; Cronin, McCarthy, Newcombe, &

McCarthy, 2014; Chaiken & Pliner, 1987; Hollows, 2008), the consumption of a fantastical gendered performance in the cookbooks creates tension and pleasure simultaneously. The study found evidence of a *feminine identity* that encased promises of transformation, satisfaction, and reward—in the proper performance and the food created—which remains largely impossible to realise.

Additionally, sensuality and feminine sexuality are consumed and constructed in the cookbooks by sweet food with contradictions and tensions. If hedonistic pleasure is used as an instinctive and intrinsic motivator for all human action (Freud, 1920/2003; Foucault, 1985/1990), then the thesis found that the visual experiences present in the cookbooks trigger active processes of consumption by packaging femininity as pleasing and appealing, adhering to patriarchal notions of the male gaze. The appeal observed here can be linked to a Weberian view of the modern hedonistic consumption experience and “those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products” (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 92). The consumption of these books revolves heavily around the fantasy presented and the emotion evoked, and they are carefully constructed to uphold the ‘consumer dream’, “in which the individual imagines future pleasures to be obtained through using a specific product” (Piatti-Farnell, 2011b, p. 334), in this case the practice of making a cake or performing a *feminine identity*. The fantasy presented attempts to depict and associate pleasure/joy with the eventual reward, yet because such can never really be obtained, and the romanticised feminine performance reflected in the cookbooks—whether baking glamorously or sharing home-made sweets—can never truly be realised, so “the consumer perpetually longs for satisfaction and continues to purchase” (Piatti-Farnell, 2011b, p. 334), or as the cookbooks suggest, persistently imagines a time or place when such a dream was possible.

From these findings certain implications can be revealed, particularly when recognising the layers of complexity present in the depictions due to neoliberal and post-feminist notions. Elements of fantasy, productive desire and pleasure are heavily tied to wider social concepts of femininity and expectations of sweet food to be ‘decorative’, ‘pretty’, ‘delicate’, and continually appealing. Historic associations between sugar and femininity (Mintz, 1985; Woloson, 2002) help bolster dominant notions of ideal performances of femininity and the cultural worth attached to evoking an optimal state of desire and pleasure in the contemporary consumer. The pressure placed on feminine expressions to be constantly appealing therefore exists to create a desire that can never be fulfilled or achieved, and the upholding of such perpetual and pervasive idealised representations prove harmful and divisive in wider society.

### **9.2.3 Framing indulgence and feminine eating**

This thesis determined that the cookbooks frame indulgence to shape appetite, contain pleasure, control eating via constant self-surveillance, expectations, conditioning, and presentations of prohibitions around consuming sweet foods. Connected closely to this were the continually implied socially approved rules around eating and the sharing of sweet food (Bordo, 1993; Charles & Kerr, 1998; DeVault, 1991; Lupton 1996), as well as how embodied experiences of food and eating connect to images/ideas of love and emotionality in the cookbooks. Within these constructions, cultural notions of indulgence, sensory memory, and unconscious associations (Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Daniels, 2006; Lupton, 1996; Bordo, 1993) function to connote feminine desire and eating with immorality, shame, and guilt (Foucault, 1977; Hill, 2011). This study uncovered how dominant narratives of health are used to normalise a standard of female slenderness and attractiveness, found both tacitly and explicitly throughout the cookbooks.

Many implications can be yielded from these presentations, including the cultural coding/s of sweet foods as female/feminine, and subsequent constraints in wider social discourses on eating, due to narratives of health, fear of fatness, and illicit notions attached to over-eating. If “gender is consumed through food and is reinforced through popular discourses in the form of normative, yet harmful, messages of body consciousness” (Jovanovski, 2017, p. 200), particularly when it comes to eating behaviours, then the cookbooks in this study help bolster dominant paradigms on expected/ideal femininity and feminine eating behaviours on a wider social scale.

