IDENTITY ISSUES OF GIRLS FROM SINGLE-SEX CONVENT SCHOOLS IN INDIA

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2019

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A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts (Education and Society)

ABSTRACT

This research outlines the impact of a single-sex convent school in New Delhi on the self-perception, social behavior, and sexual identity of young women in India. This analysis has been conducted within the context of the intersections of Indian patriarchy and the centuries long subjugation of Indian women's identities with the Christian missionary, colonial legacy of convent schools. I argue that the combination of these two contexts creates a negative impact on young girls and that although the Convent presents itself as an empowering institute, in practice it is only perpetuating and reinforcing the socio-cultural ideologies that subjugate Indian women. I further argue that the "empowerment" that the Convent claims to be equipping young women with is superficial, in that it seeks to provide women with a degree for economic advantage without preparing them to challenge and transform the larger social customs and beliefs pervasive in Indian society.

This study was conducted through an analysis of the school's expressed goals and policies and their rules for young women through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. This was supplemented with an analysis of interviews conducted with eight former students of the Convent. The interviews were conducted and analyzed according to the principles of Narrative Feminist Research. The findings from both the analyses were combined to conclude that the Convent adversely affected girls' self-perception, enforced rigid restrictions on their social lives and created a negative relationship regarding the issue of sex for the young women.

This study was conducted in one convent in New Delhi and therefore not all aspects of it are likely to be replicated across all convents in the Indian subcontinent, however several of the findings from the Convent are patriarchal concepts of womanhood that are prevalent throughout the country and are likely visible in one respect or another in other convents. As such, a list of

recommendations was created for the improvement of convent culture in India, so that they can be a more positive and empowering environment for Indian women.

RÉSUMÉ (FRANÇAIS)

Cette recherche décrit l'impact d'une école conventionnelle pour célibataires à New Delhi sur la perception de soi, le comportement social et l'identité sexuelle des jeunes femmes en Inde. Cette analyse a été menée dans le contexte des intersections du patriarcat indien et de la soumission, pendant des siècles, de l'identité de la femme indienne au missionnaire chrétien, héritage colonial des écoles conventuelles. Je soutiens que la combinaison de ces deux contextes crée un impact négatif sur les jeunes filles et que, bien que le couvent se présente comme un institut autonomisant, il ne fait que perpétuer et renforcer les idéologies socioculturelles qui assujettissent les femmes indiennes. Je soutiens en outre que le « pouvoir » que le couvent prétend équiper de jeunes femmes est superficiel, dans la mesure où il cherche à fournir aux femmes un degré d'avantage économique sans les préparer à contester et à transformer les coutumes et les croyances sociales plus répandues en Inde société.

Cette étude a été menée en analysant les objectifs exprimés par l'école, ainsi que ses politiques et ses règles concernant les jeunes femmes, dans l'optique de l'analyse du discours critique. Cela a été complété par une analyse des entretiens menés avec huit anciens élèves du couvent. Les entretiens ont été menés et analysés selon les principes de la recherche narrative féministe. Les conclusions des deux analyses ont été combinées pour conclure que le couvent affectait négativement la perception de soi des filles, imposait des restrictions rigides à leur vie sociale et créait une relation négative en ce qui concerne la question du sexe des jeunes femmes.

Cette étude a été menée dans un couvent de New Delhi et, par conséquent, tous les aspects de celle-ci ne seront probablement pas reproduits dans tous les couvents du sous-continent indien. Cependant, plusieurs des conclusions du couvent sont des concepts patriarcaux de la femme qui prévalent dans tout le pays. Sont probablement visibles à un égard ou à un autre dans d'autres

couvents. En tant que tel, une liste de recommandations a été créée pour l'amélioration de la culture du couvent en Inde, afin qu'elles puissent constituer un environnement plus positif et responsabilisant pour les femmes indiennes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by acknowledging my thesis supervisor, Dr. Ratna Ghosh for her enthusiastic support and diligent guidance throughout this process. Thank you, Dr. Ghosh for your kind patience, your insights and input, and your encouragement of my endeavors at every step of the way!

I am extremely grateful to the valuable assistance provided to me by the participants of this research who shared their stories and some very vulnerable memories with me. Participating in this study meant reflecting on their experiences from a new perspective and it took great bravery and emotional strength for each of them to do so. This thesis would not be the same without their contributions.

Additionally, I'm grateful to all my other professors at McGill who helped shape my thoughts and ideas into a concrete project and my colleagues and fellow students, whose work in education inspired me greatly. I am thankful for having had the opportunity to work with you and around you.

Finally, an acknowledgement to the young women in the school system in India, thriving in the face of consistent discrimination. Going to school every day, making new friends, testing new boundaries, taking risks, learning new things, and breaking gendered restrictions (whether openly or in secret) is an act of beautiful resistance.

Thank you!

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INTRODUCTION

Study Background

The women of India face numerous economic and socio-cultural challenges. They are often excluded from academic, economic, and leadership opportunities, and face an increased risk of sexual violence in their personal and professional lives (Ahmad, 2010; Kanchan, Tandon, & Krishan, 2016). In this tough environment, there is potentially great value in women-only academic institutions that provide spaces for young women to acquire the tools to become financially and socially empowered. It is easy to imagine that the power dynamics between men and women - with men overpowering women in most spheres - would replicate themselves in co-educational spaces and thus, single-sex education offers an independent and valuable safe space for young girls (Leathwood, 2004). Research has found that single-sex schools historically played a significant role in the academic and professional development of young women across the world (Watson, Quatman, & Edler, 2002) and in India (Sengupta, 2011). They opened the doors for Indian women to enter the workplace, as well as, challenged several social customs that previously restricted women to the confines of their household. However, as far as Indian women have come, there is unfortunately a long way to go until they can achieve true equality. As of now, Indian women are still entangled in several social restrictions and gender rules that prevent them from taking on challenging professional roles and positions of power in the Government and in policy making. Despite the fact the India has had a few women in leadership roles (e.g. erstwhile Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi) and even as there is a great push for women to be represented in professional and political spheres, the pervasive dominant ideology of Indian womanhood is still that of a family woman; a daughter, a wife, or a mother (Puri, 1999). If we

are to see any further substantial changes in women's social status in India, we must challenge the dominant narratives surrounding women. And single-sex schools can be the appropriate environment to raise young women who will help galvanize the shift away from the restricting definition of womanhood in India.

Single-sex schools position themselves as institutions of empowerment working for the benefit of women. In the Indian context, they claim that their primary aim is to create a generation of empowered women who do not have to conform to the restrictions that their mothers had to adhere to. However, education for the purpose of economic and professional achievement can only be one aspect of female empowerment. For Indian women to become truly equipped to challenge and transform the social landscape in the country, schools must also prepare young women to be emotionally sound and socially confident. Unless Indian women are able to critically question what has been normalized; learn to confront and challenge stereotypes related to womanhood; and can endeavor to express themselves without fear of ostracization and judgement, they are not truly empowered. Therefore, any institution that claims to be working for the betterment of Indian women also has to work to improve their ability to navigate socio-cultural challenges along with their ability to acquire financial independence. Through this research, I have attempted to analyze the school culture and policies of a single-sex convent in New Delhi, India to be able to say if the school environment is truly conducive to the holistic development of young women in this sense.

A "convent" is the generic term for a Christian denomination school in India. They are generally - although not necessarily - single-sex institutions established for the education of young men and women by various Christian missionary orders. The school on which I have based my analysis and which, in this thesis we will refer to as "the Convent", was also

established by an order of nuns who call themselves the Salesian sisters. The Salesian sisters were created by Saint John Bosco and Saint Maria Mazzaerello between 1871 and 1885 for the education of young women, especially those from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds, in Italy. Since then, the Salesian order traveled across the world and eventually arrived in the Indian subcontinent in the 1920s ("About", Salesian Sisters, n.d.) to establish a network of schools across the region. They are one of the several Christian orders that run schools for young men and women in India.

I have focused my research on a convent rather than a secular single-sex school partly because I theorize that the intersection of a convent's religious background with the cultural context of India has a distinct impact on the identity development of young women. I am basing this theory, to some extent, on my own personal experiences at the Convent as a student. During my years of being a "convent girl", I was trained to be a person with impeccable morals; a disciplined and ordered individual who respected the authority figures in her life and focused on becoming the best kind of woman. The Convent provided me and several other young women a safe space to participate in academic and extra-curricular challenges. Several of my accomplishments today can be traced back to the rigorous training of the Salesian nuns. At the same time, several of my more problematic and limited beliefs about women and womanhood can also be traced back to the Convent. Although the convent was never geared toward converting the students to its theology, its religious beliefs about women bolstered by the cultural beliefs in India had an impact on the way young women in the institution thought of themselves and their role in society. I observed firsthand as several of my peers and friends suffered self-esteem issues and struggled to reconcile themselves to the Convent's rigid and idealized perceptions of a "good girl". These expectations combined with Indian society's expectations of

womanhood, placed a great burden on these women to conform to an image of femininity that was almost impossible to sustain. The research I undertook in order to support my theory revealed that this was a phenomenon previously observed in single-sex Christian schools, and even in single-sex secular schools in different parts of the world. Young women were bombarded with contradictory messages about being feminine and ladylike while also striving to achieve more "masculine" goals like academic and professional success (Heyward, 1995; Mensinger, 2001) and this had several adverse effects on their self-concept and confidence. These findings encouraged me to add to the current literature by bringing in the unique dynamics of a convent in India.

I also decided to situate my study in a convent because of the social prestige that single-sex convents hold in India. Parents are more inclined to send their daughters to convents over a secular school because these institutions promise to imbibe young women with the appropriate values and cultures of a "good woman", while also training them to be educated and "modern" women capable of achieving economic and social success. These schools are also much more affordable than many secular, private institutions and they position themselves as charitable organizations seeking to provide quality education to girls from all social and economic backgrounds. For several disadvantaged parents, convents are extremely desirable because the academic rigor and order in the school are seemingly intact despite the low fees. There are usually several parents whose daughters are on waitlists to be admitted to convent schools. Essentially, they possess a certain amount of influence in society and like any other influential institution, their policies and their impact should be evaluated from time to time. This would give us the opportunity to identify avenues for improvement that would help convents achieve their stated goal of female empowerment in a more effective way.

Study objectives

We must account for the fact that convents emerged in India as a part of the colonial project to "civilize the savages"(Sengupta, 2011). Although post-independence these schools now consider themselves to be a part of India and are administered by Indian nuns in adherence to Indian law; they're still offshoots of global missionary organizations with their origins in Europe. The Convent from my study too is essentially a part of an Italian-origin missionary order that was seeking to "enlighten" the world with western knowledge and Christianity. Therefore, their beliefs about what it means to be a "good woman" or a "lady" still come from a colonial and Christian concept of womanhood. Additionally, they now exist within the framework of Indian culture and social norms, which also has its own perceptions of womanhood, that limit or restrict women and their social and sexual lives (Khanna & Price, 1994). The overlap of these two cultures is likely to produce an environment in which young women are being influenced by various contradicting messages about what it means to be a "good" woman. They're also likely to produce an added burden for young women to perform femininity based on different standards or reinforce existing restrictions and expectations. These influences could impact young women and the development of their identity.

As such, my specific research objective was to document *how single-sex convent schools impact the self-concept, social skills, and sexualities of young women in India*. To do this, I structured my research around the following questions:

1. How do the policies and culture of the single-sex convent schools impact the self-concept of young women?
2. How (if at all) does the school shape young women's social skills and behavior?

3. How does the single-sex convent school, set in the backdrop of Indian society, affect young women's sexual expression?

Implications of the research

Single-sex convents have the potential to act as a support system to help Indian women by giving them the tools to educate themselves, to challenge restricting customs and stereotypes and to achieve social mobility. Research shows that single-sex schools offer girls the chance to explore activities and roles that they are less likely to opt for in a mixed-sex school (Watson et al., 2002). For girls who come from conservative homes in India, these schools could offer a safe space for them to gain confidence in traditionally "non-feminine" activities and endeavors. However, single-sex schools can just as easily harm young women, especially when they are driven by society's and conservative religion's views on female identity (Mensinger, 2001). In India, where single-sex convents hold a degree of social prestige and influence, it is important that we evaluate their efforts in the education and development of the upcoming generations of Indian women. It is still relatively tough to be a woman in India and if the landscape is to change, it needs more and more young women to push the needle forward, little by little as they do - lest we will stagnate within the same ideological framework where we only make superficial improvements without challenging patriarchal dominance at its core. Therefore, I intend to use the findings of this study to conclude if the Convent is setting up an environment for the social betterment of Indian women. Based on my analysis, I should be able to discover the impact of their efforts on the lives of young women who went to the concerned institution. Subsequently, these findings should reveal the possible avenues of improvement in the Convent's culture and policies. I also plan to draft a set of recommendations and suggestions for the Convent. These recommendations would help the institution to unlearn ideological frameworks that restrict Indian women and to create an inclusive environment that accounts for the needs of girls with

different identities and sexualities. My intent is to shift convent culture away from being that of a "molding" environment that attempts to transform girls into an idealized version of womanhood toward a constructive environment that allows young girls to create their own self and prepares them to challenge societal restrictions that Indian women battle with on a daily basis. This Convent can then be used as model for an overall improvement in convent culture across the country and elsewhere and may even be applied to single-sex secular schools if necessary.

Chapter descriptions

Chapter 1 presents the existing knowledge on Indian conceptions of femininity, the origin of convent schools in India, and the impact of single-sex schools on young women's identity. I also define the gaps in the existing literature that I will be attempting to address with this research.

Chapter 2 is a description of my Research methodology and methods. I review the literature on Critical Discourse Analysis and Narrative Analysis, focusing specifically on the authors whose theories and techniques I utilized to conduct my own analysis.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of the Convent's school website to decipher the school's expressed goals for the students. It also presents an analysis of the school rulebook to identify the behavior expectations that the students are ideally expected to fulfil.

The second section of Chapter 3 is an analysis of the interviews I conducted with eight former students of the Convent who were asked questions that would provide the data for my research questions; 1) How do the policies and culture of the single-sex convent schools impact the self-concept of young women? 2) How (if at all) does the school shape young women's social skills and behavior? 3) How does the single-sex convent school, set in the backdrop of Indian society, affect young women's sexual expression?

Chapter 4 consists of a scholarly discussion of the findings, conclusions and limitations of the research. It also includes a list of recommendations for the Convent to help improve their culture and policy.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

In this section I will begin by setting up the historical and socio-cultural context of India and the emergence of convent schools in the Indian sub-continent. This will be followed by the impact of single-sex convents on Indian society up till now in terms of women's education, and their social and economic status. Additionally, I shall review the literature on the impact of single-sex schools on women's identity development and their potential advantages and disadvantages. Finally, I shall explain how my research contributes to the current literature.

Indian society has restrictive codes on women's social and sexual behavior, and there have been various evolving institutional and social measures to control female sexuality that can be traced back to the British colonization of the sub-continent (Khanna & Price, 1994) and even before that (Bose, 2000). In pre-colonial India, codes of social conduct and customs as prescribed in Vedic literature (*smritis*) placed the burdens of maintaining family order and dignity on the shoulders of Hindu Indian women. These prescriptions imposed strict rules on various aspects related to women's place in society and their sexuality, such as those concerned with remarriage and the general treatment of Hindu widows. Remarriage was socially condemned and "truly virtuous" women were expected to maintain their chastity and loyalty to their husbands even in death. Additionally, it was dictated that women who were "unchaste" (not virgins) were unfit to complete the sanctioned rituals of marriage. The practice of "Sati" (self-immolation on their husbands' funeral pyre) in some geographical areas for widows was also a test for a woman to prove her physical "purity"; it was an act of preserving her honor and dignity by destroying her body rather than engaging in relations with another man after her husband (Bose, 2000). To flout these rules and customs was to invite dishonor and punishment upon oneself and one's family and community and to be marked as a "bad" woman who needed

to be shunned. Under the Islamic Mughal rule, too, Indian women continued to occupy a subservient position in society. For Muslim women, their primary source of respect and power was motherhood. Apart from that, their positions were "dismal"; mismatched marriages with men several years older than them and polygamy adversely affected Muslim women's lives. Rules related to *purdah* (veil) and the general curtailment of young women's freedom arose from a fear of sexual laxity and the "ruin" of a woman (Chishti, 2016); several disadvantaged and "ruined" women were often pushed into prostitution and became "impure" women living and working in harems. These rules and customs underwent some changes and modifications over the centuries, but even as India moved from the Mughal dynasty to the British *Raj* (rule) and even today, the underlying systems of control on women's lives continued in one form or another.

The forms of control that women experience are also largely dependent on class, caste, and economic power where historically, there have been efforts to promote healthy "motherhood" in upper-class and upper-caste women and to limit "promiscuity" in "sexually immoral" women from lower classes, castes, and economic backgrounds (Khanna & Price, 1994). The efforts and measures taken by various social groups, international organizations, and the government (both colonial and post-colonial) also promote a very heteronormative view of social and sexual behavior, where the ideal position for women to be is within the context of a heterosexual marriage (Khanna & Price, 1994) for the purpose of raising a "healthy family". Since Indian independence was established in 1947, similar principles of women's welfare have been applied by the elected Government(s) where the institutional focus is on training women to control their sexual lives, have less children and raise healthier families. These interventions place the burden of women's social improvement and sexual welfare on women's behavior

without taking in to account the lived experiences of Indian women (Behl, 2017). It is difficult for Indian women to assert control over their own bodies because patriarchy provides the ownership of their person to their fathers, brothers, and husbands. In India, women's sexuality is a community issue, where they are scrutinized, judged, and punished for any decision that they make about their bodies, their families and their lives (Khanna & Price, 1994; Sengupta, 2011). The family honor rests on the shoulders of women so the behavior of young girls is severely restricted, especially as compared to the latitude given to boys. Therefore, Government interventions for the sexual and social empowerment of Indian women are limited in their scope because they assume that women are making their decisions about their bodies rather than the people around them and the culture they live in.

Christian missionary interventions for women's welfare during the nineteenth century have also played a significant role in establishing the organizational and institutional restrictions we see today on Indian women. During this time, the missionaries were promoting their "civilization project" in India, and Hindu and Muslim women were often framed as "victims" of their barbaric religious practices like *sati* (bride burning), the dowry system, and the *purdah* (the veil)(Sengupta, 2011). Christian schooling and pedagogical practice aimed to "awaken" the people of the native society and transform them. "Evangelical missionaries understood Hinduism, as they did other non-Christian religions, through a literal reading of Genesis. Since Adam's fall, his descendants had moved away from the true teachings, but its traces could still be detected in Hinduism. It was the responsibility of missionaries to bring non-Christians back into the fold."(Sengupta, 2011). And so, it was determined that Christian interventions were required to save Indian women from the sexual deviancy and the oppression of the "savage" Indian

society because unlike Hinduism and Islam, Christianity was a “rational” and “modern” religion that would save their souls and give them better lives.

These “civilizing” interventions introduced Victorian era morality into the Indian framework, and this was largely based on “sexual propriety”. The ideal Victorian woman possessed a “special femininity” consisting of values such as “modesty, virginity, and demure restraint”. These women were expected to be shy and not “very robust” to be considered as “ladies”; they were expected to never complain about their lives but to focus their attention on pleasing the people around them. (Strohmeier, 2013). Thus the missionary interventions to “improve” Indian femininity often took the form of classes and training for young women to become better mothers and family-women according to English values and customs (Sengupta, 2011). The first missionary schools for women were also established with the same intent and purpose and they continue to exist today.

