

## Feminist Complaint Collectives and Doorway Disruptions in Australian Christian Traditions

Tracy McEwan <sup>1,2\*</sup>, Rosie C. Shorter <sup>3</sup>, Tanya Riches <sup>4</sup>

Published: March 1, 2025

### ABSTRACT

Christian traditions maintain patriarchal cultures by upholding gendered norms that can shape ministry opportunities and sanction gender inequality and sexism, while also scaffolding gendered violence. Feminist Christian women who name this inequality, or who 'protest' and 'complain' can therefore be subject to a range of adverse consequences, from subtle social disapproval to malicious abuse and exclusion. Simultaneously, although Christian women led in 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist movements, contemporary religious and secular feminists can be mutually sceptical. As a result, Christian feminist women often occupy a marginal space. Sara Ahmed has consistently argued that when feminists speak of sexism within institutional settings, the response is often to problematise the complainer. Ahmed (2021) introduces the idea of forming complaint collectives to enable feminists to do counter-institutional work. In this paper we use Ahmed's scholarship to locate Christian feminists as 'complainants' and assemble ourselves to create a Christian feminist complaint collective. We present case studies of complaints and doorway disruptions in Catholic, Anglican, and pentecostal settings to challenge gender inequality and marginalisation and reconceptualise how feminist theory can be (re)applied to feminist activism within Christian religious traditions and communities.

**Keywords:** Australian Christianity, pentecostal women, complaint collectives, Sydney Anglicanism, Catholic feminism

### INTRODUCTION

In the days following Sinead O'Connor's death, images of her ripping a photograph of Pope John Paul II in 1992 resurfaced and were circulated on social media, proclaiming O'Connor's act as bold and prophetic. Decades ahead of investigations into institutional and clerical abuse, O'Connor publicly and visibly held the Catholic Church to account. With hindsight, it is easy to see that O'Connor's criticism of the Church was well founded. Australian journalist Julia Baird (2023) writes:

The catch-cry in Ireland now is: Sinead was right. ... Which was the greater offence: ripping up a picture or protecting predatorial paedophiles on a mass scale?

Nevertheless, at the time, the consequence of calling out sexual and gender-based violence in the Catholic Church was that O'Connor was punished. Baird (2023) reflects that:

Her punishment was swift and savage, and became a protracted spectacle. Women who challenge religious hierarchies, and lay a claim to any kind of spiritual authority, are often cast as wounded witches, or mad bitches. Men speak on behalf of God; women hear voices.

The torn photograph of the Pope John Paul II was viewed as a bigger problem than what O'Connor was protesting. That she became the problem, is symptomatic of one of Sara Ahmed's (2023) 'core killjoy truths.'

<sup>1</sup> University of Newcastle, AUSTRALIA

<sup>2</sup> Australian Catholic University, AUSTRALIA

<sup>3</sup> Deakin University, AUSTRALIA

<sup>4</sup> Eastern College Australia, AUSTRALIA

\*Corresponding Author: [tracy.mcewan@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:tracy.mcewan@newcastle.edu.au)

Ahmed (2023) contends that, 'If you expose a problem, you pose a problem: if you pose a problem, you become a problem' (18). This feminist killjoy truth can be applied across many institutional settings.

Ahmed (2010, 2017, 2021, 2022, 2023) reveals core killjoy truths in action in the family, in politics and in the university. She has shown that when women expose the problem of institutional sexism across these contexts, when they protest it, or make formal complaints, they become a problem for the institution. They are, to borrow Baird's (2023) words, 'cast as witches.' In this article, we enter into dialogue with Ahmed's work to explore how this feminist killjoy truth can help us to understand women's experiences in - and out of - Australian Christian institutions.

Even though Christian feminist scholars have long noted the violence of women's oppression and marginalisation (Brennan, 1996, 2007; Schüssler Fiorenza, 2016), feminism and associated movements are often framed in Christian traditions as irrelevant, unnecessary, and even sinful (Beattie, 2006; Lim, 2018; Smith, 2012; Sullivan and Delaney, 2017). This critique parallels neoliberal rhetoric common across western ('secular') societies where the collective struggle of feminism is understood as redundant, with inequalities situated in the self, rather than in disparities or inequalities that emerge from social structures (Evans, 2023). Simultaneously, while Christian women often occupied leadership roles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist movements, contemporary religious and secular feminists can be sceptical of each other, leading to a 'neglect' of religion in feminist studies (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013; McPhillips, 2016). Feminist Christian women can find they occupy a marginal space, where — in our experience — it feels as though we are situated in a doorway between 'orthodox' Christianity *and* 'orthodox' feminisms.

All three authors of this article are white women, Christian or post-Christian, and settlers living on unceded lands. It is important for us to acknowledge how Christianity, coloniality, and heteronormativity work together to structure contemporary Australian society (Carlson and Farrelly, 2023), which remains simultaneously Christian, post-Christian, and secular (Possamai and Tittensor, 2022). From 1788 onwards, the Australia Government and Christian churches worked together to enact colonial violence (Pattel-Gray, 1998). In Christian settings, racism, sexism, and gendered violence can often be further sanctioned by gender complementarity; a biblically based belief that men and women are 'equal but different' (Truong *et al.*, 2020; Weng and Shorter, 2023). Gender complementarity and other gendered-based norms are factors in historical and social patterns of gendered abuse in Christian settings (Baird and Gleeson 2017; Pepper *et al.*, 2021, 2023). Moreover, these and other sexist and patriarchal attitudes can shift the burden of responsibility and blame for abuse away from male perpetrators towards female victim-survivors (OurWatch, 2024).

As Australian feminist scholars interested in the study of religion, our research stems from our experiences within varied Christian traditions/communities. Tracy McEwan has written extensively about women's experiences in Catholicism and gender-based violence (McEwan, 2022; McEwan *et al.*, 2023a, 2023b; McPhillips and McEwan, 2022). Rosie Clare Shorter's work has focused on how Sydney Anglicanism, as a lived religion, is gendered (Shorter, 2021, 2023). Tanya Riches has explored various aspects of women within (and leading) Australian pentecostal<sup>1</sup> congregations (Riches, 2021, 2022). In our scholarship and lived experiences, we have observed how Christian women who 'protest' or 'complain' against gendered inequality and sexism shoulder the burden of responsibility and blame and can be subject to a wide range of adverse consequences in their religious community. Catholicism and Anglicanism are Australia's largest Christian denominations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). While pentecostalism is numerically small, it was (until 2016) Australia's fastest growing Christian denomination and represents its largest (mega) congregations (Austin, 2017; Shorter and Riches, 2023).

In this article we intentionally inhabit the marginal space outlined in Ahmed's (2021) work on complaint, joining our experiences and scholarship together to explore Christian women's historic and contemporary activism across Catholicism, Anglicanism, and pentecostalism in Australia. Together we act as a complaint collective against institutional sexism and gendered violence. We invite others to join us in this ongoing work to (re)claim the scholarship and activism of feminist Christian women, as legitimately feminist *and* Christian.

