

This book is exciting! In *The Meagre Harvest* Gisela Kaplan canvasses the practical, social, cultural and political aspects of the Australian women's movement over the last quarter century with candour and refreshing frankness. She does not resile from making the hard statements and appropriate criticisms where those are due. At the same time though she acknowledges fully the very positive and unique contributions that the Australian women's movement has made to shaping the debate, both at home and abroad, around such issues as egalitarianism, equality, discrimination, identity: credit where it is due. It is down-to-earth, yet academic; concrete, yet abstract. In other words it is the most balanced perspective of the Australian women's movement over the past twenty-five years that one could read, and be provoked and challenged.

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THE
MEAGRE
HARVEST

*The Australian Women's Movement
1950s–1990s*

GISELA KAPLAN

ALLEN & UNWIN

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty-five years have passed since second-wave women's movements began. Most continue to be fuelled by conflict, but it is not always as clear as it was in 1970 what these conflicts are ultimately meant to achieve. I believe that, partly for this reason, it is time to ask what has been achieved and what remains to be done.

But before such analysis can even begin, we need to know what has happened. Those who were part of the Australian women's movement from the very start still have only their personal, anecdotal experiences and, of course, there are now at least two generations of young women to whom the 1970s are merely history. I therefore thought it vital to write an account that offered a wide-ranging view of the social context (1950s–1990s) of the new Australian women's movement.

As the first full-length book in Australia on this topic, this one paints with broad brushstrokes rather than identifying individuals and anecdotes, although a few of the latter are included. It attempts to set a record for one of the most profound and sustained movements of social, cultural and political dissent that this half of the twentieth century has seen. The Australian women's movement has a good deal in common with contemporary women's move-

ments elsewhere in the western world, but it also had its unique traits. The Australian women's movement is so rich in material that there is more at hand than even several books could cover. Indeed, in preparation for this book the bibliography became so large that Redress Press published these titles as a separate book. Readers are referred to this publication (Kaplan, 1995) for a systematic account of Australian feminist publications. Here, I have confined the bibliography strictly to titles mentioned in the text.

Perhaps this book dwells longer on 'minority issues' than an unsuspecting reader might have expected, but this choice can be defended here on two grounds. First, it seems important to me to give an impression of the parallels in the politics of women from different backgrounds and to assess the aims, ideas and strategies of the women's movement. This book is not about cliques or just about the winners in the movement, but about the broad sweep of events, seen from today's perspective and recounted as a critique. While the book is mindful of the women's movement as a singular phenomenon, it discusses women as a disaggregated category (Coulson and Bhavani, 1990; Reade, 1994) rather than as an unselfconscious unified whole. By recognising diversity, one can describe and then debate the tensions, ambivalences and confronting issues as they occurred at the time and now.

Second, it is my firm belief that a radical movement is best tested against its weakest, or most ostracised, members. A few can always make a success of things, but how do the least appreciated fare, where do they stand, how have they been treated, and how can they benefit from the movement today? At heart, this is an assessment of one core value and political target of the movement: equality. Equality, social justice in the formal sense, respect, self-worth, choice in a personal sense are probably key terms for the entire movement and a theme for this 'work-in-progress' movement (Mitchell, 1995).

Since the 1970s, the Australian women's movement has issued promises and raised hopes for women and for society at large. It has been one of the major contributors to an extraordinarily lively and socially conscious decade. It has delivered on many of these promises. Some of the key questions that this book asks and seeks to answer are: Which promises have been fulfilled? What has survived of both the hopes and promises? What were the mistakes, and are these mistakes of the movement itself or are at least some of the omissions or wrong turns a consequence of events far larger than the women's movement or any of its players?

No doubt, to some a review of the past 25 years will be a temptation to adopt a self-congratulatory tone. But one needs to

be just as wary of acclamations as of cynicism about the movement and feminism. Clearly, those who have benefited most by the movement will sing its praises, and those who have least agreed with its platform in the first place will condemn it. Yet others, who may have sympathised with the movement's major goals, might be disappointed or angry about how it has continued to represent and reproduce itself, and whom it has excluded and included.

No doubt some issues to be raised in this book are sensitive. Here, contemporaneousness still means partiality. Some may feel that the title of this book, *The Meagre Harvest*, suggests gloom and a defeatist attitude. Quite the opposite is the case. The title is meant provocatively, as a reminder that for many it has been a meagre harvest and that for the movement as a whole much—very much indeed—remains to be done.

The media are quick to point out that we are at odds with each other, that feminists are 'tearing each other to bits' and that we are all 'at war' with each other. But Susan Mitchell reminds us that feminism was always about clashes (1995, p.13). Cynics and critics have claimed that social meliorism is incompatible with intellectual rigour (Anderson, 1995). I submit that it is possible to improve the human condition and even the world, not by avoiding but by engaging in critique.

This book is an attempt to put the vast variety of expressions of feminism in perspective and to do so with affection and compassion. The Australian women's movement has contributed much to the face of Australia in the 1990s and this book is written partly so that we may not forget its past or its future.

GISELA KAPLAN
January 1996

PART I

S O W I N G

FINDING THE BEGINNING

Beginnings are always difficult. They set the scene and they conjure up images which have to be upheld later on. In fact, every movement has several beginnings, subversive, personal and public. Within limits, all of them will be discussed in the following chapters. The perception of the public face of the Australian women's movement depends on one's standpoint. As a public event, the movement was certainly extraordinary. How could it have started? One needs to imagine the quiet routine of suburbia in the late 1960s. To be sure, a few women were disgruntled with women's status in general and with their own position in particular, but one would not have imagined that the ordered everyday life and inertia could ever have ended. Within a few years, the dissatisfaction of an alleged few turned into a public spectacle displaying the anger of a multitude. Women who had never been politically active in their lives began distributing pamphlets, gave speeches, and marched in the streets of most Australian cities.

A culture which obliges everyone to answer 'I am all right' when asked 'How are you?' has inbuilt mechanisms to prevent the expression of personal dissatisfaction. Yet a movement started in which women en masse threatened revolution. The trigger for this unprecedented outburst was charges of unfairness and gross discrim-

ination in society's treatment of women. But at the initial, personal and experiential level, the early years of the movement were also characterised by dance, song, theatre, noise in the streets, spontaneous action and the unfettered expression of emotion and irrationality—even the use of 'rude' words. Young women threw to the wind their training of being graceful, modest and reticent. So many joined the movement that even the most sceptical had to grudgingly accept that this was not just a 'lunatic fringe' but a broad-based movement. This is one beginning.

In Australia in particular, 'beginnings' are even more difficult to make than elsewhere. An inordinate amount of Australian prose is about childhood, as if every new creative effort, every public statement had to start with an analysis of roots. Perhaps this is the insecurity of a young country, perhaps it is a cultural requirement of integrity or perhaps by now it is merely a convention.

This first chapter, then, also begins with a personal revision, setting a scene that will make the rest of the text and the perspective of this book eminently clear. When I began working in earnest on this book, a well-known Australian feminist said to me: 'You can't write about that—what would *you* know about the Australian women's movement?' That question has turned out to be pivotal. Who, indeed, can and should write a book on the Australian women's movement in Australia?

Pattel-Gray accused white Australian feminists of a 'profound cultural arrogance—if not a crippling ethnocentric bias'. She also said, and I agree, that 'White feminists control the agenda, then solicit politically correct "target groups" to participate in their activities—and thereby justify their position' (1995, p.13). I have to add that one can be white and yet get entrapped from within, encapsulated and catapulted out, stunned by the ease and the subconscious self-assurance with which this is accomplished.

It may well be true that I am writing from the position of an outsider. But I believe my outsider status is one of the strengths of this book. As a 1960s 'import', I am unlikely to take the same things for granted as someone born in Australia, and may be less unselfconscious vis-à-vis a variety of conventions. Being an outsider, moreover, affords one the freedom (Feher, 1989) to say what needs to be said without being hemmed in by the in-group, without jeopardising one's sense of belonging. No such 'belonging' exists. My 'difference' now may be rather small but it is forever present and symbolised by a slight accent. No one in Australia ever queried my writing about the European women's movements, although I did so at such a great distance from my subject and sources.

I arrived in Melbourne in 1968 and was an eyewitness to the

Vietnam Moratorium. I saw the women's liberation movement evolve from the very beginning. As a student at Monash University throughout the 1970s, I had a privileged vantage-point. However, being an eyewitness is no guarantee that one will be able to report the facts accurately or disinterestedly. For women of my generation who are writing about the women's movement, the times that are behind us are not history in the sense of a past that is closed and accessible only through secondary sources. The history of the movement is not a history that is separate and exists 'out there' for an objective, distant appraisal. Rather, it is inseparable from our lives, from our childhoods and teenager years. To most of us, who were in their late teens and early twenties (i.e. born in the 1940s and early 1950s) when the second-wave women's movement began, the movement has become inextricably interwoven with our entire existence, our lives.