As early as 1817, missionary educationalists insisted on segregated schooling in India. By the end of the nineteenth century most of the missionary schools in Bengal, one of the primary strongholds of the British empire in India, were segregated by sex. “Wood’s Despatch”, one of the most significant educational policies of British India, also provided increased funding for segregated schooling. It was believed that, for young women, a female educator and a feminine environment was required to provide them with the necessary training on “essential feminine skills and behaviors” to become ideal women (Sengupta, 2011). Further, several upper-caste Hindu and Muslim parents were unwilling to send their daughters to study alongside young men and under the tutelage of male teachers in order to preserve their girls’ honor and dignity within the community. Another reason why these schools became increasingly popular in the subcontinent was that Christian missionaries did not restrict education to the upper castes. This

opened the gate for literacy and education among lower-caste Indian women, especially non-Hindu tribal women who had often found themselves at a social and economic disadvantage (Sengupta, 2011) because they were previously barred from acquiring an education.

This historical context is necessary to understand why single-sex schools are so popular in India and the role that single-sex convents play in Indian society today. Since independence, single-sex convents have become a part of the Indian cultural fabric rather than a foreign intervention removed from influence of the host country's culture (Sengupta, 2011). In this new context, they have started to distinguish themselves not just as premium educational institutions for girls, but also as centers of empowerment. Their primary new position being that of institutions working for the education and development of women in India to help them become strong, self-sufficient and successful. However, the expressed goals of an institution may not necessarily map with its policies and actions, and it is essential that we analyze how these institutions impact the people they purport to be uplifting.

India has had a dangerous history of misogyny. For centuries, not only have women been subjected to exclusion from opportunities, they've also been victims of terrible physical, emotional, and sexual violence (Behl, 2017). The census of India (2011) found that the average literacy rate among women was 55.9% compared to men's 75.3%, indicative of the fact that, more often than not, women do not have access to education (especially in rural areas). Women in India are also less likely to complete their schooling and enroll in higher education. And while these numbers seem to be improving over the years, it is essential to acknowledge that women's rates of enrollment and completion have been consistently less than those of men (UNESCO, n.d.). In order to identify the underlying reason for these numbers, we need to understand India's perception of women. The birth of a girl child in India is often considered a bad turn of fate

(Ahmad, 2010). While young men grow up to stay at home and are expected to provide financial and old-age support to their parents, young girls are married off as early as possible and are expected to become a part of the husband's family. More importantly, India's "dowry" system is still widely practiced, despite being declared illegal by the Government. When a family has a daughter, they must be financially prepared to pay a significant price to the groom's family; hence, girls become a "burden" for their families. Several parents rationalize that educating a girl - one who will eventually get married, leave to become a part of another family, and thus not provide them with any "return" for the investment in her education - would be impractical (Ahmad, 2010). This "burden" mentality also has a huge impact on how women and their perceived "morality" are treated in the country. "The degree to which the community perceives individual women as chaste and virtuous often has a profound economic impact on their families. The families of women who have been accused of dishonorable conduct may be ostracized, economically penalized in the market or unable to arrange for marriages of other daughters and sisters – all of which has an economic cost to families."(Bond, 2014). As a result, women are restricted to limited social lives such that they cannot seen to be compromising their morality and being a burden their family any further.

Culturally, young women and their "morality" are often associated with family and community "honor". "Honor" has overlapping meanings but given the context we're talking about and the culture we are diving into, it can be primarily defined as - in addition to a person's self-worth - the respect that they are entitled to in their community (Gill, 2014) by the virtue of their social behavior. This concept of honor runs in parallel with the idea of "shame"; and if honor is acquiring and reaffirming respect from the community, shame is losing respect within the community through transgressions of the community's rules about behavior. More often than

not, it is the women in the community who become liable to uphold and maintain family and community honor by restricting their ambitions, their sexuality, and by adhering to social norms and customs. “Although women are not typically seen as holders of honor property, they play a significant role in determining its value to the family as a whole. Notably, the claim here is not that women are, themselves, a form of property. Women are agents who make decisions about their own sexuality (Kapur, 2005), and those decisions inflate, preserve or decrease the value of familial honor property. Because the value of honor property fluctuates based on female behavior, other family members, including women, seek to aggressively monitor and control the behavior of female family members (Siddiqui, 2005).” (Bond, 2014). By using the term “honor property”, the implication here is that the value of a family or community honor, an intangible property, is dependent on the conformity of the women in a particular family or community to social norms and restrictions. Women themselves are not considered honorable, but their behavior reflects on the honor of the family. As a result, some extremely conservative South Asian families associate women’s “shame” with them leaving the home-sphere for academic and professional purposes and interacting with men outside the family circle (Gill, 2014), because an unmarried girl’s association with men is seen as improper and dishonorable. Moreover, any indication of women being “dishonorable” leads to harsh punishment. This punishment can take the form of alienation, banishment, confinement, or even violence. Honor killing, an act of homicide committed for the expressed purpose of protecting and redeeming familial or community honor, continues to be a major problem in Indian society. United Nations projections conclude that approximately 5000 women die at the hands of their family members each year (Kanchan et al., 2016) and the majority of these incidences take place in India and Pakistan. But the violence and punishment aren’t limited to a response against “incorrect actions” by young

women; sometimes, its preemptive. Female feticide and infanticide continue at alarming rates in India (Kanchan et al., 2016). Parents often consider it appropriate to "relieve" themselves of the burden of raising a girl entirely. So much so, that prenatal sex determination was made illegal in India in order to prevent sex-based abortions that were skewing the national sex ratio leading to a phenomenon that Dr. Amartya Sen, Indian Nobel Laureate, has called the "missing women" (Sen, 1990). And while these laws have helped, very little has been achieved in controlling the female infanticide rates (Ahmad, 2010).

Honor is also a caste and class issue, because in this social context, women from "good families", that is, women from upper caste or upper-class families are not the sort of women who socialize with men outside of marriage because women who do so are "sexually-suspect" and a "good" woman from an honorable and "respectable" family would not do that. Thus, the need to follow Victorian morality norms is also more prevalent in upper class families. At the same time, education in itself is now a class marker, where a girl's social value and her worth on the marriage market is simultaneously determined by her educational qualifications (Sengupta, 2011). Therefore, for a family intent on maintaining their daughter's purity while also "grooming" her for society; a single-sex convent offers the perfect environment because convents are known for their transformation of young women into respectable and socially desirable "ladies". This is not to imply that all convents are exclusive to the upper caste or the upper class. Several convents also provide scholarships and reduced fee packages to students who need them (Doggett, 2005)(Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). This has especially been the case since the Indian government launched Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009, which sought to provide free and compulsory education to all children from ages six to fourteen in India (Ministry of Human Resource Development, n.d.). Under this Act, private schools in India were

required to reserve 25% of their seats for children from economically and socially challenged backgrounds. Even before RTE was put in action, convent schools were some of the few private schools that worked on integrating students from different backgrounds, Loreto Sealdah (a convent in Calcutta) was one of them, where around 50% of the students are on full scholarships (Mukherjee, 2012). For parents from disadvantaged backgrounds, therefore, convents have emerged as an affordable option to educate their daughters and help them move up the socio-economic ladder.

The potential advantages of convent schools in India

Studies on single-sex schools focus extensively on academic self-concept. Self-concept is related to a person's self-perceptions, and academic self-concept refers to their perceptions about their academic abilities. Self-concept is related to self-esteem in some ways, since self-esteem is also related to a sense of pride in oneself. It is also linked to belief in one's ability to achieve a goal or accomplish something (Sullivan, 2009). Academic self-concept is important because "high self-concept is positively associated with learning, and a degree of over-confidence promotes educational attainment as well as success in other domains" (Sullivan, 2009). Girls from single-sex schools are believed to have stronger academic self-concept and higher career aspirations as compared to girls from mixed-sex schools. Therefore, single-sex schooling is found to have reduced the gender gap related to academic self-concept (Sullivan, 2009).

It has also been noted across various contexts, that the same-sex environment leads to improved academic results for both boys and girls. (Dustmann, Ku, & Kwak, 2018; Watson et al., 2002). Research has found that giving young girls a safe space to express themselves and to participate in academic, athletic, and leadership activities without male interference also

improves their confidence levels. Owing to the generally dominant status conferred upon boys, young men tend to be given preference for academic, leadership, and athletic roles in mixed-sex schools (Watson et al., 2002), which usually leaves girls at a disadvantage. Single-sex schooling has also seen some evidence of students opting for gender-atypical careers and inclinations more often than in the case of mixed-sex schooling (Sullivan, 2009). Removal of opposite-sex "distractions" also stems self-consciousness and reduces disciplinary issues in classrooms (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Brutsaert's study on student perceptions of discipline and academic order found that it was perceived that single-sex schools, especially girls' schools, called for greater academic and social discipline from the students (Brutsaert, 2002). Anfara and Mertens also found that not having to maintain appearances for the benefit of the opposite sex allowed young women to express themselves authentically. Young women feel greater pressure to prescribe to "femininity" and confine themselves to expected gender roles in presence of the opposite sex (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Brutsaert, 2002). Naturally, this would be a limiting environment for young girls and thus further exemplifies the comparative advantages of single-sex schools for girls. In studies conducted in Belgium and in Uganda, it was found that girls from single-sex schools were more likely to enter into academically challenging careers and fields because they weren't compelled to adhere to their stereotypical expectations as females (Brutsaert, 2002; Picho & Stephens, 2012). Ruth Doggett's research on a single-sex Convent in Calcutta revealed similar results for Indian women; the girls felt more capable of taking on challenging professional and leadership roles (Doggett, 2005)(Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005).

However, while convents may potentially offer similar educational advantages as single-sex schools, it is essential to acknowledge that single-sex convents are not entirely the same as single-sex secular schools. Apart from the obvious religious influences on their culture and

policies, and the subsequently resulting impact on their views about women, in India, they also have a colonizing legacy (Sengupta, 2011). For instance, convent schools in India often promise a better training of young women in the English language. Even now, decades after independence, the ability to speak "good" English is considered a "premium" skill in India (Chakraborty & Bakshi, 2016). It is incredibly difficult to acquire higher education and well-paying jobs without a strong grasp of the English language. Moreover, a person thoroughly trained in English is automatically considered "sophisticated" (Chakraborty & Bakshi, 2016) and for families looking to present their daughters as a distinguished "catch" or even those attempting to uplift their children, convent schools offer an affordable option to provide their daughters with the necessary grooming. Colonial influences on the convents' aims and philosophies are likely to have other effects on the development on young women; such as those related to their self-perception and their relationship to their sexuality. It remains to be seen if those influences are beneficial to the liberation and empowerment of Indian women or if they are limiting and restrictive.

Women's self-concept in single-sex schools

Girls from single-sex schools reported a lower self-concept with regard to physical appearance and social acceptance (Granleese & Joseph, 1993). A comparative analysis study of gender role prescriptions and disordered eating between mixed-sex and single-sex schools found that girls from single-sex schools are more likely to express physical dissatisfaction and engage in disordered eating (Mensinger, 2001). Mensinger found that most single-sex schools create great pressure on young women to be "superwomen" who can have high-flying careers but can also commit to create a fully functional and happy family. She also found that there was a "hidden curriculum" that pressurized young women to follow gender stereotypical roles and it

offset the school's expressed intention to be feminist and female-empowering (Mensinger, 2001). The problem, Mensinger found, was that regardless of the school's intentions, the teachers would often pass on conflicting messages and gender limitations to young women in their classes. Additionally, Mensinger referenced Candace B. Heyward's paper *'Catching Up: Gender values at a Canadian independent school for girls, 1978-93'* to describe the conflicting messages of "female valuing" that the girls' schools often promoted (Heyward, 1995; Mensinger, 2001). This included paying lip service to "femininity" and "female values" and their importance while at the same time enforcing uniform rules and dress codes that involved boxy and unshapely uniforms that completely hid the feminine form and were in fact more masculine in appearance. Additionally, any kind of jewelry, makeup or other marking of femininity was strictly forbidden. The administration's claim was that the intention behind such uniforms was to prevent unhealthy obsession with appearance in the school. However, as Heyward notes, this conveys the implicit message that femininity and certain expressions of female sexuality is frivolous or unhealthy and that academics are serious masculine endeavors and in order to seriously pursue an education, you need to devoid your appearance on female frivolity (Heyward, 1995).

A.J. Allan conducted a study in a Christian girls' school in England and concluded that convent schools have a culture of promoting "ladylike behaviors" as per the conservative Christian and Victorian standards (Allan, 2009). Hence, virtues like "modesty" and "piety" were strongly espoused and teachers reprimanded girls for not meeting certain standards of polite behavior or for not dressing appropriately. Young girls from the school were also often reprimanded for trying to "attract male attention" and this was considered a serious character flaw that needed to be weeded out. Girls from Allan's school of study also reported "not

knowing any boys at all" (Allan, 2009). Allan doesn't extrapolate what this apparent ignorance of the opposite sex means for the still-developing social skills of these girls. She does, however, touch upon the kind of regulation that these girls go through within their homes and their schools to ensure "sexual propriety".

Both Mensinger and Allan offer great insights into the impact that single-sex school culture can have on female identity and socialization. In Allan's case, it accounts for the added dimension of religion. Unfortunately, both these cases are set in the West and therefore, there is a gap in the current literature when it comes to the cultural context of a complex South Asian society which already has rigid norms of femininity. Doggett's research, to some extent, provided an insight into how girls from the Loreto Day School Sealdah, a convent in Calcutta, were socialized to think of their identity in terms of mothers, family members, and "loving, sacrificing" women (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005), but these weren't put in context of the rigidity with which these expectations are enforced in Indian society and the impact that it can have on non-conforming women and girls. Nor did her study outline how these identities were formed within the school system. Her study was focused more on the "enabling greater education for women" aspect of a convent. Research has found that students from theological schools in India, which includes missionary schools, report lower life satisfaction and higher degrees of anxiety as compared to students from regular schools (Kaur & Mello, 2016). Further, stress and anxiety levels are reported to be higher in females in comparison to males enrolled in theological schools. Unfortunately, the reasons for increased anxiety and lower life satisfaction are not highlighted in Kaur and Mello's paper and it is not elaborated *why* females were affected more viscerally. However, it may be considered that religious norms and their usually rigid expectations from women may have a role to play here.

Sexuality and Indian Women

Sex education is largely absent in India and expressing sexuality - especially by women - is often considered deviant (Sharda & Watts, 2012) and promiscuous. Whatever form of Government funded sex-education exists is often in the realms of "family-planning" and is more concerned with healthy child-rearing for heterosexual married couples. Furthermore, any sexual identity that doesn't fit into the heterosexual mold is rarely addressed or validated in any capacity. There have been attempts by the Indian government to establish a national sex education curriculum in public schools, however these were virulently opposed because the general public was convinced sex education would lead to promiscuous behavior (Sharda & Watts, 2012). A few left-wing states, such as West Bengal, established a mandatory sex education curriculum in schools but a study held in 2011 found that the curriculum mostly emphasized abstinence and expressed the prevalent anxieties about "western licentiousness" that would corrupt the "pure" and "innocent" Indian youth (Chakravarti, 2011) if they engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage. This curriculum did not account for varying sexualities and the associated issues at all and it reflects a deeper problem of Indian society and its relationship with sex. However, we must note that even if the Indian government succeeds in establishing any kind of national sex education curriculum for its public schools, it will not be able to mandate the same in convent schools. As per the Indian Constitution, denominational schools that are not dependent on government funding are free to determine what is taught in the schools ("Constitution of India", n.d.). A convent school, driven by its Christian perceptions of sex, may not be inclined to provide sex education, and if it does, it will likely go the abstinence-only route. This lack of comprehensive sex education is harmful, especially for women.

Young women in India are taught that sex is reserved for after marriage. But even after being married, these women have very little control over their own bodies and sexuality (Gangoli, 2007). They are taught their entire lives to be gatekeepers who refuse any pre-marital sexual indulgence (Bay-Cheng, 2003). However, after being married, their ability to say no is often taken away because under the traditional Indian framework, a wife is obligated to have sex with her husband (Gangoli, 2007). This belief system is especially dangerous since marital rape has not yet been criminalized in India. Additionally, Indian women are at great risk of sexual violence and exploitation; the country was listed as the most "dangerous place for women in the world" by a survey of global experts, only last year in 2018 (Thomson Rueters Foundation, 2018); this includes the risk of assault, harassment, molestation, and grooming. Women's sexuality is also closely policed because of women's association with family "honor". Rape and sexual assault are often used as revenge and as humiliation tactics not just against the woman herself, but her family and by extension her community. Additionally, women's capacity to procreate and carry on the lineage of families and communities also account for the patriarchal control of their sexuality (Chanana, 2001). Hence, an "out of control" woman is one who is capable of destroying the purity of the lineage and needs to be segregated and secluded from the general society. Therefore, sending women to single-sex educational spaces, also comes from a desire to protect girls from the "violence" of boys and men and possible dishonor of the family if the girl should engage in sex (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005) before marriage. However, this also means that, to a great extent, the subjugation of Indian women comes from the control and exploitation of their sexuality. In this context, it is critical that Indian girls are taught to understand and challenge this context in their youth instead of internalizing it. An empowering institution, that seeks to liberate young women would ensure that they receive this knowledge

and are able to take control of their sexual narratives rather than allow for the people around them to do so. As such, an analysis of how convents educate Indian girls about sexuality becomes critical.

My contribution to the current literature

There is currently very little information on the ideology of womanhood in Indian convent schools and how that ideology challenges (or conforms to) the dominant ideology of womanhood in India. While, we know that they play a great role in the academic enablement of Indian girls, we do not know the tools they use to shape women's identities, their social behavior, and their relationship with sex. These are essential avenues to explore because Indian women are still socialized to believe that they have to conform to certain rules and regulations of womanhood; they've made progress in economic and financial terms but have been unable to challenge the dominant ideology about their social position. Women's relationship with themselves, their ability to be comfortable with their own sexuality and their ability to assert control over their social narratives is important and yet not always quantifiable. While economic independence can help women establish some control over their lives and relationships, there are other perceptions and mind-frames that keep their progress limited. There are several educated and successfully employed Indian women who often bow down to social strictures whenever the demand arises because they've been taught to do so. The rules of "acceptable" or "good" femininity follows even the most ambitious women because to defy that ideal of femininity could result in girls and women being branded as "promiscuous" and "out of control". Very often, women themselves establish and maintain social restrictions on one another because these restrictions are so normalized that any deviation from it is promptly dismantled and shut down. Mothers will curtail their daughters' freedom, aunts and relatives will cast judgement on

“promiscuous’ and “improper” behavior, and mothers-in-law will restrict ambitions and demand subservience from young wives. Therefore, if convents are to be truly beneficial to young girls, they need to be able to provide them with the tools to combat patriarchy at a larger level and teach them to support one another in their endeavors to change social landscapes. If young girls can grow up feeling confident in their choices, their abilities, and their sexuality, then they can challenge some of the most pervasive influences of patriarchy in India. And if we can identify the areas where convents can make improvements to be able to do so, we can improve the capacity of convents as empowering institutions in India.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

In this Chapter, I will describe the methodologies upon which my analysis is based. I will also describe the research methods and tools that I used to conduct my research and the details regarding the research participants.