## COMPLAINT AS METHOD

In her book *Complaint!* Ahmed (2021) introduces the idea of 'complaint as a queer method' wherein feminists, by assembling and creating complaint collectives, can do counter-institutional work. As complaints often follow diverse trajectories, hampered by precarity and uncertainty, they can be described as having a long genealogy (Ahmed, 2021). Ahmed utilises the notion of a 'complaint biography', to explain how complainants situate

---

<sup>1</sup> In studies of pentecostalism, capital 'P' Pentecostal usually is taken to refer to the classical Pentecostal movements. Therefore, lowercase 'pentecostal' has been adopted in this article in reference to the broad global movement with its diverse theologies (see Smith, 2010).

themselves, and proposes that this ‘helps us to think of a complaint in relation to the life of a person or a group of people’ (2021: 30). Complaint collectives are a way of sharing and supporting experiences and bringing together and amplifying complaints that would otherwise be buried away in files, filing cabinets, and bureaucratic processes. In complaint collectives, feminists doing complaint activism play a role of both conscious-raising issues and becoming each other’s resources (Ahmed, 2021, 2022).

There are already some significant complaint collectives in Australian Christianity. While accounting for all complaint histories is not the focus of this article, we acknowledge the women who go before us and are alongside us. Notably, Aboriginal Christian Leader and theologian Anne Pattel-Gray (1998, 1999, 2023) has led a sustained ‘complaint’ against the enmeshment of institutional Christianity and coloniality. The collected testimonies of Australian victim-survivors of domestic violence who spoke to journalists Julia Baird and Hayley Gleeson (2018) are also a powerful multi-faith complaint collective. Baird (2018) observes the swift and punitive response by Christian men:

Our first piece, on Islam, did not evoke a single word of protest. But when we wrote about the [Christian] church, a volcano of comment erupted. And in the ensuing maelstrom, somehow two American professors were looped into a local culture war exclusively conducted by men that, briefly, almost completely drowned out the words of women in print and on TV. (8)

The factors which impact whose testimony is deemed credible and reliable and whose are not, are multifaceted and diverse. Similarly to Ahmed, our approach has evolved from sense-making of the culture in which we are immersed (Ahmed, 2021). We focus on data that we have inherited through both our research and personal experiences, lending a ‘feminist ear’ to re-hear these different case studies, textual analyses, and archives as complaint. Herein, we intentionally situate Christian feminists as ‘complainants’ and present case studies of ‘complaints’ in three (Catholic, Anglican, and pentecostal) settings in Australia. We do this firstly to challenge gender inequality and marginalisation in patriarchal denominations and churches. And, secondly, to reconceptualise how feminist theory can be applied to feminist scholarship and activism in Christian religious traditions and communities.

In naming feminists who protest gendered, sexist, and racist norms within their religious traditions as ‘complainants’, we follow Ahmed in reclaiming a negative label and using it for feminist action, collectivity, and solidarity. Ahmed (2023) argues that to reclaim the insults, dismissals and stereotypes thrown our way, ‘is not to agree with the negative judgement behind it’, but rather it ‘channel(s) the negativity, pushing it in another direction’ (16). In our reclaiming we are not alone; we join in solidarity with others who resist and disrupt exclusionary norms. As Ahmed (2023) reminds us,

there is a long tradition in activism of reclaiming the terms that have been used against us, insults as well as stereotypes – terms like queer, for instance – to say something about who we are as well as what we are against. (16-17)

We do this as a collective to remind ourselves that we do not stand on our own; nor does the complaint we have heard. Our stories might be small, but ‘we sound louder when we are heard together; we are louder’ (Ahmed, 2021: 277). We show there is continuity across time and across the three selected Christian denominations.

## A GENEALOGY OF COMPLAINT

There is a long genealogy of Christian women complaining in Australia. Women have been resisting patriarchal control in the Catholic Church in Australia since the early days of British colonial government. In 1835 an English Benedictine, Bede Polding became Australia’s first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney. In 1838, five Sisters of Charity arrived in Sydney from Dublin, Ireland to assist in what was termed the ‘Australian mission’ of the Catholic Church (O’Sullivan, 2019). On their arrival Polding asserted, ‘No words can describe our gratitude and delight of heart, when we witnessed the arrival of the heroic Sisters of Charity’ (cited in Moran, 1895: 237). However, all five Sisters of Charity had left Sydney by 1859 when Polding wrote, ‘These sisters almost from the beginning have been more or less a trouble to us’ (cited in Sutter, 1965: 79). Even when apparently ‘difficult’ personalities and the patriarchal cultures and restrictions of colonial Sydney are considered, it is evident that their persistence in complaining about unwavering, authoritarian clerical governance made life impossible for these pioneering women religious (O’Sullivan, 2019).

A few decades later, on 22 September 1871, Australia’s first Catholic saint and co-founder of an Australia order of women religious, Mary MacKillop was excommunicated by the bishop of Adelaide. MacKillop is (now) acknowledged for her commitment to social justice issues, especially gender equality in education. However, her persistence and determination to achieve these goals, and self-governance for her order, placed her at odds with

the clerical authorities (McPhillips, 2013). Although her excommunication was initially blamed on her insubordination, it would be eventually linked to hostility regarding her complaints about sexual abuse by a local priest (Maley, 2010).

A series of contemporary research projects have continued to draw attention to the complaints of Catholic women. Between 1996 and 1999 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference conducted a research project on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia (Macdonald *et al.*, 1999). Published as *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* (1999), the project collected data to address barriers to women's participation in the Catholic Church in Australia. The extensive research revealed 'a strong sense of pain and alienation resulting from the Church's stance on women' (vii-ix), with gender inequality the dominant issue (Macdonald *et al.*, 1999). In 2000, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference published a follow-up Social Justice Statement, *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond* (2000), which included nine decisions and 31 recommendations for action to further the participation of women in Catholic parishes and dioceses. More than 20 years on all the recommendations remain unresolved.

In 2018, the Catholic Church in Australia embarked on the process of its Fifth Plenary Council, an official meeting of bishops and other delegates from all the dioceses and eparchies. The first phase of *Listening and Dialogue* began with consultations with the Catholic community in Australia. More than 222,000 people participated contributing to 17,457 submissions (Dantis *et al.*, 2019). Submissions frequently complained a lack of inclusion of women in the Catholic Church governance and ministerial leadership roles (Dantis *et al.*, 2019). Yet, in July 2022, during the second, and final assembly of the Council, a deliberative vote on the Motions and Amendments document 'Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men', failed to pass when it did not reach the required two-thirds majority support of Australia's bishops. The issue was a proposed amendment which named and recorded that Council members had heard the disappointment and frustration regarding women's exclusion (Fawkner, 2022).