Furthermore, implications of pervasive and prevailing cultural messages that correlate indulgence and restraint indicate how guilt functions to reiterate the significance of bodily discipline and the morality of over-indulgence (Foucault, 1977). Ideas of ‘moderate’ and ‘temperate’ eating and behaviour are reinforced by tacit descriptive and visual associations epitomised by proper feminine performances in the cookbooks and wider social discourses that urge for small servings, ‘bite-size’ pieces, and sweet food as ‘treats’. This reaffirms the central roles that surveillance, evaluation, choice, and control play in ‘normative feminine behaviours’ (Murray, 2007; Davies, 2010) and how such are unconsciously internalised and largely unexamined in wider society, while indicating that such do not work the same way on masculinity.

### **9.3 Limitations of the study**

There were certain limitations of the research that can provide a solid foundation for further exploration and research. It is pertinent to consider that most of the cookbooks contain very similar materials, the same recipes, comparable images, and ideas of practice, yet remain hugely collectible. As data was collected, patterns and coding were easier to recognise and notes of difference more straightforward to distinguish. It can be

said that this may have limited the data able to be collected from the cookbooks, and some of the evidence was not greatly distinctive or analogous. However, there are a few aspects to consider that may go towards explaining or mitigating this limitation. Significantly, the moderate size of the cookbook industry in Australia was surely a determinant of the materials published and available, as are the influence of trends, currents, and food culture's cyclical and interconnected nature. These aspects further pose consideration of consumer expectations and the sorts of ideas that are packaged and sold within the cookbook market. As discussed contextually in Chapter 2, cookbooks are currently viewed/consumed as collectable items that are used less for their recipes, and more for pleasurable experiences and insights. Therefore, the move to include more analogous content that appeals to a target consumer becomes a component that could be considered further within the parameters of the data collection in this study.

Throughout the study, subjective views may have influenced the interpretation, categorisation of themes, and assertions made. The data classification evolved and shifted throughout the project and did not remain a measurable or fixed quantity, which may have predisposed a number of assumed concepts to influence the eventual conclusions. However, even as a certain natural partiality was taken into account, every effort was made to explain and acknowledge the connections made and to ensure the analysis was based on justifiable assessment and theory.

## **9.4 Areas for future research:**

There are several recommendations for further investigation to be made that would prove useful and provide extended understanding and insight into social perceptions and pervasive concepts. Many are connected to areas in the analysis that I was unable to

cover extensively or prompted questions that lead down other paths of inquiry. One area with scope to be elaborated on is the conception/s of masculinity in the cookbooks, and examination of the references to men and male roles—husbands, boyfriends, chefs, cooks, bakers—in cookbooks, as well as further probing of how the masculine is conceived and perceived in terms of sweet food, eating, indulgence, and desire. While at certain times the analysis focused on wider gender conceptions and masculinised interpretations, more concentration on how the cookbooks present masculinity and how such connects to wider contemporary ideas seems useful for future consideration.

There is room to further explore how depictions of femininity in the cookbooks can be used to push certain gendered expectations or enforce femininity as a means of oppression. As Hollows' (2000) suggests, femininity is a “cultural product” influenced by dominant media messages to “play a role in socialising women into restrictive” behaviours (p. 21), and tensions/contradictions between domesticity, feminism, and femininities seen within cookbooks have potentially wider social, political and cultural ramifications that should be investigated further. This would be particularly useful as a comparative study that brought together ideas of body image and eating and contained a survey, or set of interviews, of people's thoughts, practices—of baking or of collecting cookbooks—and ideals of femininity, masculinity, and gender in general. Such a survey may identify and provide extended understanding, insight, and further consider implications offered by cookbooks to contemporary lifestyles or conceptions of femininity and baking practice.

Moreover, this inspires wider investigation into how Australian femininity is specifically defined/conceived, versus Western definitions of femininity. An extended contemplation and discussion of such, including the nuances involved and the differences and similarities in experience, conception, behaviour, and expectations

would prove useful. As well as this, a more extensive look at the socio-economic, ethnic and political aspects of such—which were not able to be probed with enough depth in this study—and notions of culinary identity would provide further understanding of changing tastes and multicultural ideas specific to Australia, and how such relates to shifting concepts of the feminine and femininity, domesticity, parenthood, private and public space.