My early years in Australia were particularly difficult, and I would not want to repeat any part of them. Neither my good education in Europe nor my experience as a budding opera singer had prepared me for being considered 'just right' for factory work in Australia. Loss of identity, the new and unfamiliar stigma of being a 'migrant woman', and the difficulty of gaining recognised qualifications in the face of financial constraints and child-rearing responsibilities made these first years complicated, if not at times traumatic.

It would hardly be appropriate to whip the Australian women's movement for my own deficiencies and uncertainties at the time. I emerged from them long ago and since then have participated actively in migrant and women's politics, in the women's refuge movement, as a member of the Women's Advisory Council of NSW, in state government advisory positions, in collectives, as a speaker, as a listener and as a writer. But the nature of my personal history means that 'looking back' is a process that gives rise to profound unease.

THE MOOD BEFORE THE MOVEMENT

One can date the start of the second-wave Australian women's movement very precisely (see Chapter 2). But where did it come from? And why did the women's movement snowball so quickly (within a few years) and develop in every single western industrialised country? There are many ways in which the Australian movement is comparable to the European and the North American

movements. In a sense, these similarities render the issue of outsider and insider (as sketched above) rather ridiculous.

To answer the question, where did the movement come from, one must go back to the 1950s and early 1960s. My Australian friends and I—we were all children and young women then—have talked a good deal about that period over the years. Our memories are surprisingly similar. It is perhaps odd that my friends do not find this surprising. After all, they grew up in Melbourne or Adelaide and I in postwar Berlin. But similarities there were, and some of these may have laid the groundwork for us to think and later act in ways that made a women's liberation movement psychologically, socially and politically inevitable across the western world. For instance, when I was nine years old, we were all asked in class what we wanted to be when we grew up. I said I wanted to be a surgeon or a famous professor. My classmates and teachers laughed for days about this. My Australian contemporaries had similar experiences in childhood. Recent autobiographies of Australian women such as Ann Moyal's *Breakfast with Beaverbrook* (1995) or Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain* (1989) make these points strongly, as do earlier works, such as *The Half Open Door* (Grimshaw and Strahan, 1982) or *Why So Few* (Cass et al. 1983).

Especially for girls and women, the 1950s were constrained and prescriptive years (Carruthers, 1994) in Australia, Europe and the US alike. They were constrained in the sense that a new breed of educators, psychologists and others had assumed a place as givers of advice on every aspect of life and specifically on 'growing up'. Allegedly feminine traits of modesty, charm, poise and grace were to be fully 'developed' and had to be apparent and functional before the young woman entered matrimony and then usually suburban boredom (Tennison 1972; Schapper et al. 1975; Johnson, 1994). Between the monitoring and moulding of teenage girls there was little space left for what we now call self-actualisation and self-determination. Advice books on household chores were plentiful, however (cf. *Australian Women's Complete Household Guide*, 1953), and a desexualised marriage was glorified as an institution in itself.

Behind some of these dictates lay the views of doctors who, together with politicians and policy makers, firmly believed that the birth rate had to be increased. The anxiety concerning women's fecundity (Browne, 1979) continued even though the birth rate actually increased in the postwar years. Although such views came from different sources in Europe than in Australia, they were equally coercive for women there. Among professional groups in Australia, they were compounded by nationalistic interests. Hence, a doctor told a medical conference that family stability was desirable for

satisfactory child rearing, 'which in its turn determines the weaknesses and strengths of a country's culture' (*First Australian . . .*, 1962). Ultimately all efforts of socialisation were expected to culminate in marriage, motherhood and home-making.

During the 1950s and 1960s Australians shifted en masse to the suburbs (Rowse, 1978), pursuing the nascent 'Australian dream' of home ownership. But many of the new areas were bereft of public transport, facilities, telephone booths, meeting places and even a sense of community (Munday, 1973). Nothing was accessible from the new suburbs without a car—but the car was taken to work by husbands and fathers. This is the environment into which young families moved and where young housewives and newly wed couples made their home (Rees and Senyard, 1987) and not all women coped well (Palisi, 1976). Services which might have offered women some relief from unmitigated childcare chores were few and far between. In the suburbs there were usually no preschools at all (Curthoys, 1987, p.312). Inner cities had some from 1940 onwards. Some were even government funded, but those centres that flourished tended to be the result of volunteer work and donations, generally in middle-class areas.

The Menzies government strongly promoted the idea of home buying, introducing schemes that would help even low income earners to buy rather than to seek rental accommodation. Some writers have proposed that such a trend was welcomed because Menzies hoped that home ownership 'would strengthen social and political conservatism' (Martin, 1987, p.87). In a sense, it did. The entire ideology of the homemaker (a wife), of an intact home with a stable family was well buttressed by home-ownership.

Women were tied to the home and their husbands economically as well. Banks rarely gave loans to women, let alone home loans. I keenly remember in 1969, when I attempted to buy my first car in Australia, that no bank or finance company would lend me \$1500.00 for a second-hand car unless I had a male guarantor. My sex, it seemed, constituted an 'unreasonable risk'. Access to money, be it for general purchases, for setting up a business or for the purchase of a home, was a quiet but ever-present barrier to women's independence and it was a long time before this barrier was removed (Watson and Helliwell, 1985). In February 1971, the Bank of NSW became the first bank to grant loans to women without a male guarantor (Smith, 1987). While I was serving on the Women's Advisory Council of NSW in the late 1980s, it commissioned a study of women in small businesses, undertaken by Leonie Still. This study revealed that even then women had problems securing loans.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s demand for goods was extremely high. Western notes that the period from 1945 to 1973, loosely referred to as the postwar era, was marked in just about all western countries by growth expectations and a generally heightened consumption orientation (Western, 1983, p.344). Almost all western industrialised nations recorded full employment and general shortages of labour. Australia did its economic homework and found enough treasures to grow rich, so it seemed. The dollar sign in the eye became a hallmark of Australian 'development' with the euphoria of the 'get very very rich very quickly' mentality of the mining boom (1968) and natural resource finds especially of the 1960s.

Why we perceived this decade as prescriptive and restrictive (or just plain boring), even as children, had at least two reasons. The laughter about my career aspirations at the age of nine sat uneasily with the examples and knowledge we obtained from our mothers. In my case, both my grandmothers held full-time jobs until retirement age and even beyond. My grandfathers had been killed. My mother preferred to work rather than stay at home and when she finally succumbed to social pressures and gave up work, she seemed unhappy and unsettled. On what grounds, then, was I to accept that my choices were limited and 'going to work' was only a matter of biding time before marriage? I am convinced that many Australian women who later entered the women's movement also had examples in their immediate or extended family of women in working life, notwithstanding the mythology of women as homemakers. I shall come back to the issue of women and work later. Suffice it to say here that there was a discrepancy between the dominant values and our experiences. Especially in those times of full employment the young women of my generation wondered why they could not choose careers in future, and/or become financially independent if they so desired.

But the laughter in my classroom—and that recalled by my Australian friends—showed that a female still did not count for much in the hierarchy of values. The fundamental popular belief that 'a man is only immortal when he has a son' leaves little room for girls to regard themselves as important. A daughter, as Brown put it, in most cultures is 'a thing to be given away' (Brown, 1981). She is indeed, as Simone de Beauvoir said, a member of the 'second sex' and is not supposed to desire public support. The thought of a girl making independent plans for her future in the 1950s appeared pretentious and worthy of scorn or laughter.

Also internationally shared in the 1950s were taboos relating to sexuality and to sexual expression. The movie *Splendour in the Grass*

contains an almost modern critique of the prevailing stifling and often dishonest mores. I knew of few couples who were happily married. Older girls at my school who had married immediately after leaving school did not seem happy. Similarly in Australia, the image of the beautiful home and glorified marriage was often marred in reality. Medical journals reported on the 'ubiquitous nature of marriage problems' (*First Australian . . .*, 1962, p.99), the widespread phenomenon of unconsummated marriages and virgin wives (*ibid.*), and the high incidence of pregnancy problems, maternal death in childbirth and stillbirths. In Australia, the incidence of the latter was as high as 15 per 1000 live births in 1953, declining to only 13.25 per 1000 by 1961 (Townsend, 1962, p.404). The sexual silences in the 1950s were stifling.

When problems did occur in marriage, the tendency was to explain them away as purely 'women's problems' and, by implication, as women's fault. The report of the First Australian Medical Congress in Adelaide in 1962 includes these comments by a Dr R. Wurm:

Pre-menstrual distress was regarded by many women as a natural heritage of their sex. That was not the case and often distressing symptoms snowballed to such a degree *that for only a few days of each month did a wife remain normal*. Not only did *she have a loss of libido or complete frigidity*, but often pelvic hyperalgesia resulted in dyspareunia. Frequently fear of pregnancy was the provoking factor. Changes in *her* behaviour pattern became increasingly marked, leading to arguments and loss of respect for, and by, her husband and children. (*First Australian . . .*, 1962, p.100) (emphasis added)

Evidently, in the eyes of some professionals, a woman's womb was an important source of marriage problems and men were simply the troubled onlookers who eventually lost respect (because of their wives' 'loss of libido?').