Council members, particularly women, reported feeling sad, shocked, angry, disappointed, and frustrated at the outcome of the bishop's vote. One woman wept openly. There was a morning tea break directly after the vote. When the members returned to take their seats there was a spontaneous, silent gathering of 60 of the 277 members near the doorway at the rear of the room (Bowling, 2022; Rodrigues, 2022). In the aftermath, this silent gathering of women and their allies was framed as a 'protest' or 'complaint' (Fawkner, 2022). The Plenary Council had been widely promoted as a process of listening and synodality yet hopes for a process where the voices of women were heard and acknowledged seemed dashed. Then something unexpected happened. Instead of the assembly continuing after the women stood and resisted, the agenda pivoted and a re-formulated decree on the equal dignity of women and men was voted on and passed (Knott, 2022). The re-drafted decree committed the Australian Catholic Church 'to enhancing the role of women in the Church, and to overcoming assumptions, culture, practices and language that lead to inequality' (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2022). It did not include any promise of radical change in the status of women in Catholicism, but there was expectation among Catholic women that adjustments and amendments might finally address gender inequality (Knott, 2022). More than a year has now passed and the situation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia remains unchanged.

In *Complaint!* Ahmed (2021) theorises that doors, open doors, closed doors, and doorways can literally and metaphorically explain institutional power dynamics, including how women, as complainants, resist and are shut in and out of institutions. For many generations Catholic women in Australia have been knocking on doors and standing in doorways, asking and begging for gender equality and recognition without success. When institutions, such as the Catholic Church, deal with complaints by following procedures, conducting research, holding councils, writing statements, and creating new policies, they can make the complaint non-performative. In this sense, the complaint and complainer become sites of negation; particularly when misconduct and harassment is part of institutional culture (Ahmed, 2021). Ahmed (2021) observes, 'to be heard as complaining is not to be heard' (1), yet 'to complain is to keep knocking on that door, hoping to create an impression, to cause a disturbance, to disturb someone who is there' (305). A 'door' although it can be an actual door, is often a door of consciousness (Ahmed, 2021). The closing of a door of consciousness, which is used to exclude the complainant, can also be used by the complainant as a withdrawal and survival strategy. Ahmed (2021) suggests that complaints and complaint activism often have a queer method that leaves a non-linear or circular trail. In the following section, by focusing on The Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW), we consider how the formation of Christians women's groups in the second half of the twentieth century operated as complaint collectives to disturb institutional sexism.

## FORMING COMPLAINT COLLECTIVES

In the 1960s and 1970s, built on the successes of the second wave women's movement, Christian complaint activism grew, and complaint collectives were formed. Christian women gathered in church-based, feminist movements and produced publications that generated understandings of feminist agendas in Christian traditions,

including the ordination of women and the lack of inclusive language in the liturgy (Madigan, 2021; McPhillips, 2016). One prominent example is the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW). Early leaders of the movement positioned themselves and their activism as feminist (Scarfe, 2007).

In 1983, MOW engaged in what we might, retrospectively, term feminist doorway activism. Calling to mind Martin Luther's alleged doorway protest, members of MOW gathered at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney and glued their 'protest against the Church (12 propositions for the ordination of women) to a door of the Cathedral' (Scarfe, 2012: 122). MOW's protest was penned by then theology student, Susanne Glover (Piggin and Linder, 2020). Glover named the complementarian principle of male headship as an errant theology which was being used to limit women (Piggin and Linder, 2020). In gluing Glover's (theological and feminist) complaint against headship to the cathedral door, MOW brought public attention to the long-standing problem of sexism with the Anglican Church of Australia. In the words of Patricia Brennan (1996: 28), 'The Movement flushed the debate out of the back room.' However, the history of MOW begins before this complaint, indeed, while 'a complaint might be the start of something ... it is never the starting point' (Ahmed, 2021:20). According to historian Stuart Piggin (2012), MOW Australia was formed in Sydney by Brennan after a collective complaint she had assembled was silenced, yet, that collective complaint continues to arise from gendered exclusion within the church.

Prior to forming MOW, Brennan was part of the 'Sydney diocesan committee on the question of women's ordination' (Piggin, 2012: 180). Piggin (2012) writes that to open conversation, Brennan had collected the written testimony of 19 women and presented it to a fellow committee member, Peter Jensen. Piggin (2012) does not elaborate on the content of these collected testimonies; he simply notes that Jensen 'returned all of it to [Brennan] without comment' (180). Over the course of the next 20 years, Jensen would become the Archbishop of Sydney. He would advocate that complementarian ministry was good, biblical, and rewarded by God. In his final address to the Sydney Synod, Peter Jensen (2012) declared:

[O]ur complementarian position is Biblical and has never held us back ... I urge you to recognise that it is the clear teaching of scripture and remain loyal to it. God will bless such costly, counter-cultural obedience to his word, and he has done so already. (14)

In contrast, Brennan (2007) would later write of herself as 'counted among those MOW leaders who are not part of a local Anglican congregation' (61). Engaging in complaint activism against the complementarian principle of male headship does not open doors to the centre of diocesan life. Assembling a collective complaint led Brennan to a more marginal space in the diocese, however, it also 'gave birth to MOW' (Piggin, 2012: 180). This should remind us that, 'complaint activism can lead to forming new kinds of collectives' (Ahmed, 2021: 285). As a complaint collective, MOW gathered many who would engage in complain activism. By 1985, MOW 'had attracted over 800 members around the country' (Scarfe, 2012: 120).

In the story of MOW's activism, a door had multiple and contradictory effects. By co-opting a physical Cathedral door MOW's protest was loud, public, and unavoidable. The action amplified the collected arguments of many Christian women, as well as male clergy who supported women's ordination. This protest eventually opened the door to women's ordination in most of the Anglican Church of Australia. However, the door to ordination remains closed in the Sydney Anglican Diocese, and feminist women, like Brennan, and intentionally feminist women's groups such as MOW continue to occupy a marginalised space in the Diocese.

## INSTITUTIONAL POWER AND THE LEGACY OF CLOSED DOORS

Although MOW Australia began in Sydney, I (Rosie Clare Shorter) had no knowledge of MOW as a child or teenager in the Sydney Anglican Diocese. In 1992, nearly ten years after MOW's doorway disruption, when I was ten years old and regularly attending a Sydney Anglican church with my family, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia voted that Anglican women could be ordained as priests (Rose, 1996; Scarfe, 2012). I didn't know this at the time. I must have had some awareness through my late teens and early twenties that outside of Sydney, Anglican women could be ordained, yet I simultaneously believed they could not be. As a Sydney Anglican, I believed preaching and ordination was for men. Brennan (2007) suggested that the possibility of women priests is 'an unspeakable topic ... in the Sydney Anglican Diocese because of its obsession with male headship as a fundamental doctrine of faith' (60). For me, women's ordination was unspeakable because complementarian discourse (Shorter, 2021) made it 'unhearable'. I had not heard the complaints of those who came before me.