Critical discourse analysis

To begin with, I analyzed the Convent's public website through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. School websites are useful resources for the purpose of analyzing institutional discourse. Most school websites clearly outline a school's vision, mission, and expressed goals for the students. Moreover, school websites are mostly written for the benefit of parents and the community; the way they market themselves and their purpose depends on what parents will find appropriate or attractive (Taddeo & Barnes, 2016). Therefore, an analysis of the school website also provides insight into what society holds valuable in an educational institute. As such, I looked at the Convent's expressed aims and goals for young women. I also looked at the Convent's official rulebook which defines the prescriptions of behavior in various school situations. School rules provide the standards on which student behavior can be judged to be appropriate and desired or inappropriate and forbidden (Thornberg, 2008). Therefore, an analysis of the rulebook helped me identify the Convent's underlying expectations of female behavior and its related implications.

Theoretical Framework

Critical discourse analysis approaches language as a primary force for the production and preservation of ideology that has been socially accepted as "common sense" (Bucholtz, 2008). Language-in-use can help sustain the established power dynamics in social life. Often these

power dynamics are so ingrained in a society that they are "naturalized" (Fairclough, 2010) for the people involved. Not only are the powerful often blind to their privilege, the underprivileged can also learn to accept certain oppressions as natural. Even the people attempting to change the power relations may be limited in their ability to do so because they are operating within the same ideological framework. The language we use and the social norms we practice are almost in a cyclical relationship. As such, social norms define how we speak of and think about certain things and in turn, the way we speak of and think about things affect how we treat them. In this way, discourse is not just symbolic, but has a real, tangible effect on people's lives (Bucholtz, 2008).

I situated my work within the concepts of "ideological-discursive-formation" (IDF) and the "naturalization" of dominant ideologies laid down by Fairclough (Fairclough, 2010). Fairclough describes an IDF as a "a sort of 'speech community' with its own discourse norms but also, embedded within and symbolized by the latter, its own 'ideological norms'." (Fairclough, 2010). Each society has multiple IDFs, but some IDFs are dominant over others. Fairclough claims that institutions and people follow the norms of an IDF, while being unaware of its "ideological implications". This is especially true in the case of the ideologies of the dominant IDFs, which become so normalized in society that they are mistaken for as "neutral" ideologies. Unless we scrutinize why we speak the way we do about certain things and how it affects the way we see them, we will remain unaware of our underlying biases that are (Fairclough, 2010) influenced by the dominant ideology and continue to unknowingly subscribe to the same discriminatory beliefs and practices. I argue that the patriarchal ideology is so naturalized within Indian society and its discourse related to women that it is "opaque" even to those who are attempting to counter it. For there to be any significant change, we need to

denaturalize patriarchy and its associated "implicit propositions" (Fairclough, 2010) from the discourse about women. "Denaturalization", as Fairclough puts it, would require us to analyze how social strictures determine properties of discourse and vice versa. Using this approach, we can detach patriarchal properties from the discourse around women and address the problems associated with this way of talking and seeing women.

I also utilized Gee's concept of Discourse Models to analyze how language-in-use impacts social perceptions surrounding women and womanhood in India and how institutions attempting to support women are also unknowingly trapped with these perceptions. Discourse Models help define the relationship between the macro-level social institutions and the micro-level social interactions (Gee, 2005) and they involve us in making exclusions we don't realize we're making (Gee, 2005). Discourse Models create simplifications about complex people and situations. Unfortunately, the simplifications and implications of the Discourse Models help perpetuate harmful stereotypes or assumptions about people (Gee, 2005). Gee also brings in the concept of "Prototypical Simulations" we build in our heads about people or situations. These "Prototypical Simulations" are informed by Discourse Models and reflect what we take for granted as "typical" or "normal" (Gee, 2005). When faced with a different sort of person or situation, we form "special prototypes" which we judge as "atypical". This is dangerous because this paves the way for people to judge different people as "deviant". Discourse Models derive their meaning locally, and therefore what is "typical" comes from what is socially accepted as typical in a particular society (p. 78. Gee, 2005). I argue that the Indian "Prototypical Simulation" of women is heavily influenced by the cultural perception of women and womanhood and it is reflected in the way that people project the image of a "proper" or "normal" woman even in the single-sex schools established to "empower" them. By helping them

acknowledge this bias, we can assist administrators and teachers of convent schools in identifying the perceptions of womanhood that they take for granted and help them to make room for a more diverse perception instead.

With Fairclough and Gee's work of dominant discourses and their relationship with ideology as the backdrop, I used Robin Lakoff's concepts on language and gender to conduct my textual analysis. In her influential article, *Language and Women's Place* (Lakoff, 1975)(Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004), Lakoff was concerned with how women talk, how they are talked about, and how that "talk" reveals the dominant social ideology on women. Somewhat similar to Fairclough and Gee, Lakoff also asserts that "language uses us as much as we use language" (Lakoff, 1975)(Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). She explains that while our choice of words are dictated by what we want to express to a certain extent; the way we feel about things also governs our expressions (Lakoff, 1975)(Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). Hence, we can use linguistic behavior as a diagnostic into hidden feelings about things. Lakoff asserts that "women's language", the language women use and the one that is used for and about them, both submerge their personality and deny them means to express themselves. Ultimately, this system normalizes lack of power for women, conditioning them to believe that certain discriminations and limitations they face are natural (Lakoff, 1975)(Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004).

Lakoff has identified various avenues through which language about women boxes them into set categories and limits. Most significantly, she talks of politeness and how it has been relegated as "natural" for women to aspire for (Lakoff, 1975)(Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). This comes from a hegemonic concept of womanhood as "constrained" and "refined"; the language we use and encourage women to use sustains the power of this hegemony (Eckert, 2004) (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). This is primarily because, for women, their position in society is often

entirely dependent on the impression that they make on others; the "painstaking creation and elaboration of a worthy self" (Eckert, 2004)(Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). Accomplishments and institutional roles are not sufficient recommendations for women, they must provide "proof" of their good character through polite behavior (Eckert, 2004) (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). "Men do things; women be things": Penelope Eckert writes, drawing from Lakoff's concepts on how language defines women. Women are expected not to perfect their skills but themselves, because they are often thought of as "symbolic capital" (Eckert, 2004) (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). They serve to enhance the images of the people around them. And this, I argue, can be seen from what women are encouraged to be; by the goals that are defined for them by their families, communities, and educational institutions.

Linguistic interaction is deeply influenced by social interaction and the study of language is fundamental for our understanding of how dominant ideologies are produced and sustained in society. It is my understanding that single-sex convents, though seeking to empower young women in India, are still trapped in the dominant discourse about women in society and this is reflected in how they talk about young women. This, in turn, has a cyclical effect on women's social place in India. When the institutions that were meant to empower them end up naturalizing oppression for them, women will continue to operate in and perpetuate the same discourse that has kept them powerless for decades. Unless this institutional discourse is challenged and changed, very little will change in women's social lives.

Narrative Feminist Analysis

I analyzed the interviews of former students from the Convent using the Narrative Feminist Analysis approach. Narrative methods of analysis are not always concerned with being "objective" or "scientific"; their intention is not to uncover or "discover facts" but to learn more about the people living in the world and their experiences (Fraser, 2008). Essentially, narrative methods are used to analyze how people make sense of their world and how this sense-making affects them and the people around them (Fraser 2004). This approach provides gravity and legitimacy to people's experiences. Narratives have a critical role to play in the human culture, they help us identify the stories we tell about ourselves (Fraser, 2004). They help us make sense of the language in use and analyze not only what is being said, but what is not being said. Additionally, the Narrative Feminist approach to research can help promote women's stories and provide sharper focus to their issues (Fraser, 2008).

Women's lived experiences are legitimate sources of information that can provide an insight into the institutional and social issues they face. Certain experiences and how they affected women's self-perception and their lives cannot always be quantified. Narratives can provide a nuanced view of the real-world challenges of women that won't necessarily always show up in surveys and questionnaires. Delving into women's stories can help us provide legitimacy to their experiences and it also helps us acknowledge the fact that research is never really a "disembodied neutral affair" (Fraser, 2008).

Theoretical framework

Analyzing narratives encourages the "plurality of truths" to become known and also accounts for the intersectionality between individuals' lives, society, and culture (Heather, 2004).

Most significantly, they may be used to "authorize the stories of ordinary people". By recognizing people's strengths and engaging them in meaningful dialogue, narrative approaches can help us analyze a problem from a macro perspective that accounts for the wider social phenomena (Heather, 2004).

Narratives are especially useful if they are taken in context of their related politics and are analyzed to decipher how social structures and policies are either supported or contested (Jackson, 1998) (Heather, 2004). Appropriate use of narrative analysis means that we must challenge existing social hierarchies. Narrative researchers must avoid erasing the impact of social practices on individuals and simultaneously ensure that focus on social norms does not invalidate individual agency. "Narrative research should not only reflect 'reality' but also challenge taken-for-granted beliefs, assertions and assumptions, including those made by revered social theorists" (Heather, 2004). Narrative research does not use "language of certainty" but instead presents ideas that may be "tentative, circular, or multiple" (Heather, 2004). They allow for richer descriptions of experiences and the associated emotions of the people involved in the research. This approach is ideal for situations where we attempt to delve deeper than statistical facts and numbers, and focus on the individual accounts of ordinary people that often get omitted in many research projects (Heather, 2004); this is especially true in the case of ordinary women.

Most narrative researchers opt to use interviews as their primary source of analysis. Interviews provide a detailed insight into women's lives and their experiences and can help establish theories that are better suited to women's lived experiences. Interviewing can help unearth hidden ideas and beliefs and can challenge existing dominant beliefs and established theories about women and their challenges (Heather, 2004). Since the intent is to derive stories from people, researchers generally use a conversational style of interviewing. The key is to

establish a friendly, casual tone in the interview so that the participants can feel comfortable enough to share their experiences which, in several cases, may be painful and difficult to talk about. It is essential that narrative researchers, attempt to "really listen" to the participants and take the time to process their stories and allow for comments and points that may not immediately make sense or seem valuable. The intent is to ask questions that help participants present their stories in an organic fashion, that can then be analyzed for what was said and what was left out (Heather, 2004).

I derived my approach primarily from the work of Heather Fraser, a professor of social work at RMIT University, Australia. Fraser's work consists of analyzing women's stories of intimate abuse and the impact that their experiences had on their lives. Fraser takes into account not only women's primary experiences of the abuse, but also their social context, family lives, and economic struggles to identify how all these factors intersected together to affect their lives.

I argue that young women from single-sex convents also have complex lives with various social and familial influences that add to their experiences at school. By analyzing women's stories about their lives as convent students, we will be able to identify how the Convent's culture and policies shaped their lives and their identity. We will also be able to account for intersections with Indian society's perceptions of womanhood and their family lives when we allow them to define their stories of adolescence. More significantly, this approach allows us to track how their perceptions with regard to themselves and to the concept of femininity has changed over time. Participants in narrative feminist research are given the space to explore "subjective meanings and experiences that have been ignored or silenced in previous research" (Heather & Christiana, 2017). Therefore, using this approach gives us insights into social pressures or practices that were not previously explored in detail. "Narrative feminist research

projects may be concerned with a single event, an experience, or an entire life, and within the project the analysis may focus on plots, characters, roles, themes, structures, props, functions and linguistic turns, and the interplay between the story and the storytelling" (Heather & Christiana, 2017). Some researchers focus more on the structure, function and form of the language used. For this research, however, I focused more on the plots, characters, settings and themes in the stories the participants told me.

Narrative feminist research links the personal experiences to the political and social atmosphere. It takes care not to "hyper-individualize" or pathologize the individuals for their experiences (Heather & Christiana, 2017). It doesn't seek to establish a "single truth" through the recount of an incident or an event; it is a co-constructive process of telling, listening and conversation and it acknowledges that several different interpretations could be made from a given narrative. More specifically to this research, Narrative Feminist research can help identify how languages can be used to "normalize or resist gender stereotypes and express (dis)approval" (Heather & Christiana, 2017). By analyzing clichés, metaphors, or turns of phrase in a given account, narrative researchers are able to recognize how participants interact with others, how they perceive themselves and their experiences, and what they have left unsaid or have found difficult to address (Heather & Christiana, 2017).

Generally, researchers combine similar narratives together for analysis and use a selected set of narratives for a deeper analysis. The intent is to observe how power (social, political, institutional or familial) structures in participants' lives show up in their narrative accounts (Heather & Christiana, 2017) and what that reveals about the impact that it has on them. Further, narratives can also be used to identify how dominant discourses or ideologies affect people's lives and how they choose to either conform to it or reject it (Heather & Christiana, 2017).

Narratives with similar plots, events, and/or characters may be clustered together for analysis. From these clusters, a shortlist of narratives may help deepen the analysis.

Intersectionality plays a great role in Narrative Feminist research. Researchers in this field attempt to analyze how gender and sexuality can influence the participants' experiences in society. Social norms and beliefs also have a strong influence on how women experience their lives in various phases, and this includes their experiences in school. Therefore, my analysis of the participants' accounts was set against the backdrop of India's social and cultural context and its rules regarding womanhood along with the cultural and historical context of convent schools. If we do not account for these essential contexts, the participants' experiences in the Convent appear to be individualized issues or problems, when in reality, they are systemic. "Intersectionality insists that one aspect of identity cannot stand isolated from other intersecting aspects of identity. Instead, attention is cast across multiple standpoints and locations."(Heather & Christiana, 2017). Therefore, I argue that participants' class, caste and sexual orientations also played a role in their experiences at the Convent. Using "standpoints" can help us identify how power and power dynamics work in certain situations to create structural problems and discriminations.

Narrative feminist research can be used to observe patterns that affect people's lives and can be used to identify a different worldview to challenge the current system (Heather & Christiana, 2017). While the intent is not to find any conclusive answers to a problem, Narrative Feminist research can help identify areas of improvement within an institute or a system by given legitimacy to ordinary people's problems. If we want to create a better academic environment for young women of India, where they can learn to be truly empowered and self-sufficient, we must account for their day-to-day experiences. Things like self-esteem, relation

with one's own sexuality, and social confidence are not quantifiable items, but they are essential factors for an individual. Unless we give credence to these aspects of women's lives, we cannot claim to be empowering them to create a better future.

Research methods

Textual analysis: The website and the school rulebook of the Convent were analyzed. The website is available on a public domain; the rulebook I obtained from my own collection of rulebooks from my time at the Convent. Certain sections of both sources were isolated for deeper analysis for the purpose of the research. These sections were analyzed using the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis and the results have been recorded in the next chapter. It is significant to note that the Convent's name or any identifying features have not been discussed in this research.

Semi-structured Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were held with eight former students of the Convent. I started with a set of prepared questions that allowed for participants to share stories. Each interview lasted approximately one hour; sometimes a little more. Digressions, side-stories, or volunteered information from the participants was encouraged. The intent was to keep the interview conversational and allow for the interviewees to feel free to express themselves in the way they felt comfortable. Although, I'm providing my list of questions here, it is essential to note that the given order was not always followed. Sometimes, the progression of the conversation required for some shuffling of the order of the questions. The narrative accounts were recorded then transcribed. The transcriptions were then analyzed, and similar narratives were grouped together on the basis of the themes they reflected. Each narrative theme is a collection of stories from different participants that reveals similar plotlines or ideologies. These themes were analyzed separately and have been recorded in the next chapter.

Each participant was given a pseudonym to prevent their identity from being known. The chosen participants were all adult women and former students of the Convent. I chose not to conduct this research with minors because several questions required them to share information about their social and sexual lives (including their sexual identities, which may be a secret). Moreover, working with current students would mean putting them in potentially uncomfortable situations where their participation may raise objections from their parents or the school authorities. Finally, by interviewing adult women, I was able to get more nuanced stories. These women have had the chance to think about their experiences, and their perspectives have proved incredibly valuable.

Research participants

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Sexual Orientation**	**Occupation**
Anna	26	Heterosexual (Demisexual)	Instructional Designer
Ina	25	Heterosexual	Journalist
Reyna	20	Bisexual	College student
Sammy	27	Heterosexual	Corporate lawyer
Sandy	23	Bisexual	College student
Karla	25	Heterosexual	Unemployed/Studying for state exams
Sharon	27	Heterosexual	Banker
Nina	25	Heterosexual	HR Representative

Interview Questions

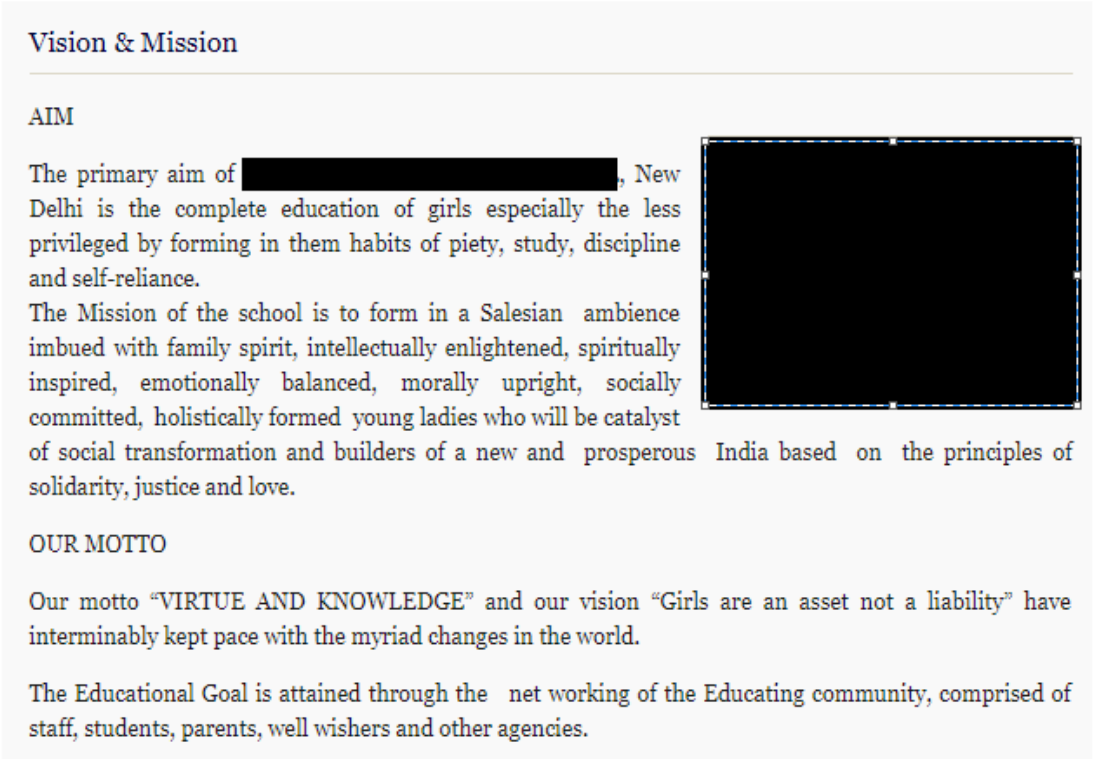
1. Why do you think your parents opted to educate you at this school?
2. How was your social life outside school?
3. Were you allowed to date in your teenage? How did you navigate your dating life?
4. How much social freedom did you have as a teenager? Did you feel free in school?
5. What did you think about the school rules and policies?
6. Was there any particular rule that you didn't like? Why?
7. How would you identify your sexuality? What was it like growing up with this identity?
8. How did you feel about your sexuality in the context of school life?
9. Are you currently in a relationship? If yes, how did this relationship progress?
10. What are some things you wish you had done while in school? What would you do differently now?
11. What do you do now? What is your occupation? Why did you choose this occupation?
12. How did you do academically in school? How did the school support you in your academics?
13. Did you take up any leadership/extra-curricular roles in school? Why or why not?
14. Did you study in any other school? How was that school different from this particular single-sex convent?