Lastly, this study raises questions into gender and femininity that inspires inquiry into further and darker reaches, particularly urging an exploration of the abject in relation to womanhood in the cookbooks presented. Study into elaborating on a femininity almost opposite, missing or excluded from the pleasurable fantasies depicted in the cookbooks, and shaping an analysis around gendered presentation/s beyond the boundaries, undisciplined, uncompliant, subversive, and that includes notions of expulsion and repulsion (Butler, 1990; Kristeva, 1977/2001) offers added implications and social insight.

## **9.5 Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the key conclusions and implications of the study which included culturally perceptions of femininity and baking as intrinsically linked through conceptions of natural aptitude and an engrained culture of baking significant to Australian conceptions of collective cultural experiences, sweet foods and national identity. It highlighted how the thesis showed representations of a consumable feminine identity that sustains an unachievable and perpetually desirable fantastical feminine performance. The chapter revealed a specific framing of feminine indulgence and eating in restrictive and expected ways that reaffirmed wider culturally informed and pervasive social perceptions. Lastly, it provided a summary of limitations and

recommended areas for future research and inquiry that could offer additional insights into society and further elaborate the relationship between femininity and baking in contemporary cookbooks.

## 10 References

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## 11 Appendix A: Cookbooks used in the Study

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## 12 Appendix B: Compendium of Key Sweet Foods

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### ANZAC BISCUITS

Australian and New Zealand Army Corps

“Crispy buttery cookies... if Australia had a national cookie, the ANZAC biscuit would be it. ANZAC biscuits can be purchased in supermarkets and bakeries all over Australia. They are also a homemade specialty. They are especially popular on April 25—ANZAC Day, which is the day Australians honour all their war veterans” (Sheen, 2010, p. 36).

### CHOCOLATE CRACKLES

“small, chocolate-flavoured cakes made from Rice Bubbles, coconut and Copha. The earliest Chocolate Crackles recipe so far discovered was printed in an advertisement in the *Australian Women’s Weekly* on Saturday 18 December 1937. The advertisement was placed by Edible Oil Industries, a subsidiary of Unilever, who made Copha – a uniquely Australian ingredient made from solidified coconut oil.

Few Australians need an introduction to Chocolate Crackles. They’ve been a favourite for children’s parties and cake stalls for more than 80 years. It’s probably because they’re chocolate flavoured and easy to make – you just melt and mix” (Australian food history timeline, 2018, para. 1 &2)

### COCONUT ICE

“A traditional home-made English made from grated coconut and mixed with sugar... The mixture is stirred, giving a slightly grainy texture. Often half the mixture is pink, the rest being left white. One batch is poured on top of the other to set, giving a striped

confection when cut. Fresh coconut is said give the best flavour, but desiccated coconut is frequently used.

This confection is not frozen, how it came to be referred to as 'ice' is unknown; possibly natural colour and the slightly crystalline, smooth yet tender texture had something to do with this” (Davidson, 2014, p. 204)

### DAMPER

“traditional Australian bush bread, damper was once made from flour, salt, water and perhaps some dripping. It was baked directly in the ashes of the fire or in a camp oven. Today, milk and butter are used, and the damper is baked in a hot oven or, if cooked in the fire, is usually wrapped in several layers of foil so that there is no need to knock the ashes off before eating” (*Margaret Fulton’s Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 83).

### HUMMINGBIRD CAKE

Originated in the USA, first appearing *Southern Living* magazine in 1978

“Hummingbird cake is made up of three layers of banana-pineapple spice cake spread with cream cheese frosting and sprinkled with nuts” (Roufs & Roufs, 2014, p. 364).

### LAMINGTONS

Lamingtons are considered to be a classic sweet treat, produced commercially and found across Australia.

“They are cubes of sponge cake coated in chocolate frosting and rolled in coconut. They look like fuzzy marshmallows but taste like cake. They are often served with strawberry jam and whipped cream. The result is wonderfully sweet, rich, and satisfying.

Lamingtons are said to be named after Baron Lamington who was the governor of the Australian state of Queensland at the turn of the 20th century” (Sheen, 2010, p. 37-38).