MOW had named, and attempted to change, the sexist cultures and practices within the Anglican church (Scarfe, 2014), yet institutional culture worked to keep such complaints hidden from view. Ahmed (2021) maintains that the work of complaining about an institution, teaches us about that institution, and about institutional power; 'Power works by making it hard to challenge how power works' (125). When MOW raised the voices of Anglican women, patriarchal power circulated through the Sydney Anglican Diocese to minimise and erase their experiences.

Peter Jensen's refusal to engage with the complaints Brennan had assembled, as discussed above, is illustrative of this.

While MOW hoped to open a door to constructive theological debate (Brennan, 1996), their 'opponents' refused to debate, and instead 'sought to starve the issue of oxygen' (Piggin and Linder, 2020: 408). One tactic for avoiding debate was to read MOW's feminist position and activism as a sign of insufficient doctrinal and confessional knowledge and practice. Scarfe (2012) explains as follows:

Both its opponents and Church leaders were quick to dismiss MOW members as secular feminists with little understanding or appreciation of the Anglican Church or the nature of a religious vocation— a view that has persisted. (121)

Early dismissal of MOW's complaint activism resulted in this history of complaint being buried under the noise of those, who – in varying degrees – continue to advocate men's headship. For example, in *Sydney Anglicanism* (2012), Sydney Anglican minister Michael Jensen (2012) has one separate chapter on the topic of women's ministry. Here, he attributes the diocesan position against women's ordination to a 'theological conviction about the nature of the church,' which he considers to be like a home or family, and so the both are based on New Testament passages which outline 'a pattern of leadership-through-service, and submission as a response' (128-129). He does not mention MOW.

When I asked Sydney Anglicans<sup>2</sup> about ministry, leadership, and preaching, only two women, both in their seventies, voluntarily raised MOW in conversation. Cassandra (who had previously been involved with MOW) described the Sydney Anglican Diocese as getting 'harder and harder lined' on the question of ordination. I asked Cassandra if she thought this was based on an interpretation of scripture which reads the New Testament as prescribing male headship, she replied, 'That might have been the excuse.' She considered it less about how the Bible was read, and more about institutional power. Cassandra explained:

The whole thing, including the current complementarian doctrine in my opinion, is about who is in charge. It's all about power. And if they have these convenient verses, the subordination of women becomes socially acceptable in the Diocese. If they said it was about power, then there wouldn't be nearly so many supporters. But as far as I can see, the whole thing has been about power.

In naming complementarianism, Cassandra's words were reminiscent of Rose (1996) and Brennan (2007) who firmly linked the diocesan stance against women's ordination to male headship and power.

Another woman, also in her seventies, told me she had recently met with members of MOW and that she 'gave them a little razz up, because they are small, depressed, burnt out.' Her assessment should not surprise us. Institutions minimise complaint by wearing out the complainer over time; 'the time it takes to get a complaint through the system needs to be understood as part of the system. If the complaints process is long and drawn out, it is more likely that a complainer will tire out' (Ahmed, 2021: 104). Some members of MOW have been complaining for 40 years or more. Reduction in numbers and momentum is a legacy of institutional power, and the door it closed on their complaint.

## OPTING OUT/ OPTING IN

The dismissal of Christian women's feminist activism sits in wider context of reduced membership in Christian feminist groups across denominations in the 1990s and 2000s, as many women opted not to participate. By the late 1990s to mid-2000s, neoliberal political agendas, reduced church attendance, and increased awareness of clergy sexual abuse prompted 'a cultural turn in the feminist politics of religion away from the big reform movements to new styles of political engagement' (McPhillips, 2016: 144). Taking place alongside such changes in feminist politics of religion in Australia was a growing discourse of generational contempt among secular feminists (Summers, 1993). The absence of younger women in Christian feminist groups created tensions (Madigan, 2021); although the reasons are complex. The valorising and rewarding of women who comply and conform with patriarchal edicts and norms – alongside the policing and enforcement of women who are perceived non-compliant – operated alongside secular feminist discourses, and a post-feminist backlash to silence feminist complaint activism and collectives in Christianity (Manne, 2018; McEwan, 2022).

An era of neoliberal political agendas and increased popularity of complementarian ecclesial movements juxtaposed to reinforce traditional gender roles and make feminism unconvincing for some women. In patriarchal

---

<sup>2</sup> Shorter interviewed 28 Sydney Anglicans between July 2019 and November 2020. 'Cassandra' is a pseudonym. Ethics approval for this project was granted by the Western Sydney University Human Ethics Research Committee in June 2019, approval number: H13296.

Christian traditions counter-hegemonic feminist movements sought to promote and reinforce traditional gender roles via gender complementary patterns of ministry (Bowler, 2019; Schüssler Fiorenza, 2016). In Australia, specific government exemptions for religions from certain human rights laws and anti-discrimination regulations currently permit religious organisations to create their own policies for employment and training (McPhillips, 2015). Therefore, within government reports and policy documents, women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights can be problematically framed as challenging religious freedoms (Poulos, 2019). This can result in the exclusion of certain groups, such as women and LGBTIQ+ people, based on Christian doctrine (Hollier, 2022).

Within Catholicism, a dualistic, feminine identity movement called 'New Feminism' emerged which promoted complementarian and essentialist theologies and supported the subjectification of women by maintaining women's subordination as essential, natural, and preordained by God (Beattie, 2006; Schüssler Fiorenza, 2016). In a similar way, Anglican women formed Equal but Different, 'to counter MOW' (Piggin and Linder, 2020: 407), and 'to testify to the unchanging truth of God's word—especially as it applies to the unity, equality and complementarity of male and female in God's creation, in marriage, and in ministry' (Equal but Different, 2015-2023). While many Anglican women opted out of explicitly feminist Christian groups, they increasingly opted into the complementarian theology circulated by groups such as Equal but Different. These groups typically guaranteed smoother pathways to employment opportunities; with conservative Anglican women writing how they have flourished in complementarian marriages and ministries (e.g., Hartley, 2019; Smith, 2012).

The 1970s and 1980s also marked the exponential growth of new pentecostal congregations in Australia. Hillsong Church, founded in 1983, quickly grew to be Australia's largest single congregation. Historian Denise Austin (2017) asserts that many of these pentecostal congregations, but particularly Hillsong, directly benefited from women opting out of mainline denominations, including Anglican and Catholic traditions. However, by the early 2000s younger pentecostal female leaders, heavily influenced by more conservative evangelical models, began to intentionally reject the second wave feminist notion of 'having it all' by choosing not to postpone child rearing but focus on motherhood, continuing their leadership as the wives of celebritised male church leaders (Bowler, 2019). Hillsong's Sisterhood and Colour Your World women's conferences, which have been critiqued for their conservative post-feminist values, often served to only amplify these women, thereby often reinforcing complementarian theologies (Maddox, 2013; Miller, 2016; Riches, 2022).