CHAPTER THREE: DATA ANALYSIS

Critical Discourse Analysis of School Rulebook and Website

The value of women

The "Vision and Mission" page for the girls' convent has listed the expressed aims for young women enrolled in the school. It also consists of the school motto: "Girls are an asset not a liability" (See image 1). Given the context established in the literature review above, the word "liability" should not be a surprise. The school may be attempting to counter the dominant societal discourse of women being a financial and social burden on the family. However, the use of the word "asset" is interesting. Why does the school decide to position young women as assets?



Vision & Mission

AIM

The primary aim of [redacted], New Delhi is the complete education of girls especially the less privileged by forming in them habits of piety, study, discipline and self-reliance.

[redacted]

The Mission of the school is to form in a Salesian ambience imbued with family spirit, intellectually enlightened, spiritually inspired, emotionally balanced, morally upright, socially committed, holistically formed young ladies who will be catalyst of social transformation and builders of a new and prosperous India based on the principles of solidarity, justice and love.

OUR MOTTO

Our motto "VIRTUE AND KNOWLEDGE" and our vision "Girls are an asset not a liability" have interminably kept pace with the myriad changes in the world.

The Educational Goal is attained through the net working of the Educating community, comprised of staff, students, parents, well wishers and other agencies.

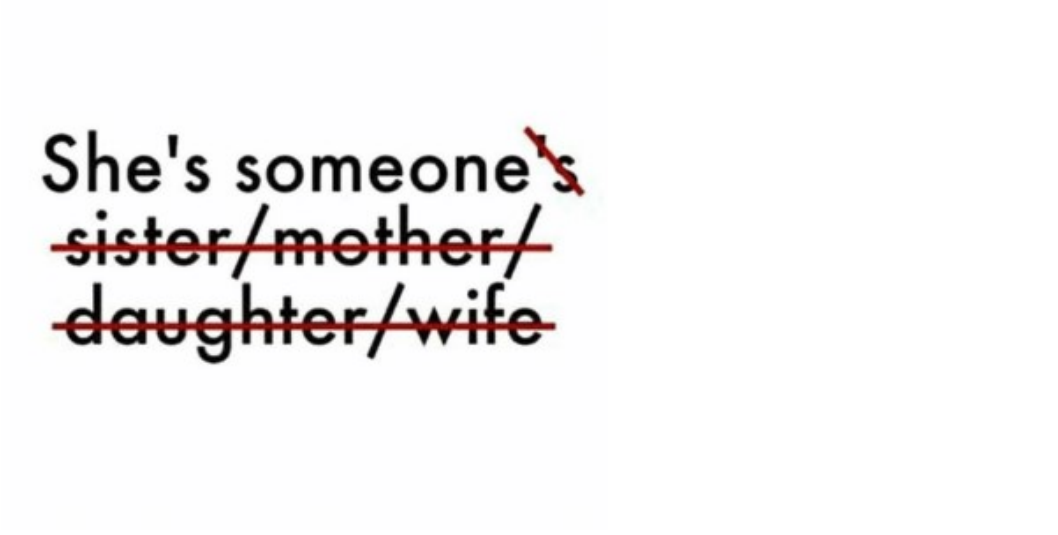
(Image 1. Vision and Mission page from the school website; deidentified and pictures of students blacked out.)

For this, I refer to Lakoff's point of women being "symbolic capital" in the dominant patriarchal ideology. This is very clearly exemplified in Indian society where women and their "honor" are associated with their family's standing in the community. In the general societal discourse, girls are a "burden", an entity that will cost a fortune in education and in marriage with little to no financial returns. In the family ledger, therefore, a daughter becomes a "liability". By positioning girls as "assets"- an approach that is often also used in government sponsored ads and in sections of society which claim to be "progressive"- the school is challenging the financial negativity attached to women. What they appear to be espousing is that girls, if educated, can provide financial support to their family. Essentially, women have "worth" and that "worth" can benefit the family. However, while the word "asset" has more positive connotations as compared to the word "liability", it is still primarily used to define the value of property. In this definition of women, they are still "symbolic capital". The general concept of women as being entities that belong to other people (fathers or husbands) is so naturalized that the school, while genuinely attempting to paint women in a better light, finds itself using the same terminology that dehumanizes and objectifies women.

It is also significant that school websites are written primarily with the intention of targeting parents. The school, therefore, is either knowingly or unknowingly using a language that parents will respond to. They took the narrative of women as liability and flipped it in order to appeal to parents without challenging the dominant ideology. Perhaps the school recognizes that they are more likely to connect with families and win their acquiescence to send their girls to school by communicating within the dominant ideological framework. However, it may also be entirely possible that the school genuinely considers this to be a radical statement. People often attempt to appeal to the better nature of others by trying to counter their sexism without

challenging the underlying sexist ideology. For instance, the poster in image 2, translates into: "how will your daughters cook for you, if you won't let them be born?". The text is referring to the practice of female infanticide/feticide. The general intention is to appeal to the emotions of families to prevent them from killing their daughters. But the appeal still subscribes to the concept of girls being primarily responsible for housework and of their value being derived from how they can benefit the families. A similar approach is applied when people talk about sexual violence and ask men to think of women in terms of "someone's sister, mother, daughter, wife" (image 3), instead of simply people.

(Image 2. Image of graffiti reads "How will you eat the bread made at their hands; if you won't let your daughter be born", India, 2018.
https://smedia2.intoday.in/aajtak/images/stories/052018/untitled_1_copy_1527492142_618x347.jpeg)



(Image 3. Text reads “She’s someone’s sister/mother/daughter/wife”, all the words after “someone” have been struck out in red ink to read “She’s someone”, n.d. https://pics.me.me/shes-someones-sister-mother-36528550.png)

In the dominant narrative, women belong to other people and their value comes from that belonging. Therefore, they are characterized as “worthy” in terms of being “beneficial” or “valuable” to the people they belong to. This isn’t a progressive or empowering stance to make for the benefit of women, even if it may appear to be so. If the school truly wants to lend its support to women’s development in India, it will have to change its language about women such that it accounts for women’s autonomy and acknowledges their value independent of what they are able to give to other people. For instance, they could define girls as “strong”, “intelligent”, and “capable” in the motto instead of as “assets”. By failing to do so, the Convent is simply perpetuating society’s current discourse. Any woman who goes through this system is also unlikely to see the implicit dehumanization of her existence and will continue to establish her worth in relation to what she can bring to other people rather than what she can do for her own benefit.

Young Ladies and their character

Another significant section of the Vision and Mission section of the girls' school website is their expressed aims for young women:

"The primary aim of [the school] is the complete education of girls especially the less privileged by forming in them habits of piety, study, discipline and self-reliance.

The Mission of the school is to form in a Salesian ambience imbued with family spirit, intellectually enlightened, spiritually inspired, emotionally balanced, morally upright, socially committed, holistically formed young ladies who will be catalyst of social transformation and builders of a new and prosperous India based on the principles of solidarity, justice and love."

The first sentence is interesting because of its emphasis on the need for developing habits of "piety, study, discipline and self-reliance" *especially* for the "less privileged". While the goals outlined for the students are valuable and well-intentioned, if not completely holistic, it is unclear why the Convent felt the need to single out the less privileged students here. It may be understood that the Convent wants to make it clear that the school is open to the underprivileged students as well, but they could have mentioned that separately, in a section that focuses on their efforts to include people from all socio-economic backgrounds. By setting it up along with their primary goals, it appears as though the "less-privileged" students would be more in need of developing these habits as compared to the more privileged. If we consider the fact that historically, one of the major aims of missionary schooling was to teach modesty and humility to the "promiscuous" lower-class and lower-caste women in order to "uplift" them, then this sentence appears to indicate that the less privileged students currently lack these values. This is

also reminiscent of the perceptions of upper-caste Hindu society about people from underprivileged and "lower" castes as "uncouth" or "unrefined"(Sengupta, 2011).

"Salesian" in the above quote refers to the "Salesian Sisters": a catholic organization of nuns working for the education of girls. And because the women are to be "formed" in this ambience, it's essential that we consider what this ambience is like. The school's values and culture are heavily informed by Catholic Christian values. The school's patron saints, and their teachings are also all primarily Catholic. Given this background, it would not be a stretch to consider that the school's perceptions of womanhood may be derived, to an extent, from the Catholic viewpoint.

We see a glimpse of the same values in the school website. The school motto is "VIRTUE and KNOWLEDGE". The word "virtue" in Christianity generally signifies "purity" of thought and body, however the word's association with women usually refers to social and sexual propriety. Christianity has had a long history of demonizing women's sexuality as a "sin" but more particularly, missionary Christian interventions in India and in other colonial outposts attacked non-European female sexuality as especially "debauched" (Knust; Lakoff, & Collier, 2005). We cannot ignore this backdrop in our analysis of the word "virtue" in this context and must acknowledge that it signals to a deeper ideology about female sexuality and more importantly, the practice of its subjugation. Therefore, the dominant narrative that defines this school's ideology is not merely set within the dominant ideology of womanhood in Indian society but also dominant ideology of womanhood in Catholicism and Victorian morals prevalent during the colonial era. Given India's concern with women's morals, it becomes even more likely that people (parents) reading this text will relate the word virtue to its "propriety" related definition. There are also other indications of behavior policing on the same page.

Consider the following phrase:

"…imbued with family spirit, intellectually enlightened, spiritually inspired, emotionally balanced, morally upright, socially committed, holistically formed young ladies…"

Lakoff eluded to the expectation of women to "become something" rather than "do something" in order to be of value and that this expectation is reflected in language. The above quote is a significant example. There is an implication that once the school succeeds in instilling all the listed values in the girls, then they will be distinguished as "ladies". The school will "transform" the girls into more "worthy" or "improved" people, which one can only assume they are not if they do not possess these values. However, what are these values and why are they so essential?

There is a reference to women becoming "self-reliant" and being "intellectually enlightened" which hints at the values of education and freedom, but these are far outweighed in number by the behavior related aims for women. As Heyward had noted in her own analysis on Canadian girls' schools; there is a contradiction in the messages that young women are being provided (Heyward, 1995). They are being pushed to be self-reliant and enlightened, but at the same time they also need to be pious, feminine ladies without acknowledging that very often, being self-reliant and confident means rejecting the restrictive rules of femininity and feminine behavior. Moreover, these are projected in passive phrases; the girls shall "be formed" into enlightened and self-reliant people through the efforts of the institution rather than, for instance, engage in intellectually stimulating activities in order to *gain* self-reliance. The remaining expectations are similarly passive but are also influenced by the concepts of ideal womanhood. With terms like "morally upright" and "emotionally balanced"; the school appears to be referring to the expected standards of behavior from women. Deborah Cameron comments on Lakoff's

concept of the "silent woman" to bring out the historical expectations of behavior moderation from women. Withdrawn and reticent middle class and upper-class women were favorably compared to the "loose and coarse-tongued fishwife" of the lower classes (Cameron, 2004) (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). Therefore, this expectation on women to monitor their emotions, be disciplined, and be conscious of their moral standpoint in order to be considered "good" women is not unheard of. Moreover, not only is this behavioral expectation quite constraining; it is also incredibly classist. By relating "good" behavior to the way of speaking and acting of upper-class women and relegating other types of speaking and acting as somehow "lesser than", this also implies that certain types of women (generally richer and privileged) are "better" than other women (mostly working class or underprivileged). In India, this demarcation of women is also a combination of the caste discrimination principles and the colonial roots of the convent schools. "Upper-caste" women are ladies; the appropriate, well-behaved women and the "lower-caste" women are the "sexually suspect" fishwives. And both categories of Indian women need to be molded into the behavioral ideals of the English woman. Teaching young women that they are somehow worth more than other women on account of their behavior is an insidious way of controlling them and of perpetuating classism. Young women who inherit this framework are less likely to be able to change their own and other women's position in society if they think of some women as not "good enough". If the Convent really intends to work for all women, it needs to stop adding to this discourse by conflating women's behavior with their value in society.

The Importance of Family

The term "imbued with family spirit" in the above quote seems to refer to conception of women being homemakers; essentially as mothers, daughters, and wives. The Discourse Model of women in India has always been closely associated with women being a part of a family,

rather than as independent individuals (Lau Ee Jia, 2003) (Krishna Raj, 2010). It is, therefore, perhaps natural, for the school to position family spirit as an essential part of their goals for young women. This is likely to appeal to the parents greatly. What happens, however, if a woman is not interested in the "family spirit"? Not all women are inclined to establish and sustain family relations but narratives around women are rarely individualistic. In fact, unmarried and childless women are often considered oddities and are frowned upon. The use of the term "self-reliant" in junction with the "family spirit" only reinforces the expectation on women that they may aim to be successful, but they must always aspire for marriage and family.

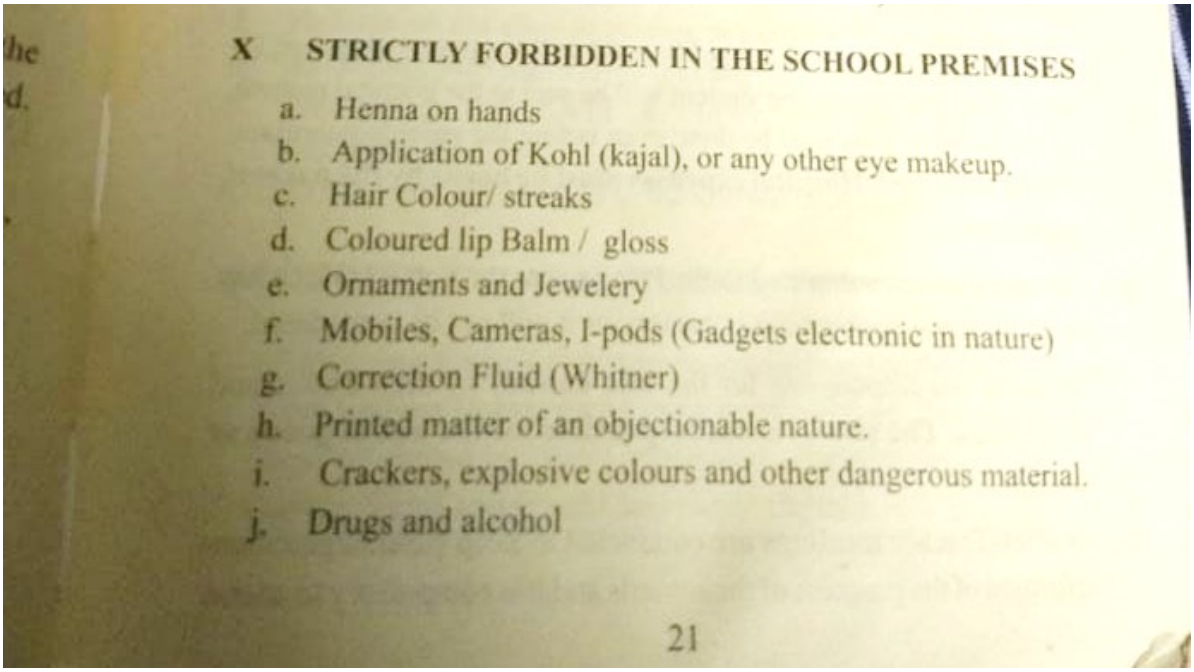
Since there is no other indication in the text about what "family" means to the school, I cannot draw any further concrete conclusions. Even so, it is critical to consider the accepted prototype of a "family" in India. The dominant narrative of a family is heterosexual. Homosexuality was decriminalized in the country only last year in 2018; it will be years before homosexual couples are accepted into the social ethos or given protected legal statuses. This social background is also intersected with Catholic views on sexuality in this school text. The prototype of a family from the school's perspective, therefore, is more likely than not to be the same as that of the dominant ideology. It is also unlikely that there would be absolutely no people with varying sexualities enrolled in the school. So, the question remains, "whose" family is the school talking about; what "kind" of family are they training the girls to be a part of? And who gets left behind in this endeavor?

School Rules and Policies

School rules can provide a way for the administration to manage students and their activities such that the institution can accomplish its educational goals in a safe and fulfilling

manner. However, in practice, school rules can become arbitrary and unreasonable. They can be restrictive, ambiguous, unexplained and developed without student participation and are often enforced in a legalistic manner rather than in an educational way (Thornberg, 2008). In such cases, they defeat their purpose of creating a holistic learning environment for students. Therefore, it is critical that school rules be written with clear intentions. The pedagogical point and rationality of school rules should be visible to the students for them to understand and adhere to those rules (Thornberg, 2008).

Given this context, let us analyze this section of the Convent's rulebook (Image 4):



X STRICTLY FORBIDDEN IN THE SCHOOL PREMISES

a. Henna on hands
b. Application of Kohl (kajal), or any other eye makeup.
c. Hair Colour/ streaks
d. Coloured lip Balm / gloss
e. Ornaments and Jewelery
f. Mobiles, Cameras, I-pods (Gadgets electronic in nature)
g. Correction Fluid (Whitner)
h. Printed matter of an objectionable nature.
i. Crackers, explosive colours and other dangerous material.
j. Drugs and alcohol

21

(Image 4. Convent rulebook; section on "Strictly forbidden items in the School Premises".)

Apart from rules i. and j.; it is not immediately clear why the other items are prohibited on the school premises; the rationality for these rules needs to be deciphered for us to be able to understand the true ideology behind the forbidding of these items. I want to focus specifically on rules a., b., c.,d., and e. because they all pertain to "forbidden" items that are concerned with

young women's personal appearance. What's interesting is that not only are these specific items extremely personal to an individual's physical person, some of them are also have cultural references. Which is why, these rules can be problematic on two fronts.

First, henna and jewelry are often signifiers of faith and culture in Indian society. Henna tattoos on the hand are applied during Indian weddings in both Hindu and Muslim faiths. Henna tattoos are temporary and fade after a few weeks, they're harmless and it's safe to assume they would not disrupt the discipline or the studies of other students. As for jewelry, several Indian faiths like Sikhism and Islam have requirements for individuals to wear bangles or necklaces. Some Hindu faiths also have a requirement for individuals to wear necklaces or rings. While there is a possibility that the intention is to maintain a secular school environment, it's also critical to note that the Indian constitution does not ban the wearing of religious symbols in any school or workplace. Moreover, the school in itself is very obviously and prominently Catholic, with religious symbols scattered throughout the premises and embedded in the school philosophy. But the use of religious symbols by the many religious groups that have coexisted in India has been normalized in social institutions and in society in general. However, the intent of missionary schools with their roots during the colonial era, remain 'colonial' or that of 'civilizing' young women and men(Sengupta, 2011).