In the early 1960s, of course, the pill made its entry into western women's lives. My generation had no immediate access to the pill, certainly not at first. We were too young, too timid, and too ignorant to ask for it. But the pill, even if unavailable to teenagers, brought with it changes of attitude (Clarke and White, 1983). The most significant one was the idea that sex need not lead to pregnancy. The pill enabled women to enjoy sex more because it reduced the risks of pregnancy. It also enabled them to plan their lives more concretely than ever before. The pill saw the beginning of fitting pregnancies around other life events, such as work (Raphael, 1971), rather than vice versa. The pill later became controversial because of its side effects. Some writers also questioned

whether sexual liberation in a male-defined context was not just a mirage (Lake, 1988, Burgmann, 1993).

Most of us were dutiful daughters. By the time I was 21, I was not only someone's wife but someone's mother, and was hence expected to fall into these traditional roles. That the marriage did not last may be partially attributable to my ever-growing desire for independence. At the time I thought that my rebellion was an individual case. As we all learned later, this was not so. Yet neither my Australian friends nor I in Europe had come across any literature that described our smouldering annoyance. Margret Harland's book *Women's Place in Society* (1947) was just as unknown to Australian girls and young women in the 1950s and 1960s as de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) was to girls in Europe.

During the 1950s, women's role in the home (or at any rate upper and middle-class women's role) became less specialised. As the jack-of-all-trades began to disappear in industry, the jill-of-all-trades began to appear in domestic work (Cowan, 1985, p.197). For working-class and lower-middle-class women, expectations of competence were often not accompanied by the modern conveniences available to the better off. Moreover, especially in the newer suburbs, they were no longer supported by an extended family. In other words, the 1950s provided the narrowest framework for a woman's daily life: the fragility of a nuclear family and a range of expectations which often confined housewives to a rather lonely life (MacDonald, 1969; Brophy, 1975) or devalued the experiences of those women who actually worked outside the home.

HOME GROWN ISSUES

Clearly, there were also substantial differences between European and Australian society. I would like to describe these briefly. The main ones concerned the consequences of the war, chiefly as they applied to work; Australian society also had to come to grips with Aboriginal culture and the entire set of postcolonial cultural contradictions.

World War II work practices proved to be no trend setter—and here lies one of the greatest differences between Australia and western Europe. At the end of the war, at least some countries in western Europe signalled that they were ready for a new deal for women. After the war, the French government made the (belated) gesture of 'allowing' women the vote and Italian left-wing parties ensured that women's issues were part of their election platform. In fact, in Italy, there were more women in parliament in 1945

(just after the war) than there are women in parliament in Australia today. The later liberation from dictatorship of Spain, Portugal and Greece also resulted in constitutions which wrote in women as part of a new deal for the people of those countries (for detail see Kaplan 1992).

Australia had made a promising start at the time of Federation (1901), having included women on electoral rolls well before most European countries. By the 1920s, women in all Australian states could theoretically be elected to government. Yet they failed to enter parliament. In state politics before 1950 there were a total of seven women, three of whom were in Houses of Assembly (Millicent Preston Stanley, 1925, NSW; Millie Peacock, 1931, Victoria; Edith Cowan, 1921, WA) and four in Legislative Councils (Ellen Webster and Catherine Green, 1931, NSW; Margaret MacIntyre 1948, Tas.; and Irene Longman, 1929, Qld). Women first entered federal parliament in 1943 (Enid Lyons in the House of Representatives, and Dorothy Tangney in the Senate), at a time when the needs of the war machinery relaxed some of the social conventions working against entry into public life for women. In 1972, almost 30 years later, there were just three women in the Senate and none in the House of Representatives. Politically, the 1950s and 1960s were barren years for women in Australian politics. Even the few politically active women were relegated to the role of auxiliary helpmates within the male party machine.

Hence, there was no political culture to speak of into which Australian women could be incorporated or to which they could be co-opted. The last active non-party women's political activities were in the 1930s, particularly visible in the United Association of Women, whose first president was Jessie Street (Mitchell, 1980). But these were interrupted by the war and later fragmented and throttled by the Cold War. There was little in daily life that prepared women for any public role. A new deal for women was not envisaged in Australia at the end of the war, and nothing happened for women in politics.

U n i o n s a n d w o m e n

Whatever I saw of Australian unions in the early 1970s also did not impress me. There were so very few women. I learned, both by working in a factory when I first arrived in Australia and from the literature later, that women were not just neglected by and underrepresented in unions but often treated badly by unionists (Storer, 1972). As late as 1978, the Royal Commission on Human Relationships found that 'some unions have not responded to the

entry of migrants and women into the workplace. It is claimed that their neglect amounts to discrimination by omission, in that they accept subscriptions for services they fail to give' (1979, p.20). I felt that unions in Australia had made the very great error of not recruiting women into their ranks as a matter of course, a point of view frequently shared by Australian-born feminists (Ryan and Prendergast, 1982). Some European countries (from Denmark to Italy, from Greece to France) had done so at the latest since the turn of the century and the experience generally was that this inclusion (although even then women were at times marginalised within the organisations) lent untold strength to the union movement and to the left in general. Many unions in Europe provided a training ground for political thought and practice. Models of participatory democracy at the factory floor could be found in Spain, Yugoslavia, Scandinavia, and northern Italy. In Denmark, the history of powerful and active unions for women reached back well into the nineteenth century (Bassnet, 1986).

By and large, Australian union thinking paid lip service to socialist ideas, but it overlooked some of the most fundamental messages of the European socialist and communist platform. After Federation, the structuring of the Australian federal (Whelan, 1979) and state arbitration courts further hindered the development of unions for women (Clarke and White, 1983). The 'woman's question' was part of European left agendas by the 1910s and 1920s and had been foregrounded by socialist western European writers and activists in the 1870s and 1880s. Even fascist governments were unable to break the strong working-class union women, who were highly organised and mobilised in the 1910s and 1920s in a factory-floor movement. The knowledge of how to act politically was resistant to any form of oppression and hence survived. In many European countries, political action was not readily weakened by gender splits but instead was strengthened by unified working-class movements.

Egalitarianism

Another element in Australian culture was its avowed egalitarianism. I failed to comprehend or believe this. The 1960s produced culturally optimistic and populist books such as Horne's *The Lucky Country* (1967), one of the first books I read here. I could not see in what way Australia was luckier than other western nations or indeed less stratified. Its political system is much like some European ones. I furthermore failed to see why this self-delusion was necessary. Australia is not only an extremely beautiful (and uncrowded)

country, but its overall standard of living puts it comfortably in the 20 per cent of countries which now use 80 per cent of the world's resources (Trainer, 1991). That may be 'lucky', depending on one's viewpoint of the rights of nations in the world, but why the mythology? Why would Horne have felt compelled to pronounce that inequality was 'a minor problem' (p.61) and argue that Australia was 'the most egalitarian of countries, untroubled by obvious class distinctions, caste or communal domination' (p.19)? Why was it still possible, in the late 1960s, to proclaim that there were not any *really* poor people in Australia (cf Playford, 1977, p.115) and argue that egalitarianism was the most pervasive value of Australian society? Many other writers have also stressed that egalitarianism runs through Australian culture as a 'persistent motif' (McGregor, 1968).

One of the first sociology essays I had to write as an undergraduate (in 1972) was on the question 'Is Australia a classless society?'. In my tutorial group, there was no doubt in anybody's mind that Australia had 'classes' of people. Other sociologists at the time argued that Australia was only 'stratified', suggesting that one's position changed from one generation to the next. I concluded that the mythology had more to do with an attempt to forge a unique Australian identity than with social facts. Women were certainly not well off, occupational stratifications were very similar to those in other western countries, and by then I had also met a few Aboriginal people and found their poverty and some aspects of their life stories deeply shocking. In 1970, as a member of a suburban art group in Melbourne, I met the Aboriginal painter Ronald Bull and a friendship developed which lasted until his death in 1979. His untimely death (we were the same age) was also a grim reminder of Aboriginal health and living standards. Some migrants of whom I knew also lived in utter poverty. The income differentials I saw were just too great for me not to believe that life was 'lucky' only for certain people, and decidedly 'unlucky' for others (Hardy, 1968). At that time the Henderson Report appeared (Henderson et al, 1970), testifying that there was extreme poverty in Australia, and Peter Hollingworth added his comments to this scenario in the book *The Powerless Poor* (1972).