As it relates to women, Australian pentecostal history is complex. Today, prevailing ministerial rhetoric emphasises the largest denomination, the Australian Christian Churches (or ACC) movement's roots as egalitarian, echoing the prophetic utterance in the biblical Pentecost event (Acts 2:17-18). Women within Australia's pentecostal movements do have the right to be ordained; and the ACC was founded by women; most notably the street evangelist Sarah-Jane Lancaster. However, soon after her death the movement re-introduced complementarianism in various aspects of practice (Hutchinson, 2019). By 2009, Alphacrucis College faculty Jacqueline Grey and (now post-pentecostal) Shane Clifton stated:

Most spirit empowered people believe in female equality and empowerment (whatever their views on headship) and would be horrified to be told that they function in such a way as to sustain a sexist church culture ... the difficulty is of course, that good intentions are not enough... the presumption that [pentecostal] communities are empowering to women (when compared, for example, to mainline denominations) creates the situation where the sense of self-congratulation undermines the voice of any who might be advocating for change. (Clifton and Grey, 2009: 2)

A decade later, Elizabeth Miller (2016) demonstrated that a 'theology of submission' prevails in practice. In this way, ordination is not all that is required to ensure that institutions consider women constituents or leaders.

Upholding complementarian ideals may at times look to be pro-women as it focuses on the special 'feminine' attributes individual women can bring to ministry. However, as we have shown across Catholic, Anglican, and pentecostal traditions, failing to acknowledge the way the rhetoric of complementarianism scaffolds institutional sexism and gendered violence, means complementarian ideals also operate to keep complaint collectives hidden behind closed doors. We suggest that by joining and forming complaint collectives across denominational boundaries, feminist Christians can operate from an in-between space to re-open the door for those who came before, and keep it open for those who will carry complaints forward.

As in previous sections we have reviewed some of the counter-institutional work done by Catholic and Anglican women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we now examine a contemporary complaint collective in a pentecostal educational context.

## CARRYING COMPLAINTS FORWARD

In 2019 as an ordained minister and senior lecturer in theology expanding the higher education awards of the pentecostal megachurch Hillsong, I (Tanya Riches) encountered a convergence of complaints. Ahmed (2021) notes that complaints unfold paths, which must be walked; ‘a path can be what unfolds through action: a path as what you have to do to get somewhere’ (31). Eventually, I assisted by carrying a report summarising complainants’ concerns through the third-level security doors into Hillsong Church’s executive boardroom.

The precipitating event was a relatively innocuous post (initially public, later restricted) on the Hillsong College<sup>3</sup> alumni Facebook page on 15 October 2019. It was written by an alumnus simply requesting resources for deconstructing Christianity; however, over 1,600 comments ensued in the space of approximately 48 hours. Complaints of over 250 individuals in this thread were initially visible to all. As alumni converged in the space sharing their fragmented vignettes, which included their shared memories and general experiences, but also frustrations, unmet expectations, and allegations. I sent a short message to the moderation team encouraging them to review the content of each complaint methodically. This resulted in a press statement announcing my involvement.<sup>4</sup> Some commentators rejected this and demanded an external review; therefore, additional to the Hillsong College internal team, the legal firm HWL Ebsworth was commissioned.

Ultimately, the year 2021-2022 proved a tipping point for Australian pentecostals. The numerous Hillsong ‘scandals’ leaked to the media disposed the senior leadership, with the church’s constituency still in redefinition at the time of writing. Various failures to adequately address sexual assault/harassment complaints had become, in one sense, an institutional branding problem that could not be suppressed any longer. For example, journalist David Hardaker (2024) details the mishandling of complaints made by Hillsong College student Anna Crenshaw, after she was assaulted by Jason Mays, a member of staff. Hardaker (2024: 159) asserts that ‘according to Anna Crenshaw, when she took her complaint to the church, it took three months to notify Jason Mays of her claim, and then it took no further action for another two months.’

Although I had always prided myself on student advocacy, I realised I had been privileged not to ‘see’ many of the organisation’s paths. The process of reviewing complaints opened a door of consciousness with no return. For me, the months between Sydney’s COVID pandemic lockdowns were characterised by emergency zoom meetings with Hillsong Church’s Global Senior Pastor Brian Houston, General Manager, PR liaison, executive college leadership, and varied student support personnel. What unfolded was a slow rolling institutional crisis. A further 70 Hillsong College students/alumni requested interviews with faculty, while others turned directly to media to voice their experiences and concerns (Hardaker 2024; Riches and Peerenboom, 2024; Shepherd, 2023). In media reporting, the gendered nature of these complaints became evident; several high-profile cases included instances in which the church publicly admitted to the sexual assault and harassment of women (Riches and Peerenboom, 2024), alongside other allegations. As Ahmed (2021) notes, complaint is ineffective and costly and cannot be undertaken by everyone. During this time, some student complainants sent anonymous emails and petitions, unaware that anonymity sometimes prevented complaint handling under the institution’s policies (Shepherd, 2023). Students publicly highlighted their objections with their earlier complaint-raising as well as the church’s responses to media narratives; overall, they objected to Hillsong College’s separation or ‘atomisation’ of the issues. As Ahmed (2021) terms it, these ‘doors’ kept women in private messages and meetings, and from realising that other complaints existed. As celebrity pastors and leaders were exposed and came under investigation in Australian Courts, many other concerns presented were also validated.

Ahmed (2021) notes that complaints show institutional mechanics; meaning those who complaint-raise often *become* the mechanics demonstrating how the institution’s systems work. Complainants converged around the pentecostal model of training, whereby Hillsong College students were inducted via service learning into the pastoral vocation. Overall, the students proposed, this model *didn’t work as well* for those outside the existing Hillsong campus norm of an extroverted, married, white, (male) pastor. Certain students described experiences of exclusion at Hillsong Church, and these were particularly from women, and gender diverse and sexually diverse people. The described exclusion was exacerbated for students who were older, single, or lived with disabilities and/or mental health issues. Where students did not fit the model, they were often expected to change. And yet, Hillsong’s famous brand had depicted (and therefore drew into the student body) a diverse global church; often described by scholars as ‘the cosmopolitan ideal’ (Riches and Wagner, 2017). This was articulated by some students to have become what Ahmed (2021) terms a ‘coercive diversity’ or ‘pretence’ that suggests the institution is something other than what it is. As in, the marketing drew diverse young people from all corners of the earth to

---

<sup>3</sup> Hillsong College is an educational provider based in Australia that is a part of the pentecostal megachurch, Hillsong Church.

<sup>4</sup> The use of non-disclosure agreements (NDA) has been widely examined in the suppression of complaints in Christian organisations. My own experience was of an NDA being produced even as my own personal experience was of suffering reputational damage due to the publicity surrounding the event. Notably, I do not here detail any complaint subject matter or breach any individual’s privacy in this article.

attend Hillsong College's Sydney campus. But when they got there, they often found themselves 'strangers' within a white middle-class Australian suburban church, experiencing the structural violence of a world not created for them. Ahmed (2021) explains; 'You complain because you don't belong here' (158).