## MELTING MOMENTS AND YO-YO BISCUITS

A common biscuit recipe that has a uniquely Australian variation.

In *Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics* (2015), a recipe for *Lemon Melting Moments* (p. 31) is shown, accompanied by expounding narrative that the biscuit is “sometimes known as yo-yos”. This links to Michael Symons’ (2014) inquiry into biscuit origins, “...in the 1930s came treats such as chocolate crackles and Yo-Yos, reminiscent of Melting Moments but with custard powder” (2014, p. 2). This clarifying difference can be seen too in *Afternoon Tea's* (2010) recipe for *Yo-Yo Biscuits* (p. 28), which calls for Custard Powder instead of the butter cream traditionally used in *Melting Moments*.

## PAVLOVA

“...lighter-than-air dessert... made from meringue (mer-rang), a shell-like confection made by combining egg whites and sugar” (Sheen, 2010 p. 43).

“... named after the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova and is still just about the most popular party dessert in Australia. Everyone has their favourite texture, be it the crisp meringue shell or the delicate soft marshmallow. The meringue puffs up as light as a feather, looking just like Pavlova’s tutu, and the tart-sweet flavour of the strawberries adds a distinctive flavour to the dessert” (*Margaret Fulton's Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 145).

“Both Australia and New Zealand claim credit for inventing the dessert. Although it is unclear who created it, one thing is certain, Pavlova is as light and airy as the dancer it was named for” (Sheen, 2010, p. 45).

## TEA CAKE

“Australian style tea cakes... are halfway between a sponge and a butter cake. Quickly made from store-bought staples, tea cakes are lighter and less rich than butter cakes... Tea cakes often have a filling or topping of apple slices or cinnamon, and are so called because they are traditionally served, still warm, as an accompaniment to tea”  
(Margaret Fulton’s *Baking Classics*, 2015, p. 88).

### TIRAMISU

“Tiramisu was invented inside brothels in the... northern Italian town of Treviso... In Italian, tiramisù literally means ‘pull me up, lift me up’, or, more literally, ‘pull it up’. For centuries, up until 1958 when brothels were shut by the government, the cake was served to reinvigorate exhausted clients inside so-called ‘casinos’ (closed whorehouses) non-stop: before, during and after heavy and multiple sex sessions to keep them going and the money flowing.

...it is made of layers of Savoiardi ladyfingers biscuits dipped one by one in a whipped mixture of mascarpone cream cheese and a fine blend of different coffee powders. Some chefs add Marsala wine and a sprinkle of chocolate powder. The original brothel recipe however was slightly different... It was called ‘sbatudin’ which literally means ‘gimme a shake, bang me’. It was said to be able to raise even the dead from the grave. It was made of shaken egg yolk and sugar” (Marchetti, 2017, para. 1, 2, 8 & 9).

### VANILLA SLICE

A modification of a traditional *Millefeuille*, the dessert of “a thousand leaves” that dates back to 17<sup>th</sup> century France and has many cultural adaptations and associations.

“Known in the English-speaking world as a custard slice, a Napoleon or a vanilla slice...[it] is sweet without being overly sugary, complex without being overwhelming, and somehow paradoxically light and rich at the same time.

Crafted from thin layers of pastry, cream and a topping of cocoa, vanilla icing or almond fondant, the concoction is a staple in all good *pâtisseries*, and a favorite of the discerning French” (King, 2015, para. 1 & 2).

### VICTORIA SPONGE

or *Victoria Sandwiches*, named for Queen Victoria. An established quintessential tea time custom.

“...the Victoria sponge cake became the ‘sweet treat’ at teatime—a time between lunch and dinner when the diminutive queen, and her staff, needed a bite to eat to ‘tide them over’ until dinner. The small sponge cakes became one of Queen Victoria's favorite sweets.

A mixture of sugar, eggs, flour, and butter came to be the irresistible sponge, and the fresh fruits or jam in between the layers raised the elegance level. Victoria sponge is never frosted but may have a dusting of sugar” (Roufs & Roufs, 2014, p. 116).