Secondly, it may be that the school only forbids these items for cosmetic reasons; this may not entirely be the case because of participants' narratives of being punished or suspended from school for wearing henna, but we may assume for the purpose of this section that it is so. Even in this scenario; the rules may be considered arbitrary and reflective of the school's (and also society's) perception of femininity or performance of the female gender as somehow "frivolous"; as something that doesn't belong in the serious endeavors of education and

academic excellence (Heyward, 1995). To be taken seriously, it appears, girls need to devoid their person of femininity. However; this is also contradictory to the Convent's aims to create young "ladies" with feminine virtues. It appears there are some feminine "virtues" like piety, discipline and modesty that are prized above other aspects of femininity; especially those related to physical "vanity" or to sexual expression. If the intent of the Convent is to help young women leave behind the trappings of femininity, then this should be exemplified in their school vision and their expressed goals as well. Additionally, if the goal is to stop conforming to feminine performance, then it should be so for all feminine performances, not just the ones related to appearances and "worldliness". Ideally, the girls would be encouraged to present themselves however they wish without being "formed" into "pious ladies" with a list of gracious behavioral accomplishments. By just singling out some aspects of femininity (makeup, clothes, etc.) as deviant while still holding on to other more subtle, yet pervasive aspects (like meekness, modesty, virginity), the Convent isn't challenging the dominant ideology; it is choosing to perpetuate one part of it more prominently.

While banning makeup for young women or policing their dress is not specific to Catholic schools or to schools in India- Heyward, Mensinger and Allan found similar stories in the single-sex schools they'd researched - the prevalence of a particular type of rule does not grant it legitimacy. Dictating women's appearance and controlling their self-expression through rules and regulations implies that the school has a right over an individual's physical person. During my interviews, I found that the Convent went as far as to dictate the girls' hairstyle, their hair color, the cut of their clothes and even, in some narrative accounts, the color of their underwear. Dictating such rigid rules on women's appearance is only reinforcing the same societal narrative that leads to victim-blaming and to the control of women's lives. It implies that

by the very nature of their dress and their appearance, women invite ridicule and assault. This is pretty insidious on its own but in the context of young women who are consistently being policed by society at large, this is also giving them the message that people with authority can dictate even the most intimate parts of your personal self if they so wish and if you protest, you could be punished.

I also think it is essential that we look at forbidden item h. The rulebook does not specify what it means by "Printed material of an objectionable nature". This vaguely defined construction of the rule gives the school the leeway to enforce the rules on a case basis. It also means that different individuals holding authority at different points of time will interpret the rules however they see fit. The word "objectionable" in the given context - that of a conservative society that sends its girls to an equally conservative school in order to protect them - could mean anything that flouts the dominant ideology of what women are permitted to read. This could include literature that informs young women that their sexuality is not sinful, that they do always not have to be submissive and gracious, or that they do not need to adhere to numerous rules to prove their worth and respectability.

The vaguely defined concept of "objectionable" also appears in other parts of the rulebook. Let us look at the second section from the rulebook that I'm particularly interested in:

"Students are responsible to school authorities for their conduct not only in the school but for ***their general behavior outside****. Any report or* ***observed objectionable conduct*** *outside the school on part of the pupils will make them liable to disciplinary action.* ***It is expected that through their good behavior they must enhance the prestige of the school****."*

This rule is indicative of the behavioral standards for young women stated in the school's vision and mission. Which means that the acceptable behavior outside school premises would also require young women to be "pious" and "disciplined" and to act like "young ladies". But we've already found that these are rather subjective statements and given the context of the school and societal expectations of womanhood, it means that the acceptable behavior would entail a certain degree of meekness and severity on the part of young girls. However, it is also critical to note that they're talking about "reported" or "observed" behavior and the individual who does the observing and reporting becomes essential in this situation. An individual could observe and incorrectly interpret a situation as being "unladylike" or "objectionable" and report it to the school as such. In fact, in the later section wherein I analyze my interviews with young women from the school - I find that certain instances like this have happened. There is also great ambiguity in the term "objectionable" because it is subjective to the person receiving the news. An authority figure may consider a certain report to be objectionable while another may not consider it to be worthy of being reported at all. How are students to know what is objectionable and acceptable outside the school premises? And do schools have the right to impose such authority on student's personal lives?

Students have lives and activities beyond the purview of the school's authority that could account for different types of behaviors; there could be various situations that require young women to present a set of behaviors that isn't necessarily what the school would promote. Demanding conformity from young women to a prescribed set of behavior in all spheres of life seems like an unfair burden. Moreover, it reinforces the same values that the dominant ideology prescribes; that women need to be on consistent watch and that they need to be extremely conscious of not only how they present themselves but also how they reflect on the people or

institutions that they're related to (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). In this context, the school's "prestige" is not very different from a family's "honor"; in both cases, the women involved are consistently expected to mold their behavior to uphold or enhance someone else's image.

Analysis of Interviews

In this section, I analyzed the primary themes that emerged from my interview of eight former students of the Convent. Each theme contains excerpts from different interviews talking various aspects of a similar topic. The narrative excerpts were analyzed using the Narrative Feminist Approach method and keeping in mind the theoretical background around "women's language" as given by Lakoff.

The cultural significance of convent schools

Why do Indian parents like to send their girls to convent schools in India? We've already looked at the historical significance of convents but if we're going to delve into women's concerns and problems, we must look at their lived experiences too (Heather & Christiana, 2017). The first emergent aspect in this theme was that for several parents, convents were the best available options for their daughters. Karla was one of the participants who had transferred to the Convent from another Christian girls' school halfway through high school and she talked in detail about why her parents chose to consistently keep her in the same type of school:

"When we moved from Shillong to Delhi…see, there was a convent in Shillong, my hometown, that had a great reputation and when we came here, we came with an impression of that school. Plus, on my dad's salary, it (convents) was the only good school that really fit our budget. Furthermore, we're Christian. My parents thought it would be good because in a convent - I'd be able to go for bible class. They thought it would be a good transition for me in a new city. And

then, when I moved to a second convent school in 11th grade; I wanted to upgrade to a better school and a coed experience. So, we searched but the fees of those co-ed schools were very high… In another school we considered… they gave us a form asking my parents if they could give more time and money to the school…So in the end, I just wound up going to this Convent. It was affordable, you know. It wasn't the best option- but it was good enough."- Karla

Karla's account encompasses most of the reasons why parents in India love convents; cost, quality, and reputation. Convent schools offer quality academic experience at a relatively more affordable price; which allows girls from various social and economic backgrounds to enter this framework. So much has already been established by the school literature in this case, where the Convent website itself asserts that it offers educational opportunities "especially to the less privileged". In a country where a majority of the population is extremely disadvantaged and where the education of boys is prioritized over that of girls in face of scarcity, convents can offer parents a boon. They (the parents) can educate their girls and perhaps see them become financially independent at an affordable cost. However, class and economic capacity had other roles to play in the participants' experiences at school. Significantly, some of the participants noted, how you fared in school often depended upon what your family was like and who your parents were. Affluent and upper-class parents were more likely to defend their kids against what they perceived as unfair punishment as compared to parents who weren't as advantaged. This is an avenue that we'll cover in more detail in a later section.

Parents from various social and economic backgrounds were also more likely to send their girls to the Convent because of the "reputation" factor. The standing reputation of convent schools in general is very evident in what Karla describes about moving cities; the reputation of *another* convent school, in *another* city was a good enough recommendation for *this* Convent in

Delhi. And what is this "reputation"? The most significant claim that the Convent makes on its website and which research shows several single-sex schools and convents make, is turning young women in "ladies". This, I argue, is primarily concerned with molding women's behavior.

"When you think about a convent school, the kind of curriculum they follow and the kind of leadership you have- they really teach you to be disciplined. Right from the start. You know? They teach you these values, they teach you to listen to your elders, to respect them…and you have to be in a society where people are looking at you constantly. So, you have to always be aware of your surroundings."- Sharon

When Sharon talks about values; she talks about things like obedience and respect for elders. And while these are generally positive values to inculcate in a young person, it is also important to put this in context. For young women in India, it is essential that they respond to authority with acquiescence and subservience (Lau Ee Jia, 2003). Young girls are taught to be submissive and non-argumentative and that is generally the "trick" for them to be able to live a good life, escape criticism, and have successful marriages and relationships with in-laws (Lau Ee Jia, 2003). Therefore, it shouldn't be surprising that one of the values the school would emphasize is "listening to elders". However, who are the "elders"? For a teenage girl, this could be anyone in a position of authority; including older men and women outside the family and the school. Where do the girls draw a line at whom to respect and adhere to? And how do they learn to draw that line? Analysis in later sections of the paper shows that very often these young women ended up making several harmful adjustments for abusive people who took up authority in their lives.

Another "value" that Sharon points out is this ability to present yourself, to modify your behavior for the society you live in. She expresses this point in an interesting phrase: "people are

looking at you constantly". Perhaps unknowingly, she's summarized one of the major challenges Indian women face; they're consistently being scrutinized and judged for how they act and how they present themselves. More significantly, they must constantly be aware of this scrutiny and "perform" for the benefit of the people observing to prevent censure and criticism. What Sharon has implied is that the Convent trains young women to adhere to societal behavior standards and pass muster under scrutiny.

Finally, the most common reason why participant's thought their parents sent them to the Convent was related to English speaking skills that the school was reputed to impart. Ina, a transfer from a co-ed institution, made the following point:

"My cousins went to this Convent. And we'd always heard good things about it and it just seemed like the right choice. And for my parents to learn English - to be fluent in English - a convent school was the best choice."- Ina

Ina's account signifies how English language and its association with class plays a critical role in Indian society. A well-educated person, a refined (code for upper-class and most commonly upper-caste) person, is someone who knows how to speak clean, almost accent-less English with perfect grammar. The influence of English on Indian society is pervasive and can impact people's careers and by extension, their ability to climb the social and economic ladder (Chakraborty & Bakshi, 2016). When you speak "good" English, you set yourself apart as a sophisticated and educated person who is worthy of jobs and promotions and respect. In fact, English speaking skills also add to a girl's social profile and her "eligibility" and "marriageability".

The Convent's capacity to impart "good" English language skills needs to be looked at against the context of convents being a colonial legacy. In fact, the premium on English as a language in India is itself a colonial legacy. During the British occupation, Indians who managed to acquire an English education were the "few good ones" who'd risen above their "savage" background. This class of Indians was able to acquire high-paying positions working with the British Government and reaped the social and economic benefits of the same (Chakraborty & Bakshi, 2016). This conflation of sophistication and superiority to English speaking has permeated Indian society thoroughly and also reflects in the choices that parents make for their children. One of these includes sending them to Convent schools where they will be thoroughly trained in a skill that improves the social and professional chances to succeed.

Controlling women's behavior

Now that we've established a few reasons why Indian parents send their girls to convent schools, it is critical that we look at how the school accomplished the goals it promised the parents. One of the most significant goals was related to the girls' behavior modification; of turning them into pious, disciplined, and moral young women as per society's and the Convent's standards. There were a few prominent strategies for behavior control and modification; here I will focus on two, namely- shaming and surveillance.

In various situations, the participants recounted, they found they were made to feel like a "bad" person for engaging in a certain activity, expressing a viewpoint, or for asking for help. Karla, for instance, mentioned that the school didn't have a cafeteria and students were expected to bring their own lunch. She spoke of her father's death while she was only sixteen and the challenges her family faced. Her mother, newly widowed, burdened with the care of Karla and her siblings, and understandably depressed was unable to regularly wake up in time to prepare

her daughter's lunch bag. As Karla struggled to arrange her own lunch bag every day at six in the morning, she suddenly realized that she would not have had to worry about this in her previous school where there was a cafeteria offering affordable meals and snacks for students and teachers. When Karla spoke to the Principal of the Convent about considering setting up a small cafeteria, the Principal said that some girls couldn't afford cafeteria food and thus having a cafeteria would be unfair to those children.

'She made me feel really guilty, she said, 'You'll encourage income disparities.' But what's funny is that every other month, we would have a tuck shop; where the school would order in vast amounts of snack food from a local restaurant and resell it to the students at almost double the price to raise money for charity. How was this any different? If anything, the tuck-shop cost more than the regular cafeteria from the previous school I went to.'- Karla

Refusing to have a cafeteria on school premises for reasons of compassion for underprivileged students is an understandable, if one dimensional, approach to being humanistic and inclusive. However, Karla's point is relevant, if income disparities and making underprivileged children feel included and equal is the intention, having a monthly tuck-shop with inflated prices doesn't seem consistent with that intention. Perhaps, the school - which runs on low fees and donations to remain affordable - doesn't have the funds to account for the development of a cafeteria space. But Indian private school cafeterias are often profit-oriented and add to school revenue (Rathi, Riddell, & Worsley, 2018) through rent and commission. Moreover, the school's brother school (the same order runs a separate school for boys at another location) does have a cafeteria. Perhaps the Convent truly doesn't want to highlight income disparities which is also underlined in their policies forbidding students from bringing any kind of expensive items to school or wearing any ostentatious jewelry or watches. However, most

students have access to media, the internet, and to the outside world where they can observe and be cognizant of income disparities. Moreover, a student's ability to get better (and regular) lunches is itself indicative of their higher-income families; being able to bring filling and nutritious meals to school on a daily basis is a privilege. Karla, in this context, isn't a holder of privilege but someone who needs extra help in a challenging situation, therefore, the response to her request erases her struggles completely. When asked about it, the Principal chooses to frame it as "*You*" the student "will encourage income disparities"; where she places the (quite frankly, large) burden of income disparity anxieties on a student asking a question based on her own family restrictions and problems. Why did the Principal phrase her response in a way that made Karla or any other student asking for a cafeteria the problem? And why was it acceptable to charge students double the cost price for snacks in a tuck shop for external charity but not provide a fairly-priced cafeteria to provide their own students with meals? It may be interpreted that the tuck shop was held to raise money for another group of people and Karla was asking something for her *own* benefit. And for a young woman to ask for something for herself is considered selfish, which women aren't often allowed to be. This also seemed to be the case when it came to situations the girls couldn't really control, like their bodily functions and illnesses.

'I used to have really bad periods. So-I was on my first day and I got really sick and uh- I was feeling really nauseous and everything…so I wanted to go home. So, I went to the reception (office) *and told them…they told me I should ask the Principal. I went to the Principal and I told her - I really wanna go home, I'm not feeling well. And she was very condescending about it, she told me that - for some reason…okay - so my cousin sister who had previously gone to this school, was dyslexic and she didn't have very good marks - and so when I went to the Principal*

to tell her I wanted to go home she said, 'You know your sister was also not very good at studies.' I found that really weird…why would you bring that up when I just wanna go home because I'm not feeling well?' - Ina

Once again, the Principal changes the conversation to turn it into an irresponsibility on the student's part. She implies that Ina's desire to go home was akin to her neglecting her studies and goes as far as to reference the experiences of a relative; essentially blaming both Ina and her cousin for their academic performance. It seems unfair but this tendency to shift the burden of academic performance entirely on a student isn't unique to this story and something that we will analyze more closely in another section. Here, it is essential that we focus on how guilt was utilized to stop Ina from asking for something the Principal wasn't willing to provide, i.e., a pass to go home early. It is possible that the Principal rejected Ina's request because she suspected the student may be pretending to be sick based on some past experiences, but by choosing to bring in her academic performance, she made the issue about Ina and her supposed transgressions. She also put Ina in a position where she felt like she was being a "bad" student for asking to leave when she was sick and that her academic performance was an outcome of situations like these. Additionally, this interaction is also a small instance of how often girls' and women's pain, especially, period-related pain is taken non-seriously. The general assumption is that menstrual issues aren't as bad as the girls are describing them to be or that they can be easily powered through if the girls are strong enough. This perception puts several young women at great health risk and also invalidates women's experiences. It equates women's strength and their "goodness" with their ability to endure pain without complaint.

In both Ina and Karla's situation, school authorities seemed to shame students for asking something for themselves, essentially, a kind of relief for a discomfort or a challenge. Both asked

for support and in some terms made themselves an "inconvenience"; which for a woman, is an unacceptable thing to be. In the dominant ideology, women exist to ease the pain of the people around them without making any complaints about their own pain and suffering. "Suffering silently" for an Indian woman is a virtue (Lau Ee Jia, 2003) and attempting to seek relief from the pain is a "nuisance". This practice isn't confined here, we see various versions of this in professional spheres as well, where women's needs, like maternity leaves, act as "inconveniences" to the usually "smooth-running" corporate machine (Schein, 2007). From Lakoff's perspective, this may even be a type of "silencing", where the words they uttered and the things they asked for were heard very differently by the Principal (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004). In some ways, the Principal was preparing Ina and Karla for similar discourses that they would face later in life in workplaces and in relationships when they ask for help or support as women only to be rejected. Ideally, however, it would have been beneficial for the Principal to encourage these women to take up space and ask for things they need. Unless we can make it normal for women to ask for, or even demand the things they want and need, they'll always be suffering in silence.

Shame was also used to establish a standard of behavior indirectly; that is, not just by shaming a person in exclusivity but doing so in front of an audience in order to send implicit messages about expected behavior to the audience. This practice is often referred to as "making an example" of someone; however, this often had a long-lasting and detrimental effect on the girls' self-confidence and their perception of other girls.

"They would make fun of girls who got their eyebrows done. Like, we're all so insecure and conscious about our appearance at that age and teachers would just pick at the girls who…you

know…just got their eyebrows threaded or their arms waxed. And we would look at these things and decide that girls who did that are shallow or stupid."- Sammy

Mensinger and Heyward note that often teachers of single-sex schools ended up transferring harmful stereotypes and beliefs on their students and that teacher orientation and training was extremely necessary if a school was to achieve its goal of building up young women to be confident and strong. In the case of this Convent, we'll see several instances of teachers passing on their own internal biases about femininity and women's role in society(Heyward, 1995). This is perhaps a small example by comparison, but it is a distressing one. The teachers sent an implicit message to Sammy and her classmates; that there was an acceptable way of being, of practicing femininity and then there was the "vain" or "shallow" way which needed to be laughed out of practice. Several other participants also noted that they often felt shallow or "wrong" for thinking of themselves as beautiful or for engaging in feminine practices.

This sets a behavior expectation that the girls are required to follow which isn't necessarily a part of the school's explicit rules and regulations but is more embedded in the interactions with teachers and other authority members. By shaming someone for a perceived deviance, the teachers manage not only to control the girl they're targeting but also the rest of the class; girls aren't just shamed directly for things they actively participate in but also indirectly for things they may potentially do. However, and this has been noted earlier, women get exactly the opposite message about being feminine from outside the school boundaries. They're expected to shave and fix their eyebrows and conduct various grooming activities to look "presentable" (Allan, 2009; (Mensinger, 2001). These diametrically opposed expectations of womanhood are likely to have a negative impact on adolescent young women attempting to establish a sense of identity and to fit in with the world around them. It is remarkable that young

women who feel compelled to meet the rigid beauty standards of the world are then ridiculed for trying instead of being made to feel comfortable in their appearance or being educated about the problems of the media construction of beauty. Shaming young girls, and teaching them to shame one another, will not change the global system that creates unrealistic standards for women, it needs to be addressed by helping adolescents process their insecurities.

Sharon's account in the last section of the analysis mentioned that the Convent would train young women to learn how to behave in a society where "everyone was looking at them". One of the ways it was able to do so was by keeping the girls under rigid surveillance. Based on my interviews, it appeared that the girls' actions and behaviors were being analyzed both inside school and out. Most participants spoke about how their online presence was being surveilled by the school authorities, teachers, and even fellow students who would sometimes "out" each other for participating in behavior that the school would deem as "incorrect".