Ahmed (2021) notes, 'A complaint can require saying no to those with authority who in receiving your complaint will use their authority to retell the story' (146-147). At significant moments during the institutional crisis Hillsong's leaders sought to discount the veracity of complainants in public by emphasising high numbers of (assumedly) satisfied graduates. During this time, Hillsong Church set up a 'newsroom' on its site to refute victim's stories in granular detail, a strategy that scholars later noted to result in emotional and religious harm (Morehouse and Lemon, 2023).<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, these responses acted as the organisation's disciplinary tools, retelling the story from the organisation's perspective. Therefore, just as Ahmed (2021) notes, 'what you encounter when you make a complaint is *more* of what you encountered *before*' (159).

It soon became apparent that what prevented student experiences being acknowledged by the church was the *affect* students held toward the organisation (i.e., disgruntled, disaffected) versus the College's intended graduates: positive, ready-to-serve church volunteers. Sociologists Matthew Wade and Maria Hynes (2013) had previously emphasised the Hillsong Church's affective production; it seemed that pastors wanted to ensure their college's vocational programs developed particular affective qualities in potential church leaders. Ruth Graham (2022) writing in *The New York Times* articulates this succinctly:

Terry Crist, a fifth-generation pastor in Phoenix, joined the global megachurch Hillsong in part because of what he describes as its *distinctly joyful approach to church life*: Hillsong was an institution where leaders seemed 'light and free,' offering a church experience that attracted tens of thousands of people around the world (emphasis added).

To become a complainant was to betray the code. Ahmed (2021) makes this explicit, 'If you can become a complainer by virtue of not reproducing an institutional legacy ... not reproducing an institutional legacy can be seen as the work of complaint' (164). It seemed that those who were not happy to reproduce the legacy were expected to leave. Therefore, as in Ahmed's (2021) case, 'a path can also be a path *through* an organisation' (31).

As complainants gathered in intensity and force, so did global media attention. In February 2022, Global Senior Pastor Brian Houston announced he would be standing aside, instating interim pastors. At the time, he was facing a charge from Australian police for the concealment of sexual assault due to crimes concerning his father, of which he was acquitted. However, through this process it was revealed that Houston had been investigated internally twice for breaches of Hillsong's own ministerial code of conduct in interactions with women. Therefore, leaders receiving the alumni's complaints had themselves been under secret disciplinary action, raising questions as to who the heavy third-level security doors were built to protect. My sense of betrayal from the Hillsong General Manager and Board was intense; as Ahmed (2021) notes of complaint,

you reenter the institution through the back door. You find out about doors, secret doors, trapdoors: how you can be shut out, how you can be shut in. You learn about processes, procedures, policies; you point out what they fail to do, pointing to, pointing out; you fill in more and more forms; forms become norms; files become futures; filing cabinets, graves. (276)

After the 'scandals', and continuing appearances of grievances in the media, Hillsong Church experienced a decline in attendance with many of its (female and diverse) congregants disappearing (Shorter and Riches, 2023). Following the change in leadership, Hillsong's new Senior Pastor Phil Dooley apologised in a Hillsong gathering to all congregants who had experienced harassment, reported on the evangelical website *Eternity* (Abbott, 2022). It is not known if this apology was extended to or received by the complainants not in attendance. As Ahmed (2021) proposes, after a complaint fails, the main grief becomes that these voices and contributors are gone.

## CONCLUSION

Feminist Christian women can find they occupy a marginal position, standing in a doorway between Christianity and feminisms. In this article, following Sara Ahmed, we have assembled ourselves in this in-between space as a Christian feminist complaint collective to firstly, challenge gender inequality and marginalisation in patriarchal

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, an editorial in Hillsong Newsroom (2021) stated 'since Hillsong College commenced, almost 20,000 people have successfully graduated and now serve successfully in ministry positions across the world. The vast majority of past students report wonderful experiences, however like any college, there are some students whose experience did not meet their expectations, for a variety of reasons' (n.p.).

denominations and churches. And, secondly, to reconceptualise how feminist theory can be applied to feminist scholarship and activism in Christian religious traditions and communities.

We have brought together the complaints of women arising across Catholic, Anglican, and pentecostal settings in Australia as a collective complaint against institutional sexism and gendered violence. Drawing on the work of Ahmed (2021), we have shown that when Christian women protest sexism and gendered violence, or make formal complaints, they become a problem for their institutional churches.

Positioning Christian women, especially feminist women, as troublemakers and complainers, is a tactic for dismissing and burying their concerns and the complaints. Some complaints – such as the demands made of Catholic and Anglican women – have been buried by institutional processes and tucked away in the archives of institutional memory. Others – such as the complaints and allegations raised by pentecostal students and former staff at Hillsong College – have been erased and even repurposed as positive statements.

In hearing and retelling complaint stories, knowing that ‘to tell the story of a complaint is how the complaint comes out from where it has been buried’ (Ahmed, 2021:276) we have exposed gender norms, including how power is reproduced and how boundaries are policed in Christian traditions. As a complaint collective we inherit the complaints of those who came before us, and we are willing to hold the complaints of those who work alongside us and come after us. Doorway work, as a way of lending a feminist ear, of resisting and pushing back against institutional sexism and boundaries, is a legitimate and necessary feminist and Christian action. We invite other feminist scholars to join us.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## REFERENCES

- Abbott, R. (2022). Hillsong repents and regroup, *Eternity*, 21 March. Available at: <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/world/hillsong-repents-and-regroups/>. (Accessed 21 July 2023).
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv125jkj2>
- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373377>
- Ahmed, S. (2021). *Complaint!* Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2022). Complaint as a queer method, *Feministkilljoys*, 24 March. Available at: <https://feministkilljoys.com/2022/03/24/complaint-as-a-queer-method/>. (Accessed 7 July 2023).
- Ahmed, S. (2023). *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*. United Kingdom: Allen Lane.
- Austin, D. (2017). ‘Flowing together’: The origins and early development of Hillsong Church within Assemblies of God in Australia, in T. Riches and T. Wagner (eds), *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You call me out upon the waters* (pp. 21–37). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3_2)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Religious affiliation in Australia, *Government of Australia*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia>. (Accessed 21 August 2023).
- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. (2000). Woman and man: The bishops respond: Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000, *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*. Available at: <https://www.catholic.org.au/commission-documents/bishops-commission-for-health-community-service-1/513-woman-and-man-the-bishops-respond-1/file>. (Accessed 20 June 2021).
- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. (2022). Final Decree 2: Witnessing to the equal dignity of men and women, *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*. Available at: <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-4-Witnessing-to-the-Equal-Dignity-of-Women-and-Men.pdf>. (Accessed 7 July 2023).
- Baird, J. (2018). Data thy neighbour. *St Mark’s Review*, 243, 7–24.
- Baird, J. (2023). When I met Sinéad O’Connor she looked like a monk who smoked Marlboro lights, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/celebrity/when-i-met-sinead-o-connor-she-looked-like-a-monk-who-smoked-marlboro-lights-20230728-p5ds2z.html>. (Accessed 31 August 2023).
- Baird, J. and Gleeson, H. (2017). ‘Submit to your husbands’: Women told to endure domestic violence in the name of God, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 18 July. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-18/domestic-violence-church-submit-to-husbands/8652028>. (Accessed 12 March 2024).