All I could perceive was a culture of concealment, hiding as well as it could the inevitable blemishes that accompany the economic system of western cultures. Also hidden from debate was a recognition of any power base in Australian society. At a different level of mythology, it was claimed that no one really rules Australia. Conservative thinking maintained that there was no identifiable power élite, and hid the relationship between wealth and power.

Yet in postwar Australia 'approximately half of all the personal wealth of Australians is owned by the richest five per cent' (Connell, 1991, p.136). It is possible that Australia has more fluidity in status mobility than other western countries (Broom and Jones 1976). Classes may not be hermetically closed off from one another, but even such limited mobility is no proof that 'class' is irrelevant, or that money is not related to power. In the 1950s and 1960s women featured nowhere in the landscapes of power, no matter how complex or simple these structures might have been. One would also be hard put to find more than a handful of independent women among the richest 5 per cent today.

In everyday life it was possible to partially overlook structured inequalities in the relatively broad bands of the petty bourgeoisie and middle class. Inequality is, after all, structured vertically and hence horizontal peer-group relations can give the illusion of egalitarianism. Obversely, a hostile outsider group can foster a sense of sharing and equality among the insiders (Simmel, 1964). Oxley's study concluded that egalitarian thinking in the face of status differences can be maintained only in certain ways, either by mixing only with status equals or by maintaining impersonality when status differences exist (Oxley, 1978, p. 206). Such social distance would indicate that egalitarianism does not work across strata. If this is the case then there is no egalitarianism in the first place, because egalitarianism purports to achieve social closeness across strata. This has implications for women, as I shall explain below.

Universities had their own brand of egalitarianism. We called lecturers by their first names and they called us by our first names. Needless to say that this did not change the power structure. 'They' were still marking our essays and the power structure remained unchanged. Women also did rather badly in winning postgraduate scholarships in the 1970s. The problem was then that, in general, women were not often awarded high grades in the humanities and social sciences. Marking assignments is not an entirely objective process. The issue of the 'bright young man' and the 'hard-working girl' crossed my path often enough in academia of the 1970s and 1980s. When I wrote about this later (Kaplan, 1985), I received a washing basket full of mail from women (postgraduate students and academic staff) across Australia, agreeing with me and citing horrific cases of discrimination at their work/study places.

My views placed me in the radical camp, a label I held almost involuntarily. It was partly a function of my having been socialised elsewhere; my lack of identification with the local mythology made it easy for me to see through some ploys.

Socialisation

Egalitarianism is as gendered as status maintenance and Australian men and women are socialised to play different roles in the egalitarian myth. Studies confirm that males play at being equal while the wives undertake the role of defining and symbolising status (Oxley, 1978). For the study of gender this is an important statement. It suggests, as has long been recognised, that status (as well as class) socialisation and perception are gendered. In most continental European countries, class is firmly embedded but not necessarily reflected in the education system, at least not at compulsory school level. For instance, in Germany, the entire school system was state-school based. There were a few private schools but these, in my generation, were disreputable—reserved for students who were considered ‘no-hopers’, failures whose parents were forced to buy them a (minimal) education.

In Australia, by contrast, the binary private/state education system created the most obvious divisions in educational intention and social status. Private schools for girls functioned largely as training grounds for ‘good breeding’ (Reid, 1960). Some were chiefly interested in academic achievement but in others social training was given great weight (Zainu’ddin, 1975). As late as the 1980s, despite substantial changes in the educational climate for girls overall the stated aim of some private girls’ schools was to inculcate in students the values and behaviours of ‘ladies’ that would serve them well as wives (Parker and Offer, 1987).

If social rules demanded that the husband pretend equality, he had to learn a very different set of rules from his wife. His ‘egalitarianism’ could only work if *she* set the standard and tone for his success and power. She would be called upon to help him up the corporate, political or career ladder, a feat that required her to know not only how to behave in the here and now but to predict what behaviours would be appropriate for the station beyond their present one. She had to be schooled in every fine nuance of class presentation, set the (status) tone in conversation and entertaining, and know the entire ‘vocabulary’ (verbal and non-verbal) of social cues, a process well described by Vance Packard in *The Status Seekers* (1960).

I can only conclude that Australian women were trained to be more class and status conscious than their male counterparts. I would argue that this is more typical of New World countries, such as Canada, Australia, the US and New Zealand, than of Old World countries, excepting indigenous peoples. Indeed, in the Middle East, in many Asian countries, and especially in southern Europe, gender

segregation often bonds women together in relatively large and very relaxed networks.

For the Australian women's movement, and for all the women of Australia, this specific socialisation pattern had to have consequences. Since the rules functioned to *maintain* social distance between women, a women's movement would somehow have to learn to overcome the games devised for status distance. By definition, middle- and upper-class women had more to gain from such training than working-class women. One of the inevitable consequences of such training is that women are segregated from one another and isolated. Wherever I went in Australia I noticed with discomfort women who eyed and played each other off, vying with each other and never hesitating to let others know when she considered them inferior. This excludes the old Australian working class, which had very strong bonding patterns (see Liverani, 1977). For the middle classes there was none of that easy bonding among women that occurs in other cultures and little to none of the relaxed friendship ties among women (not girls) that characterise social contacts elsewhere. This status issue, it seems to me, was all part of a divisive training which functioned well to uphold a male mateship culture in Australia.

One of the chief goals of the women's movement from the very beginning was to unite women, to create an egalitarian, horizontal network of sisterhood, of bonds that would be emotional, social and political and would transcend traditional status associations. The size of the undertaking can only be fully appreciated if one bears in mind the powerful socialisation which worked very much in the opposite direction.

I maintain that to this day the breaking down of status barriers has been successful only in exceptional circumstances or in relatively superficial situations. In general, the tenuous links forged across class, culture and colour barriers have not endured or have not been established. Friendships between adult women, I feel, are still often 'difficult', underlining social distance even in cases of status similarity. Cliques are a different matter because they function largely to maintain status distance. My conclusion is that, by and large, Australian feminists have at best merely mirrored the male egalitarian model of mateship, but they have done so only half as well as men. Women rarely engage in all the paraphernalia that goes with a functional mateship system and old boys' network. I attribute this failure to a socialisation which directly contradicts bonding between women.

Those who today hold the view that the networking of women is wonderful and greater than it has ever been are completely

correct, but only at certain levels. Formally, this is certainly true. Women's studies and women's conferences in Australia attract hundreds and sometimes thousands of delegates, and even more internationally. A network of women's organisations spreading across political, educational, social and professional configurations exists now but did not exist in the 1950s and 1960s. Informally, there are groups that meet regularly, but on closer inspection the closer ties among these tend not to function across status and class let alone ethnic divisions. They usually also lack the stability and intimacy of the bonds of working-class women.

Culture

The 1950s and 1960s were also decades of contradiction in cultural terms, and this in turn must have required some strange responses. Institutes of culture were being built at the same time as Australia's creative and literary arts remained largely unappraised. Many current cultural fixtures were born in the 1950s and 1960s at the same time as overt cultural denial continued. Australian schools, radio programs and tertiary training courses focused their cultural teaching firmly on Britain—teaching English literature as the national literature of Britain rather than as English-language literature—and retaining a 'British definition taught to my kind of colonial' (Conway, 1989, p. 95). Despite this orientation, the 1950s and 1960s were in fact highly productive years in Australian literature and in the fine arts. Many of the books now regarded as Australian classics and turned into internationally successful films were creations of the 1950s and 1960s.

Australian literature as an identifiable Australian culture, in contrast to Australian fine arts, was far too often ignored, with the possible exception of plays. To a cultural outsider it is difficult to comprehend the neglect of or disregard for Australian writers in this period and even later. We 'might have been in Sussex', writes Jill Ker Conway, recalling the lack of Australian works in her school curricula (p.98). It was little comfort to writers that the first chair of Australian Literature was established in Sydney in 1962. Most universities continued to concentrate on English literature well beyond the 1970s, excluding Australian authors from study, except perhaps Patrick White. While England has always had some problems identifying itself as part of Europe within the European context, it is clear that England outside Europe, and especially in Australia, reflected a European culture which was entirely absorbed by Australia, with only the occasional admission of and concession to local realities. These are fragmentations of a kind which I have

never suffered and I can only barely comprehend what impact the incongruence of teaching and living might have had on those growing up.

WHEN WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME
WAS NOT A CHOICE

Another discrepancy between ideology and reality concerned work. Daily experiences were often at odds with the predominant view of women as homemakers. Many married women had to earn additional income for the family. Despite the ideology of home making, women constituted a considerable part of the workforce. A minute percentage also had careers. In the 1950s and 1960s women's participation rate in the Australian workforce was not all that different from the European experience. But Australia had a distinctive history of labour, labour relations and unions which had evolved differently from that in Europe or in the US.