"Some nuns made fake social media accounts and they were stalking young girls. I never experienced it myself but that's what I heard. They would stalk you and then expose you to your parents. They would punish you for things you posted online if they thought that it was inappropriate- like if you posted pictures partying or hanging out with boys or wearing something."- Reyna

Online surveillance of the students' lives outside the school premises is indicative of how far the Convent is willing to go to monitor the girls' behavior. Once again, the demonstration of hauling up a student for a picture sends a clear message to all the other students; that they're being watched and that they're not allowed to transgress the school's rules and policies even outside the campus. It's also critical to note *what* the students are being punished for. While it is disturbing that any school would surveil students this way, the surveillance in the Convent is

concerned with women's behavior. They weren't being punished for just *any* behavior but for behavior that was considered wrong for a good girl to engage in- not just by the Convent's standards but by society's at large. Which is why the ultimate punishment for the girls here was being "exposed" to their parents. In this way, the girls were punished both at home and in school and the message they received from both ends was that they needed to stop wearing certain clothes, stop going to certain places and meeting with people from the opposite sex if they are to prove their worth as "good" girls.

Another prominent form of surveillance included "checking" the students' person and their belongings for contraband or "forbidden items". Every participant in the study remembered being frisked or their belongings being perused by teachers or by students who were dispatched to do so.

"They used to check our bags and sometimes even our shorts or our bras for things that we weren't allowed to bring to school. Like mostly phones and everything- but sometimes they confiscated any personal notes or letters, money, kajal or lip gloss. They even used to check to see if the shorts we wore beneath our skirts or the bras we wore were the right color." – Sammy

It could be perhaps understandable that the Convent would want to enforce its rules regarding forbidden items on the school premises. Confiscating phones and electronics if they're being used on campus and disrupting the academic environment or the learning experience would be a rational rule (Thornberg, 2008). However, diving into student's personal possessions, reading their private notes and confiscating items that aren't actively disrupting the class seem punitive. More alarmingly, checking a students' physical person is a disturbing way of enforcing authority upon on them; it teaches young women that people with authority are permitted to violate their personal space. We tend to think of "consent" primarily in sex-related terms, but

these stories are instances of consent violation. None of these girls were comfortable with their personal belongings, their physical self, and their online accounts being violated, and they were coerced into giving others access to their private spaces. There was never any question of them refusing consent in these scenarios. Rejecting this violation would have meant punishment by their parents and the school authorities. In a country where women already receive explicit and implicit messages that they belong to the people around them and that those people can do whatever they please with them, this is a denigrating process; it sets up a standard of behavior expectation where girls are expected to silently accept the transgressions of their personal space for "their own benefit" and their inability to do so is the evidence of their "wrongdoing".

Of course, shame and surveillance often go hand in hand. Girls are consistently being watched for behavioral transgressions and one of the ways to punish those transgressions is to humiliate them for it. This is true for society at large, not just the Convent. However, I argue that the Convent, with its direct authority on these girls' lives had real and more tangible effects on their emotional and sometimes, physical, well-being. It is critical to start arguing this point by acknowledging that not all girls responded to heavy surveillance and demoralizing punishments by suppressing themselves and following the rules as dictated. Several parents sent their girls to convents precisely so that they wouldn't be in the company of boys (Doggett, 2005) (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005) and the Convent was more than willing to enforce these rules through its own initiatives and interventions. In response, girls started keeping secrets about where they were going, whom they were speaking to and how they met new people.

'We had guy friends, but we kept it a secret because if we ever talked about them, obviously the first question our parents would ask is- how did you end up meeting this boy? Had we been in a co-ed school, we could have been more free about it and we wouldn't have had to step out of the

school to make guy friends. In a co-ed school- you know who your guy friends are. Your parents know who they are. The way we met boys- we could never really be sure about them.'- Nina

What Nina spoke of was resonated by some other participants too, who expressed that they often met boys in their neighborhoods, in tuition classes and online. Most of these friendships were developed in secret, where girls lied to their parents about where they were going and with whom; thus, putting themselves in vulnerable situations and trusting boys and men they may not know very well. While the parents' primary intention is to protect girls; in such a scenario it would be impossible for them to intervene or assist their daughters if needed simply because they're unaware of the realities of their children's lives. For many girls, this was a pattern that would follow them their whole lives.

'Even now, I don't tell my parents about my male friends. My dad is very possessive. I lie about where I go and who I'm meeting with and I'm in my twenties.' -Nina

But while Nina still has to twist the truth and lie to her father about her company in her twenties, she expressed a great relief at not being in school anymore because back then, she felt like she was under extreme scrutiny at school. As she attempted to negotiate some freedom for herself in different ways, she risked being caught and punished severely both at home and in school. This fear of punishment, she claims, led her to do desperate things in order to live the life she wanted.

'You start trying things that you would do…a way out. My way out was that… through my friends I used to have a secret phone. And my friends used to help me with (to get) the phone and with the sim. And in school, of course you're not allowed to carry a phone. There were enough times when you had these surprise checks and you'd be checked every Friday or Monday. My

best friend was the school leader, so I didn't ever get… busted… but then came the time when I was actually caught. Because some prefect girl who didn't like me, she knew I had a phone. She went ahead and complained about me. And things went really, really ugly. My parents were called in school and my Principal who I never liked because she was too strict had gotten involved, my teachers were involved. And with the phone came all the people that I used to talk to through that phone. It became uncomfortable.'- Nina

Nina describes the lengths she went to talk to her then boyfriend- a secret phone that she took with her to school to hide it from her parents. It's notable that we see two types of peer interaction here; of the best friend who essentially protects Nina from getting "busted" and a nemesis who tells on her. Both these peers knew that the consequences of Nina getting caught and took their steps accordingly. The nemesis chose to reveal Nina's secret because she knew the *power* of the secret. And predictably, when Nina was caught, she was subject to punishment by her parents and her Principal but also humiliation by all the teachers who gathered around to look through her phone and all the people she used to talk to.

'Everyone knew my secret. Everything got transferred back home too- I was grounded. When I was caught, my history teacher of the time went- and I'll never forget it- "Oh this is Nina's phone- things are about to get really interesting."'-Nina

It can be perhaps justified to penalize Nina for flouting school rules or to ground her for keeping secret phones acquired through different means. However, humiliating her and invading her privacy to read her personal texts to a partner was a traumatic experience as a sixteen-year-old and it troubled her enough to remember it vividly and with great anger even today. More importantly, it did nothing to ensure that she wouldn't continue keeping more and more secrets in increasingly dangerous ways. As a female centric institute seeking to provide Indian women

with the means to change their socio-cultural status, the Convent should have been focused on creating a culture where girls do not have to be afraid to have male friends and given them the tools to talk about those with their parents. Instead, by reinforcing the idea that girls who date or girls who even interact with men outside family circles are morally suspect, the Convent in only perpetuating the dominant culture where young women are to remain secluded from men in order to retain their purity and that their transgression of seclusion lines requires harsh and humiliating punishment to prevent any further instances. More significantly, in almost every story, the participants explained that their experiences and punishments only pushed them to keep deeper, darker secrets because they feared the reactions and anger of the adults around them. Predictably, if the girls decided to associate with men and boys they met through secretive means and if those associations turned out to be unfavorable, then they were less likely to reveal their distresses to their parents or guardians because they feared the punishment they would face for being "out with a boy".

These stories of humiliation repeat themselves across different narratives.

'Three of my friends were once randomly called into the Principal's office because they were labelled as the "problem kids" or whatever and they made them log in to their Facebook accounts and they (the principal) went through the texts my friends had exchanged with-whoever. And then they called their parents on that account. Every time a phone was confiscated, they made the student unlock the phone and they went through their entire gallery.'- Reyna

Teacher- student relationships driven by negative interactions have a profound effect on how students perceive school. Teachers are responsible for students' learning but they also have a certain degree of power and authority over their lives and can shape their experiences and

attitude for school with the way they treat them (Uitto, 2011). Research conducted on school memories also revealed that negative memories of teachers have great power and follow people's perceptions of schooling well into their adulthood (Uitto, 2011). It is, therefore, the responsibility of teachers and authorities to manage issues of broken rules in rational and educative ways that can help students learn to correct their wrongdoing instead of sending them off feeling beaten down and humiliated. Yet the pattern that emerged from my interviews was that of angry and painful memories; the feeling of being embarrassed or shamed in front of peers, parents and the entire staff. Forcefully acquiring access to a person's social media to monitor their lives and find things to punish them for is also a tactic that is prevalent in abusive relationships (Fraser, 2008). In these situations, too, the abuser claims to be conducting the surveillance and the subsequent punishment for the "benefit" of the victim. The victims in this relationship feel compelled to walk around eggshells and to curtail their behavior in order to "prevent" the abuse. However, in most abusive relationships, the goalposts for what counts as "objectionable" are constantly moving and there is no possible way for the victim to win. If women completely limit their social lives and online lives and never talk to men outside their family again, patriarchy will find other, more arbitrary, issues with their behavior.

'When I was in eleventh (grade), CCTV cameras were put up all around the school. And the Principal was always looking at what people were doing, where they were going or if they were walking outside for too long or going inside their classes. And they also had cameras facing outside the school- like the road. She (the principal) used to keep watch on where you go after you leave. There were all those rules about not having ice cream from the ice cream cart outside the school boundaries. There was one time- and I remember because it created so much chaos in my life - it was a Friday and it was those holidays before Diwali. I remember I was meeting a

friend, and this is eleventh grade, okay? So, I'm sixteen or seventeen and I was meeting a friend outside of school and this is a male friend… whatever. We were standing in front of a church (near the school) because we were trying to get him an auto (autorickshaw) to go home and the Principal saw me - and this is an off day. I'm not wearing my school uniform; I'm not doing anything that she might think is illegal or dangerous for my life. And then I go back home, I didn't realize she'd seen us. And then on Monday, I get called to the Principal's office over the intercom and I go and there's my father sitting there. She tells him that I was speaking to a guy - on an off day! And she was also really racist about it- she said 'it was black boy and you know in Delhi, they sell drugs.'- Reyna

The rule that allows school authorities to punish students for objectionable behavior anytime outside of the school premises gives an incredible amount of power to people who are not direct parental or guardian figures for the girls. However, given their authoritative role as an institution, anything they say is automatically seen as serious and justified. The fact that the principal invited Reyna's father and told him a fear mongering story of her hanging out with someone "unsavory" in certain respects means that Reyna's father has impetus to believe the Principal over Reyna. Her misconstrued opinion becomes his opinion and Reyna has very little power to change that because in this interaction, she doesn't hold as much power as the adults in the room, especially those in authority positions. Additionally, calling her father without notifying Reyna, based on a distant perception of who she was with and why she was there, was also careless. It may not be the case with Reyna, but the school authorities are unlikely to know what a student's home environment is like and how their parents may react to a news like that. In a country where young women have been killed by their family members for engaging in "dishonorable" acts, exposing them to their family like this could be very dangerous. And for a

young girl, it would be hard to understand why she was being punished this way for something relatively benign. She would only adopt the mindset that she needed to become more secretive and more alienated and isolated in order to protect herself from further punishments - which is what most of the participants did. They continued to live their lives and meet their friends in secret; they wore different clothes at home and changed them out of sight of their parents and teachers; and they made fake social media personas. While all of these were brave and persistent acts of resistance on the part of these girls, they were still a secret, because the cost of doing so openly was so high for them. How can the Convent claim to be an institution looking to equalize men and women when they reinforce the culture that forces women to go into hiding about their true identities? How are young women going to learn to be free and fearless if they are taught from adolescence to live with surveillance and to adhere to rules they may not agree with?

Managing female sexuality

Indian society has deep anxieties about female sexuality; there is a common conception that women's sexual agency needs to be curbed lest they get "out of control" and bring shame to women's family and community (Knust, Lakoff, & Collier, 2005). One of the prominent techniques of managing or controlling female sexuality is by exerting control on the female form itself. Sexual objectification is the practice of isolating someone's "sexual parts or sexual functions" from the rest of their personality or are taken as indicative of the rest of their personality (Jeffreys, 2005). More significantly, objectification teaches women to think of their bodies as a sexual thing separate of themselves. Women's bodies are rampantly sexualized, and the mere visibility and presence of the female body is often painted as an invitation for harassment and assault. Therefore, India, like most patriarchal societies, has strict expectations from women to cover their "forms" in order to "prevent" their own sexualization and assault.

This mindset often finds legitimacy in professional and educational spaces in the form of uniform laws. The Convent, it appears, is no different. Each participant talked about how the school used to have the standard uniform of shirt and skirt sets; a complete white set for the summer months and a grey and cream set for the winter. There were rules about the length of the skirts, which were apparently flouted enough times for the school to eventually change the uniforms. The new uniforms were a set of white *kurta pajamas*, a style of Indian dresswear with a long, loose tunic and loose drawstring pants - traditionally worn by men.

"It was a loose thing - it wasn't - it didn't even look flattering. I remember people used to get scolded if their kurtas were fitted or anything. They were asked to change them or get new ones. It was like - you couldn't see the silhouette of your own body; it was just loosely hanging on you… It was like- your body should be hidden. That, if you wear a tight fitted kurta, your breasts will be visible, your stomach and all that - the silhouette will come out, right? I felt like it was oddly sexualized. I don't think sexual means a fitted kurta but for them it was.'- Ina

'One thing that still comes to my mind is why were our uniforms were even changed…Until the tenth grade, we used to wear skirts and obviously, what do you expect in a girl's school?

...I had a feeling, when we shifted to kurta pajama…all we could think was-because we wear a skirt too short, is why we are being made to change the uniform. That was really, really pathetic. Because you think that a girl - or possibly the school management thinking that our girls - while they grow, they should wear something that should cover their legs while they're going home? I think that thinking is really toxic.' -Nina

Nina calls the philosophy driving the uniform change "toxic"; she recognizes that there may be an implicit message behind school's uniform policies and that they're prescribing a

change in the uniform because they want the girls to be covered or shielded from men's eyes outside the school boundaries. It's significant that she makes the distinction "while they're going home", clearly implying that the uniform isn't just for the purpose of the school but for the girls' image outside the school. This is the same rhetoric that we see in Indian society at large, where wearing "revealing" clothes makes a woman morally vacant or promiscuous and where women who wear such clothes are likely to be "inviting" sexual assault. By changing the uniform so that girls can no longer shorten their skirts and "reveal" themselves to the outside world, the school is only perpetuating the same ideological discourse that places the burden of assault on women.

'The rules were so stringent because they wanted… even after school when you go out, your skirt should be below your knee so that no one else can see you, you know, in other ways.' – Sharon

Sharon also comments that the school wanted to use the uniform to shield the girls from the outside world's gaze. Possibly, they wanted to prevent young girls from being sexualized when they stepped outside the gated school building. But this only breeds the misconception that the safety of women depends on how they dress in public. Sexual harassment and assault happen regardless of how women are dressed and that in several cases, it happens within the home sphere or in school and workplaces; not necessarily "outside". Moreover, it also places the burden on women to prevent their own assault or molestation instead of challenging sociological norms and practices that foster sexual violence and misogyny. In this way, the Convent fails to prepare young women to question the issue at its core and only hands them the tools to perpetuate the current systemic problems. Instead of educating girls about the problems of misogyny and patriarchy, it is teaching girls to think of sexual objectification and violence on a "personal prevention basis" where women are encouraged to take steps to protect themselves while othering women who supposedly "fail" to take the same steps (i.e. dressing modestly, not

going out at night). This keeps the overarching power of misogyny ongoing, where women are taught to monitor themselves to be safe instead of being trained to recognize the larger pattern of patriarchal violence and to challenge them as a collective.

The second most prominent way to establish control over the girls' sexuality was by problematizing their interactions with the opposite sex. Ina described her experiences while working as a prefect during an inter-school music competition that invited students from other schools from the city to participate. Girls from the Convent were not allowed to interact with kids from other schools and most of them weren't even allowed to watch the performances or participate as contestants. Generally, the purpose of inter-school competitions is to create interactions among students from different places and schools. However, the Convent functioned like a passive host with the students from other schools using the premises as an arena with little to no interaction with the hosting students. As a prefect, Ina was one of the small minority of students who were allowed to be around the competitors but only for the purpose of helping them navigate the buildings and setting up their equipment. She recalled that a teacher pulled her out of her duties to ask her to clip her bangs away from her face because she felt like Ina was attempting to "attract" boys by wearing her hair a certain way. Good Indian women aren't supposed to actively want to attract men or pursue them in anyway (Lau Ee Jia, 2003); they're supposed to remain pure and sexless, until their parents or another man decides that they should be engaging in sexuality. The Convent, driven by its own perceptions about female sexuality, also emphasized that young women of character did not attempt to date men or engage in any sexual behavior outside of marriage. Therefore, there were several rules and restrictions that attempted to prevent young girls from "attracting male attention".

'One of the sisters said, "if you see boys (at the competition)*, you'll go crazy". What was so bad about that? About being boy crazy? About just being a teenager? They always demonized our attraction to boys.'*- Sandy

Sandy used the word "demonize" and judging by the other participants' narratives, this "demonization" of female sexuality, of attraction to the opposite sex (or the same sex, for the matter) seemed to be a common experience for these young women. The participants felt like they would be penalized for any action that was remotely sexual or could be perceived as sexual and sometimes, they were even targeted for "appearing" sexual.

'Girls were judged on how they mature they appear to be. They would be judged by the teachers on their physical appearance and maturity. I think they targeted girls who did not look "innocent" enough. - Sammy

This is a remarkable statement because it captures something more than the judgement women face for dressing up or wearing makeup. This signifies that there can be physical attributes that can mark you as somehow "not innocent"; that there are physical traits and appearances that can be make you too "sexual". It is most likely that Sammy is referring to girls who develop breasts early or those who have a fuller figure or appear more "womanly" than their peers or those do not conform to the chaste imagery of a woman. Singling out women for their physical characteristics they cannot control and assigning moral judgement on those traits is problematic on several fronts. Treating them differently because of their body in a supposedly safe space for women is only going to fuel body dysmorphia in teenage girls. Body shaming and body surveillance also help create Objectified Body Consciousness in young women who are constantly bombarded by perceptions and expectations related to their physical form by the media and by the society at large. These young women inherit these expectations and begin to

consider their body as something to be observed and objectified (Knauss, Paxton, & Alsaker, 2008). Mensinger's study indicated they found greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorders in girls from single-sex schools because of the implicit messages the young women received about their female body being "wrong" or "too feminine" to be taken seriously (Mensinger, 2001). If we consider the Convent's missionary roots, we can even attribute this to the Victorian requirement for ideal ladies of good character to be "small, shy, and not very robust" in appearance (Strohmeier, 2013). Additionally, this also resonates with the social perceptions about "developed" or "mature" teenage girls who are often singled out by predators to be exploited and whose accounts of sexual assault are often overlooked because of their physical attributes. Associating physical maturity of a girl with her becoming a potentially "sexual" woman is a harmful ideology that is pervasive in India. It contributes to sexual violence against teenage girls and exploitation and grooming of adolescents and is also the rationale appropriated by people who force teenage girls into marriage because of their apparent "maturity".

To be a "good" girl you had to be moral, pious, disciplined, submissive, and studious and academically successful, along with several other things. To be a "bad" girl it seemed like all you had to do was appear to be engaging in sexual acts with a member of the opposite sex.