- Beattie, T. (2006). *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Bowler, K. (2019). *The Preacher's Wife: The precarious power of evangelical women celebrities*. US: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691185972>
- Bowling, M. (2022). Vote over role of women disrupts Plenary Council assembly, *The Catholic Leader*, 12 July. Available at: <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/vote-over-role-of-women-disrupts-in-plenary-council-assembly/>. (Accessed 28 June 2023).
- Brennan, P. (1996). Into the ring, *Eureka Street*, March.
- Brennan, P. (2007). O Sydney, Sydney, killing the prophets. *Women-Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 40, 60–65.
- Carlson, B. and Farrelly, T. (2023). *Monumental Disruptions: Aboriginal people and colonial commemorations in so-called Australia*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Clifton, S. and Grey, J. (2009). *Raising Women Leaders: Perspectives on liberating women in pentecostal and charismatic contexts*. Sydney: Australian Pentecostal Studies.
- Dantis, T., Bowell, P., Reid, S. and Dudfield, L. (2019). *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying: Final report for the Plenary Council Phase I: Listening and dialogue*. Canberra: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference National Centre for Pastoral Research.
- Equal but Different. (2015–2023). *What we do*. Available at: <http://equalbutdifferent.org/what-we-do>. (Accessed 12 August 2023).
- Evans, A. (2023). Femininity in the 21st century. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101502>
- Fawkner, P. (2022). What is it about women and the Church?, *The Good Oil*, July. Available at: <https://www.goodsams.org.au/article/what-is-it-about-women-and-the-church/>. (Accessed 28 June 2023).
- Graham, R. (2022). Hillsong, once a leader of Christian cool, loses footing in America, *The New York Times*, 29 March. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/29/us/hillsong-church-scandals.html>. (Accessed 28 August 2021).
- Hardaker, D. (2024). *Mine is the Kingdom: The rise and fall of Brian Houston and the Hillsong church*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Hartley, K. (2019). The women of Sydney are not silenced, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 October. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-women-of-sydney-are-not-silenced-20191028-p534xp.html>. (Accessed 1 July 2020).
- Hillsong Newsroom. (2021). Response from Hillsong College to The Daily Mail enquiry (editorial), *Hillsong Newsroom*, 16 April. Available at: <https://hillsong.com/newsroom/blog/2021/04/response-from-hillsong-college-to-the-daily-mail-enquiry/>. (Accessed 18 June 2024).
- Hollier, J. (2022). 'I will never be considered human': The devastating trauma LGBTQ+ people suffer in religious settings, *The Conversation*, 9 February. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/i-will-never-be-considered-human-the-devastating-trauma-lgbtq-people-suffer-in-religious-settings-176360>. (Accessed 18 March 2024).
- Hutchinson, M. (2019). Lancaster, Sarah Jane (Murrell), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Global Pentecostalism Online*. Available at: <https://brill.com/display/db/egpo>. (Accessed 21 July 2023).
- Jensen, M. P. (2012). *Sydney Anglicanism: An apology*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
- Jensen, P. F. (2012). 'Last words': Presidential address 49<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Sydney Anglican Diocese, *Sydney Diocesan Services*. Available at: <https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/2012%20Presidential%20Address%20-%208%20October%202012%20%282nd%20session%20of%20the%2049th%20Synod%29.pdf>. (Accessed 28 June 2023).
- Knott, M. (2022). Catholic bishops backflip on status of women in Church, giving hope to reformers, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/catholic-bishops-backflip-on-status-of-women-in-church-giving-hope-to-reformers-20220710-p5b0hh.html>. (Accessed 28 June 2023).
- Lim, A. (2018). The ardent feminist who found delight in biblical submission, *Eternity News*, 5 March. Available at: <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/culture/the-ardent-feminist-who-found-delight-in-biblical-submission/>. (Accessed 11 August 2023).
- Llewellyn, D. and Trzebiatowska, M. (2013). Secular and religious feminisms. *Feminist Theology*, 21(3), 244–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735013484220>
- Macdonald, M., Carpenter, P., Cornish, S., Costigan, M., Dixon, R., Malone, M., Manning, K. and Wagner, S. (1999). *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*. Sydney: Harper Collins.
- Maddox, M. (2013). 'Rise up warrior princess daughters': Is evangelical women's submission a mere fairy tale?. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 29(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.29.1.9>
- Madigan, P. (2021). 'Be patient, ladies! Be patient!': Women and the Australian church (WATAC), 1982–2021. *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 98(3), 259–283.