Australia may be one of the few countries, if not the only country, in the world in which the term 'a living wage' was used. It was odd to me as a newcomer that so much emphasis should be placed on a 'living' rather than a minimum wage. Behind the awkward word 'living' hides a distinct ideological position. A minimum wage or hourly rate is a standard based on market forces; it is determined by the supply and demand of labour. The viewing of a minimum wage as a *living* wage, on the other hand, is supposed to relate income to needs, calculating costs of living as part of setting a minimum wage. As Justice Higgins argued in 1912:

I have been forced to fix it [the living wage] by considerations other than those of mere earning power. I have based it, in the first instance, on the normal needs of the average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilised community. (cited in Ryan and Conlon, 1975, p. 92)

The Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration was established by a federal Act in 1904. The Act was amended about 40 times between 1904 and 1975 (*ibid*, p.87). Justice Higgins, the second president of the court, was among the first in Australia to enshrine the concept of a 'living wage' for a married man with children. Several Australian politicians had tried to arrive at a living wage (Sawkins, 1933), but that was before Federation. Higgins first announced the wage in the Harvester case judgment (1907), which set a living wage for adult males.

Although the idea of a living wage was not in itself new, having been part of Roman Law and Roman Catholic thinking and hence

part of the European history of labour, it gained enormous significance in the newly created Australian federation. From the 1920s onwards, however, the 'living wage' was constantly attacked by employers and it was eventually abolished in 1953. The labour movement has nevertheless continued to keep the notion alive, if only as the 'most potent of labour movement myths' (Castles, 1989b, p.65), and as 'a rallying point in the class-struggle, a trench to man against the attacking forces of capitalism' (Hancock, 1961, p.157). None of these lofty sentiments tended to include women.

Wages for women were part of a different set of circumstances altogether. In the Fruitpickers' judgment in Mildura (1912), a minimum female wage was set corresponding to the minimum male one. However, this ruling was undone within only six years when in New South Wales the Industrial Court saw fit to set a separate wage rate for females. The male rate had been set at sufficient to keep a family of five (husband, wife and three children). It was assumed that women, if they worked, were on their own—even though not all men were married and not all women single. The female rate was set at 50 per cent of the male wage. Given the prevailing logic, one must be thankful that it was not 20 per cent, since a man was assumed to have five mouths to feed! This proportion was later increased several times, reaching 75 per cent of the male wage (at least on paper) by the time the Women's Employment Act was passed in 1942. But the damage had been done. The view that women needed only a portion of the wages of men was never challenged at a fundamental level. Change was not brought about domestically but through international pressure. Women's representation in the professions was also considerably lower in Australia than in Europe or the US at that time (MacKenzie, 1962, p.189), in some cases virtually non-existent.

Despite such unfavourable conditions, however, Australian women were always more highly represented in the labour market than women in many European countries, even in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a myth that women began to enter the workforce only in the last two decades. At no time between Federation and now was the proportion of women at work much less than 30 per cent. However, the proportion of all workers who were women was lower—about 20 per cent.¹ Those ratios rose steadily after 1954 until today 52.2 per cent of women are in paid employment and women make up 42.3 per cent of the workforce (Townsend and Madden, 1994).

Comparable data for married women show an even sharper increase, from 13.6 per cent in 1954 to 28.8 per cent in 1966, and it has increased ever since. However, quoting these statistics without

further explanation can be highly misleading. One of the first errors is to assume that the percentage of married women remained stable in the population. It did not. In the 1920s a far greater proportion of women (and men) were never married (by the age of 40) than today, or even in the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, an increase in the number of married women at the workplace is also a measure of increased marriage rates. Baldock attributes the increase in the number of married women to demographic changes such as an increasingly early age at marriage and the smaller family size (Baldock, 1978, p.133). Further, the substantial rise of married women in the workforce from the 1950s to the 1960s is to a large degree a consequence of mass-immigration. The majority of married immigrant women went to work in the 1950s and 1960s but not Australian-born women. Third, the distribution of males and females in the population began to close dramatically, also as a result of immigration (*Immigration and the Balance...*, 1969). Finally, the rise of part-time work has distorted the figures for women's workforce participation, both in the single and married categories. In 1994, just over 52 per cent of all women were in the workforce, but nearly half of all women (42 per cent) work part-time (Townsend and Madden, 1994).

It is instructive to read the original Victorian Public Service Act (1883) which was distinctly modern in tone and sounded very democratic in its intent 'to abolish all patronage with respect to appointments and promotions in the Public Service, and to establish a just and equitable system in line thereof which will enable persons who have qualified themselves in that behalf to enter the Public Service without favour or recommendation other than their own merits and fitness for the position' (cit. Deacon 1984, p.132). With minor deviation, the language is almost identical to today's, espousing the same principles of fairness, justice, equity and merit. The difference lies in the meanings attributed to 'fair' and 'equitable' (see Chapter 2). At the time the Bill was drafted, the 'persons who have qualified themselves' were not seen as including women.

In 1951 Australia signed the International Labour Convention, committing itself to abide by international standards of equal pay. But there are pockets where employers have proved tardy, if not reluctant, to uphold this agreement.

The male labour shortage during World War II should have brought about a substantial change in Australian attitudes. However, this did not eventuate. The inclusion of an extra 200,000 women in the workforce was considered purely a wartime measure even though most women stayed in the workforce albeit often in different jobs (Beaton, 1982). The tram driver conflict that lasted

for 17 years is symptomatic of this thinking. Women were first employed on Melbourne trams in 1941 and soon there were about 1000 female tram conductors (Bevege, 1980, p.438). By 1947, as ex-servicemen returned to their jobs, women were phased out. The few who stayed filled gaps left by men who did not resume their jobs. Importantly, there were no promotion opportunities for women because promotion depended on being allowed to qualify as a tram driver. In 1956, this opportunity was officially granted to women, but the victory was short-lived. The trainers adamantly refused to train women as drivers, sparking a prolonged struggle; women continued to be barred until 1975. It took the pressure of International Women's Year, government and the labour movement to budge the male union members. At that time women constituted only 6 per cent of all tram employees (Bevege, 1980, p.448).

In 1955 the Victorian Trades Hall Council sponsored an Equal Pay Committee and the first national conference on equal pay was held in Sydney in 1958. That same year, New South Wales introduced equal pay legislation for teachers, to be implemented in 1963. In 1966 the Commonwealth public service removed its long-standing bar on married women. In 1969 the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission finally handed down its decision to grant equal pay, not before substantial lobbying and submissions by women's groups. This was a year ahead of the Equal Pay Act in Britain, but six years after a similar act was passed in the US.

Equal pay legislation was not worth the paper it was written on, in Australia, the US, Britain or continental Europe. Typically, women's work was perceived as less valuable in sectors of the labour market in which men had a high profile. The response by the private sector was simply to change female pay scales and job descriptions. To undermine equal pay for work of equal value one had only to claim that women's work was not of equal value because it was not of the same kind. Women were also deemed to need less pay because they did not, it was claimed, have families to support! (cf Power, 1974, p.8). The true motivation for opposing equal pay, however, was simply employers' desire to maximise profit. Equal pay provisions threatened to take away the substantial advantage of a sizeable and cheap workforce.

Most, if not all, unions during the 1950s, 1960s and even into the 1970s were tacit accomplices of employers as far as women's work was concerned. Their reasons for barring or discouraging women from permanent work were different but the effect was the same. For instance, the banning of married women, sometimes expressed as complete work bans and sometimes as bans from specific benefits, was supported in the name of social justice and

fairness for the men and single 'girls' (Nord, 1980, p.433). The Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union in the 1950s and 1960s employed married women only when the pool of union men and young women was exhausted. The ruling was that 'bosses' could contract labour from outside the union if the union failed to supply the labour from its own pool. In such cases, married women were called in. This happened on the understanding that they could get no seniority for the seasonal work, and hence would be called up less often, and that they would be the first to be laid off (*ibid*, p.431). As late as 14 January 1978 *The Australian* carried an article with the heading 'If mums quit work there would be jobs for boys (and girls)'.

Chief among other union reasons for opposing women at work was 'that employers were taking advantage of the situation to break down wages and working conditions' (*cit. Burgmann, 1980, p.457*). The perception of a 'polluting' effect of women in the workplace was widespread and went far beyond 'bread and butter' claims. Men's discomfort had to do with a male work culture, including the use of communal showers, the display of pictures of nude women in locker rooms, the use of coarse language and a sense of solidarity during industrial unrest (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, women started joining unions in large numbers from around 1974, at the height of the women's movement but still at a time when women were regularly refused employment if the job in question was 'a man's job'—and that meant most jobs.

The social welfare net and services that buttressed families reached very few. Reforms tended to be slow and modest in scope. In 1950, child endowment, which previously had been paid from the second child onwards, was extended to cover the first child, presumably in a bid to slow down the rate at which women were entering the workforce. Free milk was also introduced for schoolchildren. A year later free medical care and pharmaceutical benefits were introduced for pensioners. Paid sick leave and paid long-service leave were also introduced that year in NSW. In 1963, the first telephone counselling service opened in Sydney. In the early 1970s the volunteer-run Meals on Wheels service for pensioners was introduced. And in 1967 the federal Department of Labour and National Service re-opened a Women's Bureau (Norris, 1978, p.146).