'Everything was about being a good person which is absolutely fine - obviously every school teaches you that, it's not only about, you know, being in a convent but… yeah the bar is high, you know. Like, you are supposed to perform according to…like we had these moral science classes and everything… and I don't have a problem with that, it was one part of the curriculum I really liked. But like the level of what they expected out of you was a lot- you had to be the good to each other; no boys; nothing. And I don't even know how this comes into place where in… if you have male friends then you are bad.' -Nina

As Nina reached the conclusion of the passage, her voice was laden with a sense of bewilderment, as though she couldn't make sense of her experience even now, almost a decade after having graduated. Her sentiments were replicated by other participants too. It was common knowledge that if you associated with boys, had male friends or worse, a boyfriend, then you were a "bad girl". It was implied that these girls were "bad" because they couldn't possibly be associated with boys without engaging in sexual acts. Predictably, the Convent's position was that premarital sex was taboo but more critically, women's curiosity or desire for sex was indicative of their "badness". This is a part of a social endeavor to limit and suppress female sexuality at a large scale. It is generally feared that women's sexuality and their sexual expression - if left unchecked - will imbalance the current social structures in place and therefore, "socializing influences such as parents, schools, peer groups, and legal forces have cooperated to alienate women from their own sexual desires and transform their (supposedly and relatively) sexually voracious appetites into a subdued remnant." (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002).

'For the longest time I believed I was an asexual because I wasn't very comfortable with sexuality. It's taken me years to realize that I'm demisexual. It could be the morality associated with sexuality that could have been at play. I felt guilty for fostering sexual thoughts. And I imbibed this while in school, I always saw sex as something that girls don't do. There was such a prevalent idea of "saving yourself". I mean, girls were outed for even talking to boys. There was such a fear around being seen as a sexual being.'- Anna

The control and demonization of female sexuality is not unique to the Convent and we cannot give it complete credit for Anna's experiences with her own sexuality. The sexual morality standards for women that condemn any sexual activity or curiosity on women's part while also permitting the same in men is a global double standard (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002).

School is just one of the social interventions that contribute to these restrictions. Therefore, we must look at this impact on women's sexuality at a larger scale, taking into account Indian society's relationship with sex. The inherent problem in Indian culture is the association of Indian womanhood with "purity" and this purity was used to define "Indianness", thus equating sexual desire with something foreign or "western" that needs to be rejected in order to preserve Indian culture (Lau Ee Jia, 2003). As such, "good" Indian women don't actively seek sex or sexual pleasure. They allow sex to happen to them when the time is right, that is, when they are married to a "suitable" man. Since women's purity is also closely related to familial and community honor, families zealously enforce a suppression of women's sexual agency. The suppression of female sexuality is "a pattern of cultural influence by which girls and women are induced to avoid feeling sexual desire and to refrain from sexual behavior…The lack of encouragement to explore and enjoy sex is not enough to constitute suppression; in other words, suppression involves the message that sex is bad rather than simply the failure to teach that sex is good." (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). Since, adolescence is a phase when young women become cognizant of their sexuality; this is the perfect time for social forces to influence their perceptions of sex. Therefore, while the school is not solely responsible for the sexual suppression of young women here, it does contribute to creating negative perceptions about female sexuality. It contributed to Anna's and perhaps several other young women's apprehensions about sex rather than educate them about sex related issues so that these women could learn to navigate a social structure where their sexuality was under attack and where they're likely to face sexual exploitation to a great degree. By demonizing their sexual agency, the Convent planted the seeds for victim blaming in young women's psyche, teaching them that their attempts to seek sex would make them a bad person to whom bad things could happen.

Religious and cultural anxieties about premarital sex was also revealed through the curriculum that the Convent chose to impart. While there was no established "sex education" program in the school, sex as a topic was covered through other avenues, usually from an "abstinence-only" point of view that derived heavy meaning from religion.

'In our moral science classes, we had this book and there was a chapter in it called 'God's Second Greatest Gift' where the light in which we would speak about sex and sexuality would be -how do I say this - very regressive. For some reason there was - it seemed like religion had a very strong role to play in how you choose to express yourself sexually. So, now it all seems very funny but if I think about the impact that it's had me and on others - what it was saying was that God's greatest gift was life and the second greatest gift was sex, that needed to be used sparingly. Because the only time humans should be engaging in sex is to give birth. Often the people who took these moral science classes were biology or science teachers. People you expect would know better or would teach you better.' -Anna

Choosing to teach young adolescents an abstinence program means that we're leaving them vulnerable to making errors that can affect their health and safety. As numerous studies have found time and again, abstinence-only sex education does not work and only leaves teenagers with a set of misconceptions about sex and sexual health (Hoefer & Hoefer, 2017; Ott & Santelli, 2007; Shepherd, Sly, & Girard, 2017). Moreover, in India, where several young girls are vulnerable to sexual violence, molestation, and assault - neglecting the biological and scientific aspects of sex education all together is a harmful choice to make. Despite cultural apprehensions and anxieties about the nature of teenage sexuality, it is important to acknowledge that most teenagers are more likely than not to engage in some form of sexual activity. To be able to do so safely, they need comprehensive education on sexual health, consent, and

pregnancy prevention (Herdt & Howe, 2007). Apart from the cultural desire to curb and demonize female sexual agency, the Convent's policies were also full of Christian connotations about sex. As Anna mentioned, religion seemed to pay a great role in directing the school's messages in the moral science classes about sex and sexual activities. Catholic students also had a separate catechism class where they engaged in bible studies and other Christian readings and prayers. Karla, a Christian student, mentioned that during one such class, some guests had come over for a guided prayer. During the prayer, they asked the girls to ask forgiveness for "seeking pleasure" and "pleasuring themselves"; implying sexual pleasure and masturbation.

'I didn't even know women could do that. Because back then, most things related to romance in the media was about male pleasure - not female pleasure. It never occurred to me that romance was for women's pleasure too. I didn't even know what they were talking about. We were all confused.'- Karla

Traditionally, self-pleasure is a sin in Catholicism (Patton & Health, 1986), but this isn't just a Christian problem. Female pleasure is a controversial topic across religious and cultural backgrounds and as Karla rightly noticed, it isn't something often discussed or depicted positively in media. What's very significant is that even before Karla and her peers knew what female pleasure and masturbation was, the Convent had already planted the idea that it was wrong and something for which you needed to ask forgiveness from God. Therefore, right from the start, there was the instillation of the idea that sexual desire is bad and that seeking pleasure, either with a partner or on your own, is sinful.

Ignorance about sex and sexuality seemed to have had a long-term impact on the participants. One of the most prominent effects that the women talked about was how unprepared this left them to deal with sexual vulnerability.

"One of my friends, she had this boyfriend who was super inappropriate with me and several other friends of ours. He would make inappropriate and vulgar jokes and attempt to touch us in ways that made us really uncomfortable. Finally, I had had enough, and I told him off and he literally told me that I didn't know how friendships with guys worked because I was from a girls' school. For a few months, he actually had me convinced." -Karla

What Karla is describing is essentially gaslighting; "A gaslighter seeks to manipulate another or others into thinking that their own perceptions of reality are mistaken, and for the gaslightee to believe what the manipulator claims instead" (Fuchsman, 2019). The friend's boyfriend used Karla's background and supposed ignorance about male interactions to try and justify his behavior. He almost succeeded because he knew that Karla's experience with men was limited. But this wasn't the only situation where girls' ignorance about men and sexual predatory behavior had an impact on their lives and welfare. Two of the participants told me of a classmate who had allegedly "eloped" with an older man in eleventh grade. The girl in question, used to take a van (a small bus) to and from school every day. The van driver, a man in his thirties would talk to her regularly and eventually convinced her to come away with him when her parents were out of town. As soon as the news broke, rumors started flying around school about how the girl had "run away" with a "boyfriend" and how "shameful" it was. When she was finally brought back home, she had been expelled from the school. Karla described that teachers had used this opportunity to talk about what would happen if you spend too much time interacting with men and how "having boyfriends" would ruin your life. The use of language to tell this story is powerful; if we retell this story in a different way, then it appears a lot more alarming than the way teachers supposedly spoke about it with their students. An eleventh grader was essentially groomed and kidnapped by an adult man and the general reaction to it seemed to

be that she had “fallen in love” and had taken drastic measures that were so shameful that she needed to be removed from the school lest she influence other girls with her “badness”. Neither of the participants who told me this story mentioned any instances of teachers or school authorities using this incident as an educating moment for the rest of the girls on how to look out for predatory behavior and protect oneself against emotional manipulation. Instead it was chosen as a moment to vilify a teenager as a bad girl and to hold her as an example of the consequences of trying to date and engage in sex. Once again, the Convent chose to work with fear rather than information. But this approach did not prepare young women for their interactions with men or their experiences with love and abuse later in their lives.

“We were never taught how to establish boundaries. No one ever taught us - what does toxicity look like? What is abuse? We never understood that. There was a deification of loyalty and on monogamy for relationships, there was always an undue pressure on making everything last. In such an environment, you would allow for a lot of harmful behaviors to persist.”- Anna

By consistently creating an enigma or a mystery around the concepts of relationships and sex, the Convent only managed to push young women to exoticize male attention and validation. Since they were never given a chance to engage in teenage sexual attraction and opposite-sex interaction in a healthy manner, their future interactions were affected. Additionally, Anna mentioned the “thrill” of doing something that wasn’t accepted or that was “forbidden” only encouraged to dive headfirst into the first available relationship she could find without carefully evaluating what it meant. And this tendency to do so, she admits, had a long-term impact on her emotional welfare. Other participants spoke of similar experiences where they allowed for toxic behaviors and issues in their relationships for a long time before they could identify a pattern.

"I did fall in love in University, but the person wasn't very nice. Its only now that I have become more mature in dealing with people that I'm more confident about what I want. Earlier, if somebody mistreated me, I would be like "okay". My experience in school and my family taught me that hurting you is "love". That really stayed with me. When someone abused me, I would assume that it was for my best - that they're only doing that for my benefit. Only recently I began to realize that maybe people who abuse you are actually just abusers. Some of my friends - they had abusive childhoods and it just broke them down in different ways. I feel like I was the only one who rebelled in some ways. Many of them couldn't go against their parents at all. Even when the parents were bad to them, they couldn't protest against their parents. It was imbibed in them that you have to respect and obey your parents. Even I used to think my parents were God."- Sandy

Sandy's story is profound. Inheriting problematic concepts on love teaches us to conflate certain abusive behaviors with love. Fraser, in her book *In the Name of Love: Women's Narratives of Love and Abuse* found this same pattern over and over. Women from abusive families were often likely to enter into abusive adult relationships and sustain them because they had never learned to separate love from abuse (Fraser, 2008). By teaching young women that people who love you will violate your privacy, punish you for transgressions and demonize your sexuality - we're teaching them to accept traumatizing relationships later in their lives. This is especially sinister because they receive the same messages at home - that people who love you will abuse you and they will do so for your own benefit. Sandy's point about thinking of her parents as "God" with ultimate authority on her life and her decisions is also reflective of Hindu culture in India where parents are more often than not depicted as gods and goddesses in mythology and scripture. The general parenting practice in India is authoritative; there are strict

regulations and often harsh consequences for behavior expectation transgressions (Isaac, Annie, & Prashanth, 2014). Disobedience is often met with censure and even corporal punishment, studies have found that several abusive parenting practices continue to dominate Indian homes (Deb, Kumar, Holden, & Simpson Rowe, 2017; "International Perspectives on Child Abuse and Children's Testimony: Psychological Research and Law," 1996). “Indian parents give a lot of importance to familial bonds, interdependence and loyalty to the family, obedience, religious beliefs and academic and career achievements (Karkar 1978; (Isaac et al., 2014)”. Therefore, to be a “good” child, you are expected to revere and respect the word of your parents, to sacrifice your happiness for familial well-being. While it is a well-intentioned moral value to pass on to children, if it is enforced indiscriminately in all situations, it leaves children vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. In case of women especially, it encourages them to violate their own boundaries in order to accommodate others and make others happy at the cost of their own happiness.

Homophobia and microaggressions

Control of sexuality and young women’s sexual agency also meant the control of any “deviant” sexual behavior that the Convent might disapprove of. So, while there was a lot of effort in isolating young women away from men, there was also a more implicit effort made to keep them away from other women in any remotely sexual terms.

‘The homophobia wasn’t pronounced but implicit. In sociology class, the teachers made fun of gay people; they called it “unnatural” and funny…There was once an announcement made through the intercom that girls shouldn’t be hugging each other. I think it comes from a fear of homosexuality.’-Sandy

"The most effective way to keep a group out of any discourse is to keep them invisible" (Sue, 2010). For people in the LGBT community, this is a struggle that they endure across cultural contexts. India only legalized same-sex relationships in 2018. Even now, being a part of the LGBT community means living in the closet for the fear of exclusion, persecution and abuse at the hands of family and community members. Although more and more people from the LGBT community have started to become increasingly visible and vocal about their issues in the media, there is still a long way to go to achieve the legal rights and protections they need. Set within this context, the Convent seems to be engaging is various implicit microaggressions to keep homosexual relationships invisible and to actively discourage them.

The "no-hugging" rule was something every participant mentioned. The rule had apparently created a lot of stir within the school community and was a source of confusion for several young girls who couldn't understand why this had been enforced. Karla, during a Catechism class, finally learned through one of the nuns that they were trying to discourage hugging because of increasing cases of "lesbianism these days". This sentiment in a religious school is not altogether surprising. Several religious organizations believe homosexuality to be an abnormality or a sin against God and are of the view that it needs to be prevented from occurring (Sue, 2010). But people do not always express their homophobia externally, instead they use implications and subliminal messages to impart negative messages about homosexuality. This "no hugging" rule, for instance, is reminiscent of two major types of microaggressions that same-sex attracted people often face; oversexualization and the characterization of their nature as a "sin" (Platt & Lenzen, 2013).

"When reference is made to gays, lesbians, or "homosexuals", many people immediately associate "sex" and "sexual activity" with this group. LGBTs are thought of as mere sexual

beings rather than as complex people whose lives involve family, friends, careers, nonsexual relationships, hopes, and aspirations" (Sue, 2010). Further, some religions, including traditional Catholicism, view same-sex relationships as sinful abominations that need to be punished. In comparison, others may not believe in the persecution of LGB people as sinners if they choose not to "act out their sexual desires" (Sue, 2010). By banning a simple human contact like a hug between girls, who may or may not be lesbians, the implication is that lesbians hugging in itself is somewhat inappropriate sexual contact.

Given the lack of information about homosexuality or other non-heterosexual interactions, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the school social structure was littered with homophobic rhetoric. The social stereotype of convent girls being "all lesbians" put most young women on the defensive and almost every participant recalled instances of outright rejection and ridicule of those who could possibly be lesbians. Heterosexism promotes the idea that the default and acceptable model is to be a heterosexual and that homosexuality is in some way not only unacceptable but also "unreal" (Sue, 2010). Nina claimed that she was grateful to be straight because she didn't think anybody would understand and that people would "talk about her" and "make fun of her" if she wasn't. Sandy, a bisexual woman, resonated this claim by explaining that although her bisexuality was an open secret, no one ever took it seriously. They assumed that she was either lying or joking because non-heterosexual identities were never given legitimacy. Even the establishment rules to prevent "cases of lesbianism" implies that being lesbian is a trend or a fad that teenagers engage in, like smoking or drinking alcohol.

These perceptions matter because non-heterosexual people who grow up in such an environment struggle with their identity for a long time. They develop internal conflicts about their identities based on social and religious messages that consistently tell them that they're

deviant and wrong (Sue, 2010). Moreover, internalizing the belief that they're abnormal, increases their tendency to "self-hate"; where they may end up believing in their own deviancy and inferiority and may seek to suppress their nature by forcing themselves to engage in heterosexuality. This enforced heterosexuality is only likely to impact their mental health and well-being in the long run when they are forced enact roles that they do not relate to. For the girls in the Convent, it could mean upholding feminine concepts of heterosexual marriage and motherhood which they do not really want but feel the need to prescribe to.

Academics and extra-curricular support

Single-sex schools are popular for their supposed ability to create academic order and discipline in their classrooms and for establishing academic rigor that allows young women to compete in new arenas and succeed. However, guiding practices described by the participants were not always very supportive. More often than not, it appeared, your academic success was your personal responsibility.

"When we started failing, teachers started attacking us. We never got any support. One teacher, in a parent-teacher meeting, claimed that my grades were slipping because my friend circle was bad and that we drank alcohol. She called me a "gangster" to my father's face because I had so many friends. In all of this, only one teacher took care of me and once actually tried correcting my father in a PTM when he was being critical of me. - Nina

No one claimed that the teachers were bad at their jobs, as such, but their experiences were mostly related to how quickly teachers ascribed the reason for failing grades as being a personal failure or shortcoming of the student rather than an academic challenge that could be worked on in the classroom. In the scope of my interviews, I never found any indication that

teachers would change their teaching style to help a failing student - rather the approach seemingly appears to be that of censuring a student with bad grades. This comes from the assumption that the only reason a student isn't doing well is because they're not trying hard enough or are "distracted".

'When my grades dropped, there was a lot of speculation around why that happened and it affected me mentally, a lot, obviously. And I don't know if the school's responsible for it, but I attached my whole self-worth on my grades. Because that's how the teachers saw me; that how my friends and family saw me. And then when my grades slipped; anything and everything that went wrong around me became linked to my academic performance…

…I don't think I got a lot of support from my teachers. There were a few of them that wanted to understand what I was doing or if everything was ok at home. They kept reminding me how good I was and sort of- reminded me that I could do it again if I wanted to. I'm very grateful to those people but a majority of them gave up; some even became sort of bitter about it.' – Anna

Anna's story is a significant analysis point, because she's talking about a transition; about the experience of teacher behavior toward her changing with her grades. Additionally, the idea that "she could still do it if she wanted to" disregards the fact that her desire to succeed wasn't necessarily the issue. This too, is indicative that the organization thought that student behavior was at the crux of academic performance and that girls who weren't succeeding weren't doing so because they were "bad" girls doing bad things; like talking too much, having too many friends, or the old hat, "making boyfriends".

'I remember, there was a maths teacher in school- I heard at the time- when I was in tenth standard. I remember I did not score very well in one of the exams in tenth standard and I did

not have any tuition classes but one of my juniors came up to me and said that there was a conversation around this, and the teacher warned their batch that "she [Anna] was taking math tuitions and look at what happened to her; that she [Anna] found a boy there and fell in love, bunked classes, and see how her grades dropped". They were making a non-example out of me. All of this was not true. It was a vicious cycle because after that I barely participated in math classes or the minute I realized that this teacher's given up on me, or that they thought bad about me, I know I actively started to cut their classes or I would just zone out.' -Anna

Anna's story defines how being treated like a "bad" student only demotivated her attempts to participate in math class and she stopped trying to engage with the material. In her head, there was already no point in trying because the teacher had written her off. Research has found that students "perform better in school to the extent they are able to engage fully, cope adaptively, and bounce back from obstacles and setbacks in their academic work. These three processes, which studies suggest are positively inter-connected, may comprise a self-sustaining system that enables motivational resilience"(Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). One of the major factors in motivational resilience is teacher support. Skinner and Pitzer's study found that students at high-risk in the beginning of the academic year were able to improve their grades at the end of the years to the par of low-risk students when they had high teacher support but even resilient students ended at high-risk with low support from teachers. Teacher support initiatives found most effective were; warmth, structure in classrooms, autonomy, and support with choices in explanation and learning styles as opposed to coercive relationships. Anna was a promising student who needed her teachers to act but they chose to shift the burden on her instead because they were more concerned with her supposed behavioral transgressions. Thus, this culture of

behavior control affected academic rigor within the Convent and disregarded the learning needs of struggling students.