- Maley, J. (2010). MacKillop exposed paedophile priest, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/mackillop-exposed-paedophile-priest-20100924-15qkt.html>. (Accessed 12 March 2024).
- Manne, K. (2018). *Down Girl: The logic of misogyny*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190604981.001.0001>
- McEwan, T. (2022). *Gen X women and the Australian Catholic Church: Negotiating religious identity and participation* (Doctoral thesis). University of Newcastle. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1431156>. (Accessed 12 March 2024).
- McEwan, T., McPhillips, K. and Pepper, M. (2023a). *International Survey of Catholic Women: Analysis and report of findings*. Callaghan: University of Newcastle. <https://doi.org/10.25817/0FNN-Z889>
- McEwan, T., McPhillips, K. and Pepper, M. (2023b). *International Survey of Catholic Women: Analysis of responses from Australia*. Callaghan: University of Newcastle. <https://doi.org/10.25817/ESKG-9H64>
- McPhillips, K. (2013). In the southern land: Gender, nation, and saint-making in Australia. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 29(1), 26–39. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudrel.29.1.26>
- McPhillips, K. (2015). Religion and gender in the post-secular state: Accommodation or discrimination? *Feminist Theology*, 23(2), 156–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735014555635>
- McPhillips, K. (2016). Contested feminisms: Women's religious leadership and the politics of contemporary western feminism. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 29(2), 134–149. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.v29i2.31139>
- McPhillips, K. and McEwan, T. (2022). The sexual economies of clericalism: Women religious and gendered violence in the Catholic Church. *Religions*, 13(10), 916. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100916>
- Miller, E. (2016). Women in Australian pentecostalism: Leadership, submission, and feminism in Hillsong church. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 29(1), 52–76. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.v29i1.26869>
- Moran, P. F. (1895). *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia: From authentic sources*. Wellington: Oceanic Publishing Company.
- Morehouse, J. and Lemon, L. L. (2023). Beyond reputational and financial damage: Examining emotional and religious harm in a post-crisis case study of Hillsong Church. *Public Relations Review*, 49(1), 102–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102282>
- O'Sullivan, M. M. K. (2019). *A Cause of Trouble: Irish nuns and English clerics* (2nd ed). Australia: Kindle Direct Publishing.
- OurWatch. (2024). *Preventing violence against women*. Available at: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>. (Accessed 18 March 2024).
- Pattel-Gray, A. (1998). *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia critically appraised from an Aboriginal historico-theological viewpoint*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Pattel-Gray, A. (1999). The hard truth: White secrets, black realities. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14(30), 259–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649993092>
- Pattel-Gray, A. (2023). Freedom from colonial bondage: Decolonizing biblical narratives and theological education. *International Review of Mission*, 112(2), 240–256. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irrom.12478>
- Pepper, M., Powell, R. and McEwan, T. (2021). *NAFVP Experience Study Report: The nature of experiences of family violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches*. Sydney: NCLS Research Report for the Anglican Church of Australia.
- Pepper, M., Powell, R. and McEwan, T. (2023). The impact of marriage norms and gender on Anglican clergy actions in response to domestic violence. *Religions*, 14(6), 730. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060730>
- Piggin, S. (2012). The diocese of Sydney: 'This terrible conflict', in E. Lindsay and J. Scarfe (eds), *Preachers, Prophets, and Heretics: Anglican women's ministry* (pp. 178–204). Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Piggin, S. and Linder, R. D. (2020). *Attending to the National Soul: Evangelical Christians in Australian history 1914–2014*. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing.
- Possamai, A. and Tittensor, D. (2022). *Religion and Change in Australia*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003255338>
- Poulos, E. (2019). Constructing the problem of religious freedom: An analysis of Australian Government inquiries into religious freedom. *Religions*, 10, 583. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10100583>
- Riches, T. and Peerenboom, L. (2024). Complaint as testimony?: Listening to Australian Pentecostal Christian women. *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, 44(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2024.2334062>
- Riches, T. (2021). 'Wisdom cries out': Towards a feminist pentecostal theology of (dis)ability, in J. Firth and D. Cooper-Clarke (eds), *Grounded in the Body, in Time and Place, in Scripture: Papers by Australian women scholars in the evangelical tradition* (pp. 187–202). Eugene: Wipf and Stock.

- Riches, T. (2022). Nevertheless, she persisted: Freeing women's bodies from silent theological sacrifice zones, in K. Ervin Alexander, M. L. Archer, M. J. Cartledge and M. D. Palmer (eds), *Sisters, Mothers, Daughters: Pentecostal perspectives on violence against women* (pp. 49–68). Leiden: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004513204\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004513204_005)
- Riches, T. and Wagner, T. (2017). *The Hillsong Movement Examined: You call me out upon the waters*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3>
- Rodrigues, M. (2022). Australia's Catholic plenary council in crisis over role of women in church, *National Catholic Reporter*, 6 July. Available at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/australias-catholic-plenary-council-crisis-over-role-women-church>. (Accessed 28 June 2023).
- Rose, M. (1996). *Freedom from Sanctified Sexism: Women transforming the church*. Queensland: Allira Publications.
- Scarfe, J. (2007). Journeying together on the Freedom Bus. *Women-Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 40, 47–51.
- Scarfe, J. (2012). Movement for the ordination of women: Their hearts in their mouths, in E. Lindsay and J. Scarfe (eds), *Preachers, Prophets and Heretics: Anglican women's ministry* (pp. 117–145). Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Scarfe, J. (2014). Changed rules, changing cultures?: The ordination of women. *St. Mark's Review*, 228(2), 51–58.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (2016). *Congress of Wo/men: Religion, gender, and kyriarchal power*. Cambridge: Feminist Studies in Religion Books.
- Shepherd, T. (2023). Hillsong College allegedly taught some students women should 'submit' sexually to husbands, *The Guardian*, 27 February. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/27/hillsong-college-allegedly-taught-some-students-women-should-to-submit-sexually-to-husbands>. (Accessed 9 March 2024).
- Shorter, R. C. (2021). Rethinking complementarianism: Sydney Anglicans, orthodoxy and gendered inequality. *Religion and Gender*, 11, 218–244. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18785417-bja10005>
- Shorter, R. C. (2023). Complementarianism, heteronormativity and the future of the Anglican Church: Tensions in lived Sydney Anglicanism. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 36(1), 118–144. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.25740>
- Shorter, R. C. and Riches, T. (2023). We're told pentecostal churches like Hillsong are growing in Australia but they're not anymore, is there a gender problem, *The Conversation*, 27 February. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/were-told-pentecostal-churches-like-hillsong-are-growing-in-australia-but-theyre-not-anymore-is-there-a-gender-problem-199413>. (Accessed 21 July 2023).
- Smith, C. (2012). *God's Good Design: What the Bible really says about men and women*. Kingsford: Mathias Media.
- Smith, J. K. (2010). *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal contributions to Christian philosophy*. Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Sullivan, K. R. and Delaney, H. (2017). A femininity that 'giveth and taketh away': The prosperity gospel and postfeminism in the neoliberal economy. *Human Relations*, 70(7), 836–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267166676322>
- Summers, A. (1993). The future of feminism: A letter to the next generation. *Refractory Girl: A Women's Studies Journal*, (44–45), 192–197.
- Sutter, T. L. (1965). *Hierarchy and Democracy in Australia 1788-1870: The formation of Australian Catholicism*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press.
- Truong, M., Sharif, M., Pasalich, D., Olsen, A., Calabria, B. and Priest, N. (2020). Faith-Based Communities' Responses to Family and Domestic Violence: CSRM Working Paper No. 1/2020, *Australian National University*. Available at: [https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/2/Faith-based\\_communities\\_responses\\_to\\_family\\_and\\_domestic\\_violence.pdf](https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/2/Faith-based_communities_responses_to_family_and_domestic_violence.pdf). (Accessed 11 April 2023).
- Wade, M. and Hynes, M. (2013). Worshipping bodies: Affective labour in the Hillsong Church. *Geographical Research*, 51, 173–179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12010>
- Weng, E. and Shorter, R. C. (2024). Decolonial perspectives on dominant constructions of 'religion', in J. Ravulo, K. Olcoń, T. Dune, A. Workman and P. Liamputtong (eds), *Handbook of Critical Whiteness* (pp. 1–15). Singapore: Springer.

---

**Citation:** McEwan, T., Shorter, R. C. and Riches, T. (2025). Feminist Complaint Collectives and Doorway Disruptions in Australian Christian Traditions. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 9(1), 03. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/16013>

Copyright © 2025 by Author/s and Licensed by Lectito Publications, Netherlands. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.