This was more or less the sum total of reforms in public welfare services. If anything, the 1950s and 1960s were anti-welfare in spirit, thanks to the burgeoning economy and labour market. Even the 1961 recession left Australians' attitude of material optimism largely intact.

**THE BREWING OF THE STORM
AND VIETNAM**

The 1960s brought fundamental changes. It is questionable, though, whether these were attributable to the second-wave women's movement. There were conceptual changes of a fundamental nature which had slipped in well before the movement began. Many inequities had in fact been eradicated in the first women's movement. For instance, the right of women to participate in public life had been fought for and won decades earlier. The right of women to vote and be elected to parliament, to practise any of the professions, to hold property, had all been achieved. The language of privilege and exception had been exchanged for one of civic rights. The judgment against Edith Haynes's application for admission to the bar in 1904 makes this point eminently clear. One judge argued:

I think that the right of a woman to be admitted [to practise law] is a misnomer . . . The Common Law of England has never recognised the right of women to be admitted to the Bar . . . It appears to me that we must . . . bear in mind that throughout the civilised world, so far as we know, we have not been able to ascertain any instances under the Common Law . . . where the right of women to be admitted to the Bar has ever been suggested . . . It is not a Common Law right. It is a privilege which has been conferred by the Courts originally, and then been regulated subsequently by Statute from almost time immemorial, and which has been confined to the male sex . . . When the legislature in its wisdom confers the right on women, then we shall be pleased to admit them. (cit. Scutt, 1985a, pp.40-1)

By the 1920s, the 'privilege' to practise law was turned into a right for women in most Australian states. The professions were typically stocked by members of the upper-middle and upper classes, for whom class interests superseded gender considerations. In lowlier positions, the full weight of attitudes based solely on gender was felt for much longer. It took the women's movement years to eradicate archaic job advice in public service manuals, such as this one written for NSW receptionists:

Make the most of your face and figure. Achieving this can be lots of fun and it is up to you to make the end result attractive, natural, and worthy of attention. Looking feminine is an art which, if you develop it, can be one of the keys to your happy, successful existence—be a credit to yourself, by always looking your best . . . good grooming, graciousness and charm play an important part in the success of the receptionist for the Public Service. (cit. Scutt, 1985a, p.45)

At the level of rights a good deal had happened for women in Australia before the 1960s. Although social custom made these rights largely unused, they were nevertheless there.

In this sense, the second-wave women's movement in Australia was less a fight for civic rights than a fight against social custom and widespread social practice. By contrast, in the 1960s Australia's Aboriginal community had to fight for basic civic rights, for recognition as a people, and for official approval that basic citizenship rights were in fact their right to *practise*. In the 1970s, male homosexuals had to fight to decriminalise consensual sexual intercourse and they had to assume a posture that argued that they had a right to be homosexuals. By default, the same applies to lesbians even though the law did not label lesbianism as a punishable offence (see Ch. 4). At the legal and social level, all minority groups suffered from discrimination. But 'discrimination' is a concept that first needed to be discovered and then to be tested in application.

Australia had called itself a democracy since its inception, but it was yet to make good its basic promises to a number of minority groups. Throughout much of the western world the 1960s represented nothing less than the birth of social democracy. In Australia it was a painful birth, and an ailing life followed.

Two international developments helped precipitate Australian events: the emergence of the New Left, and the Vietnam war. The term 'New Left' was used in Europe from about the time of the Hungarian uprising and Hungary's defeat at the hands of the Soviet Union in 1956. This led to a split in the ranks of western communists and to an increasing distancing from Moscow.

The New Left was a conglomerate of non-Stalinist leftists, including Maoists and Trotskyites. In Europe, some radical groups (right and left) turned extremist and became terrorists. Australia was spared the terrorist dimension. In Australia, the New Left consisted largely of young intellectuals who felt that the old guard of communists and socialists had 'sold out' to the 'system', had abandoned revolutionary aims and had shown no backbone in the 'imperialist' intervention of the US in Vietnam (McQueen, 1970). Donald Horne argued, not very sympathetically, that the New Left insisted on total social change: 'There was no point in changing anything unless you changed everything; from this vantage point they could then criticise the actions of everyone else without doing anything themselves' (Horne, 1980, p.44). This assessment fails to comprehend that many in the New Left were very active politically. It also underestimates the importance of the New Left in achieving necessary and long overdue social change, and providing the impetus from which the women's movement greatly benefited—as

did Aborigines and other groups that had begun to feel the pressure of discrimination as an unbearable and unreasonable burden.

Another force behind the women's movement was the surge of protest that followed Australia's 1964 decision to introduce conscription and, soon after, to send combat troops to Vietnam. While the Vietnam war appeared to be a single issue in both Australia and the US, it was rather the catalyst for a broad-ranging critique of the state and of society in general. In Europe (and in the US) the unrest began at universities as a student movement against the state, against the university system and the capitalist system in general (Hoch and Schoenbach, 1969; Touraine, 1971). In Australia, war, the destruction of the environment, the oppression of certain groups, were all found unacceptable if not intolerable. To a lesser extent the protests concerned Aboriginal rights and conservation issues, to a greater extent they were directed against war and nuclear armaments. The Australian critique concerned the inability of either political party to embrace new issues or to understand the groundswell of new concerns.

Conservative forces claimed that the protesters were demonstrating not for the betterment of society but for their own ends and amusement. This was a line that was taken in Queensland, a state not noted for having a democratic culture (in 1967 Queensland banned public demonstrations). But at no time were the protesters demonstrating for demonstrating's sake. On the contrary, their commitment was substantial. There was, however, an ever-growing subgroup of young people who had discovered drugs and who tried to make others believe that 'dropping out' was an action worth emulating. I still believe that drugs were introduced and peddled by groups that wanted to see the radical movements undermined and destroyed. The women's movement was spared this new enemy of change, although individual women of course also joined the drug subculture.

In early 1964, Australia had only 80 army advisers stationed in Vietnam. On 10 November, Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced the introduction of selective National Service for 20-year-olds who were to be drawn by so-called 'birthday lotteries' for two years of full-time service. Within that period the recruits were liable for service wherever they might be sent. Opposition to Australia's involvement in Vietnam was almost immediate partly because of conscription. The first 'birthday lottery' was drawn in March 1965. A month later the government announced that a combat battalion would be sent to Vietnam. There were incentives for those who volunteered. Working-class youths were more likely to volunteer because the rewards were translatable into a deposit

for a house that was otherwise out of reach. For middle-class men, the relatively small economic enticements were usually not attractive enough. Conscription meant they now faced the possibility of being called up and torn away from their homes and lives to engage in a war that seemed scarcely relevant at best and hardly defensible at worst.

Apart from personal motivations and individual resistance to (and fear of) the draft, there began to be a much larger and more coherent ideological objection to the war. The draft-resistance movement became increasingly defiant and widened into Moratoriums against war in general and the US and Australian involvement in Vietnam in particular. Australia, like the US, saw many anti-Vietnam war demonstrations. In July 1968, both in Sydney and in Melbourne, clashes with police led to the bashing and arrest of many protesters. By 1969, the antiwar campaign had become a national movement. By far the largest demonstrations were the Moratoriums of 1970 and 1972.

In the 1966 elections, Labor suffered a crushing defeat despite the growing concerns over Vietnam. The new prime minister, Harold Holt, announced a trebling of Australian forces in Vietnam and further increased Australia's commitment at the end of the year. When resistance grew, the only strategy the government could think of was to increase penalties for evading National Service. Warhurst notes:

The truth was that the new causes cut across ordinary party alignments. Each party ordinarily defined itself by what was essentially an economic philosophy: its platform was therefore silent on the new issues. As the activists saw it, the parties presided over a culture that had long neglected vital problems; within the parties there was suspicion and hesitation about getting involved in unknown areas. No party could easily incorporate the new issues into its understanding of politics. (Warhurst, 1987, p.188)

Political parties in general tend not to be tuned in to new ideas and to act impotently in the face of new challenges. Most of the time governments manage to obfuscate this impotence or reluctance quite well, not so much because of specific political skill but because too few people ask for the results. Implied in Warhurst's comment is also the notion that in Australia (and perhaps in the west generally) the political system was conservative in nature and intrinsically reluctant to adapt to, let alone adopt, change.

Parties that refuse to be sensitive to social change and public opinion must expect that the population itself will take action. Conservatives, however, often try to ignore interest-group protest and dissent at all costs, arguing that a democratically elected

government has the mandate of the people to govern and cannot be swayed by individual pressure groups. In a two-party system, however, if neither party will listen to broad-based dissent, organised dissent becomes the only possible course.