For extra-curricular activities, Anna talked about how she was actively signed up for most extracurricular activities while she was scoring really well, even above "people who were probably better at it than her" but as soon as she entered high-school, the tables turned and she was discouraged from taking part in too many competitions. It's unclear from her narrative why the school would discourage her participation especially since, as Anna describes it, they often used her extra-curricular achievements for advertising the school. Anna claims that the school often took credit for her achievements but also shifted responsibility of her failures completely on her. In this way, the girls were never credited for their achievements but always censured for their apparent "failures". For school focused on developing girls' capabilities and achievements, this approach is discouraging and limiting for the students.

Restriction in participation was also noted by other participants. Sharon, who was a state level badminton player, felt like they had to take permissions for every step that they took and every competition they signed up for, and teachers were not accommodating of missed classes for sports participations. Nina, a judo competitor in her high school years, also noted that whenever they went out for competitions, they were disallowed by accompanying teachers to interact with students from other schools, especially boys. This, like the music competition, defies the very purpose of inter-school interactions. In the end, the desire to shield young girls away from opposite sex interaction and to prevent them from "going out of control" superseded the school's motivation to encourage young women to participate in traditionally "masculine" avenues like sports or to compete at a more aggressive and serious level.

Most participants also displayed very little faith for the school's student leadership system. They did not think that school leadership was chosen based on what reflected the student's needs and beliefs but on the basis of what the teachers and sisters valued as leadership.

'In our school you weren't really a leader but a follower of our teachers. I think you had to "rat' others out all the time. It wasn't real leadership. They used to choose leaders based on how much someone was willing to give away secrets.'- Sandy

Sandy's point is that only the students that were willing to conform to or enable the school culture were chosen as leaders, rather than those who would take initiative for the student body. Her perception of her school leadership was that of students who were willing to enforce the rules without questioning them and those who would carry out the prescribed punishments for transgressions in the absence of teachers and sisters. Karla, who was made school prefect in 12th grade, also had a similar perspective.

'The rules were ridiculous, and I didn't like them but then I was made a prefect and I had to go around enforcing the same rules I didn't believe in. I had no other option.' - Karla

This raises an interesting question about who is presented as a leader in the Convent; who is chosen as the mascot that all the other girls must emulate. Based on the narratives of the participants, who was chosen as leader was dependent on how they presented themselves. Reyna, for example, was briefly chosen as a house captain but was promptly removed from the post when she got a cartilage piercing at the tip of her ear because the Convent had rules against multiple piercings. They could have asked her to remove the piercing and let her keep the post but by removing her from the post, they sent a clear message to the student body; that Reyna was not the "right" girl for a leadership position because she'd chosen to violate the standards of a

certain “look”. This is also an effective way of teaching them that “this is what a leader looks like” and that people who don’t meet those standards are not a part of leadership or are incapable of leadership. Self- regulation, while generally presented as a cycle of autonomy and responsibility, for schoolgirls often means submission of regulating ones dress, ones tongue and ones behavior to achieve approval from teachers, even as one recognizes the unfairness of it (Davies et al., 2001).Therefore, if the girls wanted to be leaders; they had to conform and self-regulate, and the very act of conforming and regulation is an antithesis to leadership and creativity.

Privilege, parental support, and family life

Apart from Indian social norms and the Convent’s cultural context, another major intersection dominating the lives of these girls was their home life. Families with different perceptions of womanhood and women’s position in society had different expectations from their daughters. Certain families were primarily concerned with their children’s academic and professional excellence and were fairly open minded about their social lives and interactions with the opposite sex. Often, these were upper-class or affluent families. Sharon, who hailed from such a background recalled that even when the school seemed to haul her on transgressions, she felt confident and unafraid because she knew that whatever happened, her parents would support her. She acknowledged however that the same would not be true for all her peers. Sandy felt the same way:

‘This entitlement to the girls and their lives came from how parents treated their kids. If the parents supported the kids, it was still ok. But those parents who didn’t - the teachers and nuns felt like they had free reign over the kids. A lot of kids were financially unstable or came from

simple families and their parents trusted the school authorities blindly, and they got away with mistreating those girls.' – Sandy

Sandy has her finger on a larger class related problem in India that is manifesting in one way within the Convent. Affluent parents focused on their children's academic career were able to stand their ground and defend their children because they paid the full fees amount and often even donated to the school. Whereas financially unstable parents, whose children were often on scholarships or those who were given lowered fee packages felt almost "beholden" to the school and felt safer letting the school authorities dictate their relationship. Additionally, professional power distances are acutely visible in India and teachers are traditionally given an authoritative position. Parents who weren't socially confident enough to challenge that authority, therefore, were more likely to allow the school to interfere in their children's lives and punish them for behavior transgressions. But for several parents from across the class boundaries, a lot of the reason why the sent their girls to the Convent and were complicit with the restrictive rules about interactions with boys and dating were because of genuine fears for their daughter's safety.

'It's the catch 22 of Indian parents. Boys and girls are given different cultural contexts to grow up in within the same household. For my brother- and my family is still open minded and evolved in a lot of ways, but for my bother- they're more relaxed. They treat him differently. They worry about my safety more than his. Because it IS unsafe for me. - Ina

Given the extent to which sexual violence against women prevails in India and in its capital city of New Delhi, parents' anxieties about their daughters' social lives, the people they meet and the things they do can almost be justified. Therefore, when the Convent chooses to peruse and punish students; it can do so with the expressed intention of ensuring that the girls are not in "trouble" or at risk. As in the case of Reyna's story, where the Principal reported to

Reyna's father that she'd called him in because she suspected that his daughter was associating with an "unsafe" person. In these scenarios, parents are likely to support the school's decision and validate their interference in the girls' personal lives because they connect with the deep fear that parents have for their daughters.

Solidarity and Friendship

Another critical theme that emerged across interviews was how friendships were fostered within the Convent, how they progressed, and how they impacted the girls during adolescence. The participants spoke of two major types of friend groups; the constructed friend groups and the organic groups. Constructed friend groups were often seen in younger classes, where teachers encouraged friendships between academically successful students or attempted to create connections between struggling students and successful students in the hopes that the latter would influence the former to improve.

"A lot of my earlier friendships were with kids who also had good grades like me, and we were just grouped together or were made to sit together. I didn't really have anything in common with these people but for the longest time they were the people I sat with at lunch or talked to in class."- Anna

The general principle appears to be that by keeping "model" students together, teachers were encouraging "good" friendships. These "good" groups and their behavioral transgressions were also better tolerated, according to accounts by other participants, as long as they kept their grades up. Friend groups where the members' academic performance was average or weak were often characterized as "gangs" and there were consistent efforts to break down those friend groups (by changing seating arrangements or by contacting parents) so that the members would

stop influencing each other to be "bad". This desire to control women's social circles is reflective of the general social standard where young women are not be trusted to form their own decisions. Their lives are constructed by the authority figures around them in order to "manage" their behavior. It is the same fear of "badness" that keeps young women isolated and restricted in their homes lest they meet with "unsavory" people and "go the wrong way".

Organic friendships however, sustained themselves regardless of what the teachers thought or how they attempted to separate the students. Almost every participant in the study spoke of longstanding bonds of friendship that they formed in school, often *because* they were being persecuted.

'We all helped each other because we were all in the same boat! So, we helped each other keep secrets, we helped each other meet our boyfriends and hide things. And if one of your friends had a boyfriend, you became so involved in that relationship that it felt like it was your relationship too!"-Nina

Because punishments and judgements from teachers and sisters affected them all equally, girls started to establish solidarity with each other and even helped one another break or bend rules and do the things that they wanted to do without getting in trouble. They were the ones that knew where their friends were going when they had lied to their parents; they were ones to check in with them to make sure that their friends were safe; and they were the ones who lied or supported lies to protect their friends. As a result, they were able to form sustaining bonds that could withstand attempts to break them apart. Secrets and secret-keeping was a critical test for friendship; good friends helped you hide your supposed transgressions and revealing those secrets meant establishing yourself as the secret-holders' "enemy". This is apparent in accounts

given by Nina and Sandy, where they both held disdain and anger toward people who would "out" others to authority figures by exposing their secrets.

'We all had each other's back and we were supporting each other and keeping our secrets. I'm very grateful for the female friends I made. I don't think I would have without the childhood I have. I'm grateful that boys and the associated complication didn't affect my teenage friendships.'- Sammy

Another prevalent perception that participants had of their school friendships was that it wouldn't have been the same with boys around; that boys would have somehow disrupted their social order and their friend dynamics. Additionally, they felt they were better equipped to be empathetic to other women and establish friendships with them as compared to girls who did not grow up in same-sex environments. Most of the participants claimed that they had retained their school friends well into adulthood and felt a deeper sense of connection with these friends. These accounts were encouraging because they indicated that these women had come together to support each other in times of crisis, and they had been able to support one another in their little acts of resistance and rebellion. This development was perhaps unintentional on the part of the Convent but it is a good one; teaching young women to form collaborative bonds with one another to tackle systemic problems is beneficial and it is one of the aspects of the Convent culture which could be replicated across different schools; even mixed sex ones.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Learnings from the research

When I began this study, I started with three main questions and they were concerned with the effects of single-sex convents on the self-concept, social behavior and sexual identity of young women. Taking into account the complex history of the convent schools in India and the cultural context of Indian women's lives, I wanted to analyze how these factors intersected each other to impact young women growing up in these contexts through conversational interviews with eight women about their lives, their experiences in school and how they felt about those experiences in retrospect. I also wanted to check the claim that single-sex convents help empower Indian women and I did so by analyzing the Convent's ideological perception of womanhood through their expressed goals and aims for their students along with stories of their organizational praxis from the interviews. I found that while the Convent did have honorable intentions of helping Indian women improve their condition, they were still operating within the dominant ideology of womanhood in India which is overrun with patriarchal ideals and stereotypes. This philosophy manifested itself in the way the Convent enforced its rules, the behaviors it expected girls to comply with and the punishments they carried out. The culture that merged within the Convent eventually had a detrimental impact on the girls that they were seeking to empower.

The impact on the participants' self-perception

Indian women are bound by several restrictions that limit their self-expression and undermine their confidence. In such a context, a single-sex convent looking to empower woman would focus extensively on helping young women become self-sufficient and develop a healthy

relationship with themselves; it is something that the Convent promises in its aims and visions. In practice, however, the approach that the Convent took towards creating young women's sense of self; was extensively driven by an elusive concept of "ideal womanhood" that was derived from a cultural and religious concept of womanhood. Narrative accounts of participants revealed that their inability to relate to this perfect model of womanhood was met with shaming and censure; the Convent claimed to want them to become confident but derided them for their appearance and their behavior at every turn.

The teachers and the administration also violated student privacy and their physical integrity. By demanding that students give them access to their private lives with the threat of punishment, the Convent normalized harmful power structures that exist in society as a whole, where women are often compelled to override their own discomfort for other people (mostly men) and are punished for any refusal to do so.

The Convent demanded perfect moral values from girls in terms of how they spoke, how they looked, and what they wore and left young women feeling as though they were being scrutinized every minute of their lives. Thus, several participants were left with the sense that they had to "perform" every second of their lives lest they be judged as bad women. Most significantly, the Convent is still functioning within the dominant ideology of women "belonging to" someone(s). The Convent reinforces this idea by positioning young women's highest goal to be an "asset" to their families or to bring "prestige and honor" to their family and to the organizations they're affiliated with. Essentially, girls were expected to subvert their sense of self for other people's benefit and to conform to rules and boundaries that other people had set for them without ever getting the opportunity to set their own boundaries and limitations.

The impact on the participants' relationship with sexuality

With so many cultural misconceptions about sex and sexuality and rampant sexual violence pervading the country, a girls-only institution in India must help young women learn how to develop a relationship with their sexuality, so that they are able to participate in healthy sexual practices and are also able to prepare themselves to challenge sexual harassment and violence. Instead, the Convent sought to silence any narratives related to sex by characterizing sex outside marriage as wrong and immoral and by extension - girls who thought about it or participated in it as "bad". As a result, several participants were left to struggle with their sexuality over the years. The teachers and administration demonized young women's nascent and developing sexualities, problematized their homosexuality, and made it impossible for them to engage in sex without feeling guilty or shameful. In response, young women began to hide their relationships for the fear of ostracization and punishment. Many participants spoke of living a secret life, where they exercised their sexuality by lying and hiding critical aspects of their lives from their family members and other adults, often putting themselves at the risk of being exploited or harmed by predatory or abusive and manipulative men that the girls did not know how to handle.

The impact on the participants' social lives and friendships

Participants' social lives were limited on several fronts; interactions with the opposite sex were reviled and students were discouraged to engage with students from other schools even during contests and cultural activities. Attempts were made to control friend groups within the school as well; teachers grouped together students in order to create "good" friendships that would promote studiousness and good behavior. But more often than not, the girls came together because of a sense of solidarity with one another. In a restrictive environment, the girls came to

one another's aid and supported each other by lying or corroborating stories that helped young women exercise some level of control over their social and sexual lives. Most participants credited the Convent for the ability to establish and maintain healthy female friendships and a sense of empathy for other women.

The perpetuation the dominant ideology of woman hood in India

The school culture, as defined by the participants, the rulebook and the website revealed the dominant ideology of womanhood was pervasive within the Convent. While lip-service was paid to independence and self-reliance, in practice the Convent was focused on shaping women's behavior as per expected social and cultural standards. The same social restrictions that demand women to be self-sacrificing, meek, and submissive were enforced within the school premises by the teachers and the administration. It can be said that the Convent played a role in providing these women with quality education and a chance to acquire economic success. I argue, however, that in absence of social freedom and liberation from constraints that limit women's personal identity and sexual expression, economic opportunities are practically superficial. Women are subjugated not solely through economic means, but through more insidious socio-cultural constraints that train women to self-regulate and to regulate the other women around them. For the Convent to be truly empowering institution, it would need to challenge these deeply embedded ideologies about womanhood in India. Unless the way society perceives women - essentially as symbolic capital – is changed, we cannot better the lives of Indian women. More importantly, women themselves need to be able to see themselves and their role in society without the lens of the dominant ideology. Young women deserve to know that they can perform femininity, or not, the way they see fit, that they can behave in varying ways and can express themselves sexually without being considered bad women. A convent has the potential to be the

kind of place that offers women a chance to learn this because it is a safe space where women can learn and grow together.

Potentially, this research can help improve the Convent culture by making improvements in the school's policies and praxis. These improvements may have a positive impact on the well-being of several young girls who are currently within this system and subsequently, other convents may be able to use this research as a way to improve upon areas that they may recognize as problematic in their own systems. A list of recommendations for the Convent in New Delhi has been provided in the next section. These recommendations may be followed by other convents, single-sex schools and co-ed schools as well. Additionally, I think this may prove as a useful resource for young women to recognize language that steals their agency from them and to identify mental models that subscribe them to an "expected" version of womanhood. This way, they can learn to disassociate the ideologies from the language used for them and challenge them accordingly.

Recommendations

For the benefit of the young women within the Convent, I recommend the following improvements to the Convent's policy and praxis:

1. Re-evaluating the school rules to ensure that they are pragmatic, educational, and rational. This would mean including students' participations in setting up school boundaries for behaviors, dress, and social conduct. The intent should be to create school rules that focus on improving and maintaining the educational environment and not policing student behavior arbitrarily.

2. Learning takes place when children feel safe, not threatened. Therefore, rule transgressions should be addressed in an educational way that helps students identify *why* the rules were set and how the violation affects them and their peers. Punitive measures like shaming and censure should be avoided.
3. The Convent should include teacher training to ensure that the teachers know how to empower young women and help them navigate social challenges instead of passing on biases and stereotypes about womanhood.
4. Comprehensive sex education and information of sexual violence must be shared with young women to help them establish healthy sexual boundaries and identify predatory behavior.
5. Students should be encouraged to engage and interact with students from other contexts and schools, including members of the opposite sex, so that girls can learn how to relate to people outside their limited community.

Limitations

My analysis demonstrated how dominant ideologies are naturalized and reproduced in society and are picked up by individuals, communities and institutions as "natural" or "neutral". It is also relevant to note that the analysis revealed how Discourse Models operate in real life. The ideal version of womanhood is so pervasive that there is little to no room for deviations to be accepted. Lakoff's principles on women's language was an incredible insight into how women are spoken about and how that is sharply distinguished from how men are spoken of. Her principles helped me establish how Fairclough and Gee's concepts of discourse and dominant ideology play out in the world of language and gender. Essentially, I was able to find answers for all my stated research questions. There was also enough indication of the school discourse that

could be gleaned from their language about women. Further, I could clearly place how the discourse presented itself within the Indian context and in the framework of a conservative Catholic school.

However, I must acknowledge the limitations of my analysis. I am applying the theories and principles of discourse analysts from a different context to the text from the school websites in order to draw my conclusions. It is entirely possible that the schools are completely unaware that discriminating narratives can be derived from their language. This of course, is the very point of naturalization; they may accept their language as neutral even if it may not necessarily be so. Even so, it is important to consider that the institutions' intentions and ideologies could be completely or at least partially different to what I have implied above. Additionally, the school also markets itself on its online platform and their marketing may not be entirely indicative of their actual policy and culture. They may be positioning their aims and goals for young women based on what parents and communities would find acceptable but may be inherently more empowering and liberating than it is implied on the website. That being said, an analysis of institutional language, marketed or otherwise, it still valuable. Even if it doesn't indicate in entirety the culture of the school, it is still a great indication of what discourse is considered appealing for parents concerning their daughters. This, in turn, clearly brings out the underlying social discourse and the dominant ideology about women in India and offers new avenues of intervention and improvement. By identifying limiting and dehumanizing language about women we can take steps to "denaturalize" the ideology that promotes this language. This way, we can identify and dismantle the social norms associated with it and enroll the institutions tasked with the empowerment of women into this line of inquiry.

My narrative analysis too, is based on the theories of a western researcher, who conducted their research primarily on western contexts. South Asia is a very different landscape and there will be several differences in conducting any kind of research in this context. Perhaps most significantly, cultural context will be a dominating influence on how the narratives are to be read and analyzed. I have attempted to do that, but my analysis may yet be limited because India's cultural context is extremely diverse. For the Narrative Feminist Analysis, my findings have been taken from a limited pool of eight individuals from the Convent. I have attempted to keep the group diverse, with different age-ranges and sexualities but it would still be prudent to consider that there are perspectives that I may be missing. Further, their narratives were shaped to a great extent by the questions I asked and the topics I focused on, I have no way of knowing if there were other stories that spoke of their self-perceptions shaped by the Convent that may not have come up during out conversations. Moreover, the women I spoke to have already graduated from the school; their narratives come from memory and a few years of introspection and thought. These are not raw experiences that they are currently living through and certain nuances will perhaps have been missed or forgotten.

Finally, humans are complex creatures and their emotions define how their memories are shaped. Bitterness, anger and sorrow can impact how these stories are told; however, in some ways, this is the point of narrative research, to unearth not just the stories but what they did to people. Therefore, these "non-objective" feelings that shaped these women's experiences have value. Women's experiences have value in the stories we tell about them and the research we conduct around them and the policies we create for them. Unless we are willing to give credence to their stories, we will never know what they truly need.

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