The New Left advocated participatory democracy, a direct, non-hierarchical style of political action, which the Australian women's movement later adopted. In some quarters this was translated into collective meetings with equal votes and turned into a colourful and tremendously varied (Simms, 1981) autonomous movement that in its earlier phases was sometimes dubbed 'anarchistic' (Grimshaw, 1988). However, women were not really prepared. In the early and mid 1960s few were on their way to careers and even fewer were directly involved in political activity, be this in political parties (beyond being the accompanying wife) or in organisations with a strong political leaning (such as the International League for Peace and Freedom). The problem was thus twofold. The opportunities were circumscribed and the impetus to act was limited by lack of experience.

In the mid 1960s, an attempt was made, via night-school classes and leaflets, to fill the gap by explaining to women the mechanisms of Australian politics. There were women who acquired political knowledge via such routes. But the anti-Vietnam war movement was vital in creating a generalist public forum that was sufficiently political in intention to help women emerge from the Cinderella syndrome. For many, the exposure to a political world beyond their narrow confinement to the roles of daughters, mothers, and wives was an entirely new experience. Later on, student politics and organisation such as the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) were to become a training ground for women entering public office.

PART II

IN THE FIELD

WOMEN GO IT ALONE

My life, when looking back, seems to have covered four phases; the initial and the longest period was the unquestioning phase, then a period of questioning with no answers. Next the feminist phase where I was both questioning and obtaining some answers. It was only when moving into the Liberationist phase that almost everything fell into place. (D'Aprano, 1995, p.1)

Zelda D'Aprano's observations about her own life reflect a fairly typical process of political development for our generation. When the student movement in France began to show some teeth, there was widespread relief in Europe that the false postwar calm was going to break. In Australia, these feelings were largely vented in the anti-Vietnam war movement. This, by itself, was not feminist and offered no liberatory base for women. Females made cups of coffee, printed leaflets and generally supported the lofty revolutionary spirit of the men. In Europe and Australia alike men of the New Left spouted the idea that women were equals (Grimshaw, 1993). However, their wives and girlfriends had a different view of the situation. Gradually, women broke away from politically focused groups, and began to go it alone.

It is interesting that D'Aprano distinguishes between a feminist and a liberationist phase and in that order. For most, liberation

came first and feminism later came to be equated with it. Indeed, the first formal women's group in Sydney called itself WLM, women's liberation movement. It was feminism that was to do the liberatory work.

Some continuities existed. As we have already seen, the fight for equal pay was an old and ongoing one, fuelled further by an Arbitration Commission decision of 1969 which stated that 'equal pay should not be provided where the work in question is essentially or usually performed by females' (Fanebust, 1985, p.18). The fight for entry into specific trades and jobs, such as tram driving, had dragged on since World War II. Australia also had a number of women's organisations, some of which were quite capable of being galvanised into action or were themselves specifically geared for such a purpose. They included the proactive Union of Australian Women and organisations such as the National Council of Women, the Red Cross, and the Country Women's Association.

These continuities aside, there were forerunners to the movement that were new in tone and intention. For example, there was the chaining in 1965 of two women to a hotel bar in Brisbane to protest women's exclusion from public bars. This incurred a fairly hostile reaction from the public. Many argued that there were more worthwhile causes for women than fighting to get into sleazy pubs (Curthoys, 1988).

On 21 October 1969 Zelda d'Aprano chained herself to the Commonwealth building in Melbourne to protest against continued discrimination in pay. Ten days later she was joined by Alva Geikie and Thelma Solomon, who then chained themselves to the front door of the Arbitration Commission in Melbourne (Smith, 1987). Thereupon they formed the Women's Action Committee (WAC). This group, although small at first, organised many activities, including a tram ride ('equality ride') through Melbourne on which, in protest against women's 80 per cent pay, participants insisted on paying only 80 per cent of the fare (McNeill et al., 1985). In March 1969 an Adelaide magazine, *On Dit*, asked: 'Just about time for a New Feminism?' a question which reflected the social climate. At the close of 1969 in Sydney, women began handing out leaflets for the first time talking exclusively about themselves and of themselves as being oppressed. The Sydney Women's Liberation Group was founded on 14 January 1970. A year later, every major town in Australia had its own women's liberation groups. Melbourne alone had 34. In all major cities these groups tended to cluster in the inner-city suburbs and around the universities.

In 1971, the WAC, together with the Union of Australian Women, fought for and won space to speak at the May Day Rally

and organised the first national conference on 'Women in the workforce and trade unions'. Most women's groups had begun to form action groups on abortion, equal pay, community-controlled childcare, education, nurses, sexist advertising, working women, women's prison action, teachers and communes. One of the very first marches showed the single-issue strategy of interest groups which was to remain a feature of the women's movement. It was held to advocate abortion law reform (1971). Campaigns usually resorted to a number of methods. For instance, a poster circulated at the time of the march featured a photo of the Victorian Premier, Henry Bolte, in an advanced stage of pregnancy, with the caption: 'We'd have abortion law reform if men were the ones to get pregnant.'

THE STAGES OF THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Within the women's movement, the word 'liberation' was the key to identifying a political agenda. In Melbourne, the Women's Action Group had several thousand members by 1972, when it disbanded and renamed itself Women's Liberation after the Women's Liberation Centre was opened in March. The Women's Liberation newsletter became one of the mouthpieces of the movement in Melbourne. Obviously, to an extent membership was self-selecting. However, the fact that a handful of members grew into thousands within a year and a half is explicable only by a sense of the time being right for change. The first years of the movement were characterised by highly spirited meetings and an exchange of ideas about the fundamental question, What is it to be a woman in our society? With Germaine Greer's book *The Female Eunuch* (1992), a highly original Australian contribution was made to western feminism in general, giving rise to much local debate (Rolfe, 1972). The meetings themselves were 'liberatory' because it was the first time that women had been able to give voice to their discontent. Whatever actions the participants planned, it soon became clear that behind their discontent was a far larger agenda: not just small piecemeal reforms but all-embracing change. From the very beginning, the movement was not just a self-contained and growing group. It was also extremely interactive with the wider public. Clarke and White point out that the Women's Action Group was 'deluged with phone calls from women who were finding their domestic situations intolerable and wanted support and assistance' (1983, p.162).

Once they advertised themselves as liberationists, an enormous backlog of unmet needs swamped the unsuspecting and unprepared groups. Many liberationists were shocked by the strong responses, which made it abundantly clear that society as a whole cared little for women and catered for almost none of their needs. Action was not quietly pondered but was often hurriedly organised in response to overwhelming demand. The demand produced very different responses from those within the movement. While the liberationists proposed radical strategies and solutions, other groups, such as WEL, preferred to focus on political reform.

Despite the avowed secular and revolutionary underpinning of the early liberation movement, one of its theoretical origins lay in the liberation theology espoused by Paulo Freire, whose 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gained an international and quasi-cult following among the intellectual left. His main message was that liberation must be rooted in the concrete experiences of oppressed groups. Rowbotham's feminist reply (1972) situated the oppression of women in the family itself and in the sexual division of labour. In her view, only a revolution could achieve a breakdown of these fundamentals of women's oppression.

The Australian women's liberation movement was much indebted to these international debates. It is interesting that Australian groups at first hardly used the word 'feminist'. Indeed, initially it was something of an insult, because it smacked of an agenda inherited from emancipationist predecessors and implied a limited, reformist approach (Poiner and Wills, 1991, p.33). Equality was at first embraced only ambivalently. One of the first pieces of feminist graffiti at Monash University stated: 'Those who seek equality with men lack ambition.' Indeed, liberation was considered far larger and far more radical than career equality and, in the early years, also rather intangible and nebulous.

It is possible to divide the second-wave women's movement in Australia into three distinct phases: from the end of 1969 to 1972; from 1972 to 1975; and from 1975 to the present. The first two and a half years were the most colourful, unorganised (Grimshaw, 1988, p.67) if not anarchistic (Simms, 1981, p.227) and diverse. They also saw the spontaneous establishment of an array of small consciousness raising groups across most major towns and capital cities (cf Hartley and Parsons, 1982).

The second phase circumscribes the Whitlam years and the comparative 'honeymoon' of the Labor government with the Australian women's movement. The only other country I know of that had a similar (brief) period of détente between government and women was Greece in 1982-83, when the PASOK socialist

government made sweeping reforms, some of which were far more advanced than any in Australia, and many of which were specifically for the benefit of women.

The third phase, since 1975, is more diffuse. Some thought that after the 1970s the women's movement had nearly vanished: 'There no longer existed anything that could be referred to as "the central women's movement" and the movement only existed in the form of proliferating feminist networks within all reaches of society' (Sawer, 1990a, p.30). In 1981, under the Fraser Liberal government, the so-called Razor Gang (review of Commonwealth functions) recommended the dismantling of all women's units and the entire women's affairs machinery. The Public Service Board withdrew resources for staff in the area of women's policy. On the other hand, in 1983 the Hawke government ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which signalled the beginning of equal opportunity legislation across Australia. This did not happen of its own accord: pressure from women's groups was largely responsible.

To locate the end of a movement is difficult at the best of times. In the case of the Australian women's movement it is particularly hard to speak of an end at all, because it so quickly became diffuse and diverse, both structurally and in terms of the projects in which feminists had become involved. If a movement connotes a certain public energy, the movement did appear to peter out. In fact, it had only acquired a different shape by being regularised and to some extent harnessed by funding requirements. However, there have been large-scale mobilisations of women since the 1970s. They include the annual International Women's Day marches and the Reclaim the Night marches which became a feature in Australia in 1978. Reclaim the Night was a European import which, to my knowledge, originated in Italy in 1976 when women first protested against violence against women. The Sydney Women Against Rape Collective was formed late in 1982 and saw itself as a 'reminder that the Women's Movement is diverse and that its various parts may come together to oppose aspects of patriarchy and work for change, if not revolution' (Erika, 1994, p.18). In 1985, Condoleon wrote about the movement as a current action plan (Condoleon, 1985). The same year saw the first, and very successful, mobilisation of women in protest against the Hawke government's proposal of a broad-based consumption tax which would have resulted in a 'transfer of costs from the man's wallet to the woman's purse' (Sawer, 1990a, p.94). In other words, participants at that stage had no perception that the Australian

women's movement had ended. In 1995, The National Women's Justice Coalition was formed as a high-powered pressure group.

The organisational base of women's groups is actually better today than it was in the 1970s. There are few if any street demonstrations today, and some of the movement's self-appointed spokeswomen have no grassroots mandate. Yet legislative action, international pressure and the appointment of a series of feminist women in state and federal senior public service roles have kept the machine rolling, if more slowly and less energetically. If one defines a movement as a demonstrated ability to mobilise then there are, I believe, grounds for saying that the second-wave women's movement has never stopped, in the 25 years since it began. The Women's Electoral Lobby, founded in February 1972, proved to be the strongest and most well-organised group of all, but it also reflected a decisive split in the movement, between the anarchistic and the organised groups. The slogan 'Think WEL before you vote' spearheaded one of the most effective national political campaigns feminists ever carried out, and helped elect the Labor Party to power, after 23 years of conservative rule.

The Labor victory was both a significant historical event and an important moral victory. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam immediately abolished conscription and quickly introduced some new welfare and reform measures of relevance to women. Within the public service, women were awarded equal pay and twelve weeks' paid maternity leave, a single mother's benefit was introduced, and the luxury tax was finally removed from the contraceptive pill.

Whitlam also appointed the first women's-affairs advisor to the government. No doubt this was a pragmatic step, and it also signalled the government's genuine intention to instigate reforms of benefit to women. Since this was an area in which next to nothing had ever happened in Australia at the federal level, one can easily see that a specialist advisor was deemed necessary. However, as a *political* act the appointment was brash and ill-advised. The women's movement was in no way consulted, and when the appointment of Elizabeth Reid was announced in 1973, protest letters were sent to Canberra from all over the country. Throughout her subsequent public life, Reid had to endure public disdain. Within the women's movement her appointment remained controversial and the media mocked her at every turn. Moreover, within the government she was isolated as well.

Nevertheless, the Whitlam policies set in train a change of Labor attitudes to women which began to work their way slowly through the political system. For instance, affirmative-action mea-

asures were instituted within the Labor Party which gradually saw a shift in the composition of the federal government. In 1972, just 2 per cent of members of parliamentary bodies were women. By 1989 this had increased to 11 per cent. From 1981–82 on, it was standard policy to commission research into women's voting intentions and wishes. The ALP platform of 1982 formally acknowledged the importance of women voters:

The ALP recognises that Australian women do not yet experience total equality with men nor full participation in all aspects of our society. The special disadvantages of Aboriginal women, rural women, migrant women, disabled women and isolated women are also recognised. In accordance with its belief in the equal rights of all people, the Australian Labor Party is committed to securing these rights for women in all matters. (cit. Sawer, 1990a, p.63)

1973 saw the beginnings of a women's refuge movement and the establishment of the first health and rape crisis centres. Around this time a number of women's liberation newsletters, journals and magazines were also launched. Most of these publications were relatively short-lived, but those that became defunct were soon replaced by others, and new ones continued to be founded throughout the 1980s and 1990s. My own count of serials as well as single-issue titles comes to almost 200 (cf Kaplan, 1995).

The years of the Fraser Liberal government (1975–83) were barren ones for women. Malcolm Fraser indicated clearly in his first election victory speech that women's issues were to take a back seat in federal politics (Simms, 1984, p.110). Fraser attempted to erode the bureaucratic infrastructure and cut funding and limit federal responsibilities for women's issues wherever possible. Ironically, however, his government was not half as beleaguered by protests and submissions as the Whitlam government had been. Community lobbying of the government at times almost stopped after 1975. Few thought it worthwhile, as they 'did not perceive any willingness to respond on the part of the government' (Sawer, 1990a, p.50). While the Liberals' re-election had ended a brief, turbulent but relatively close association between the protest movement and the government, much of the momentum that had been built up in the community began to show its effects only after the Whitlam era. One result of this momentum was that in the run-up to the 1983 election that saw its return to power, the Labor Party published a substantial policy paper entitled 'The ALP and women, towards equality'.

WOMEN AND FEMINISM

Perhaps at this point I should identify what I mean by feminism. In the broadest sense, feminism can be described as advocacy of women's rights and a belief in the equality of the sexes, but this narrow dictionary definition (Tuttle, 1987) would satisfy almost no one. Another definition argues that feminism is 'both a doctrine of equal rights for women (the organised movement to attain women's rights) and an ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world for women beyond simple social equality' (Humm, 1989, p.74). It is also common to label feminists according to political traditions (Tong, 1989). Such labels, however, be they 'socialist', 'liberal', 'conservative' or 'radical', refer not just to political action but also to theoretical positions. Black (1989) divides feminism into two broad camps: 'equity feminism', which involves an extension of an existing belief system to women and includes liberal, Marxist and socialist feminism; and 'social feminism', referring to cultural perspectives.

Feminism, in its broadest sense, calls for the deconstruction—and simultaneous reconstruction—of all systems of thought. Generally, feminism has been understood as a commitment to and/or a blueprint for political action (Hawxhurst and Morrow, 1984), based on the assumption that gender inequality fundamentally contradicts such democratic notions as equality, freedom, citizenship and justice. Feminism's very brief is praxis/action for women's rights; to many this entails a transformation of society as a whole.

Despite substantial differences in viewpoints and concerns, at its core, feminism is an argument for women's autonomy and signifies a standpoint of dissent. Ultimately, feminism aims for the liberation of women which, in turn, ought to change all human relationships for the better (Brett, 1972). In my view, and I am not alone in this (cf Eisenstein, 1984; Katzenstein and Mueller, 1987), the essence of feminism is a renegotiation of value and power hierarchies, and the formation of new and different gender relations that lack the ingredient of domination on the basis of essentialist assumptions of difference.

There are more unusual interpretations of feminism, such as that proposed by Shere Hite, who calls feminism a 'deeply spiritual movement' and believes its basic goal is 'to help people'. 'Feminism as a philosophical movement,' she writes, 'believes there is a way for us to live peacefully together and is trying to find it' (Hite, 1995).

By contrast, there is a brand of feminism, not insubstantial in the number of women it has attracted, which I would like to term

'career feminism'. It has no wider political or humanitarian goals but is seen as a concrete strategy for success at work and in a career. This type of feminism is a means to an end, and its adherents have been described by Poiner and Wills as 'bandwaggoners' (1991, p.89). It has its own, extremely well-organised machinery, finding its most public expression in workshops and seminars designed to impart confidence, to improve women's self-presentation and to teach them how to play the game of corporate success (Bell 1985). It has also achieved an inordinate amount of media attention. Meredith Burgmann describes a visit to one career-feminist seminar in 1984:

The whole assumption . . . was that feminism is about making it to the top. All agreed that . . . they felt well informed and inspired. I asked if they felt inspired to help other women along the way . . . they answered quite firmly that they did not. (cit. Poiner and Wills, 1991, p.91)

Hutchinson calls career feminists a 'miserable "me generation"' and regards the trend as a backlash against the movement (1993, p.9). For all the attention that has been foisted on career feminism in Australia (certainly considerably more than in Europe), it is, I believe a storm in a teacup. The 1995 report of the International Labour Organisation's Industry Taskforce on Leadership and Management Skills, shows that Australia 'has the lowest percentage of women in management in the industrialised world' (R. Scott, 1995).

Not unexpectedly, feminist projects are very diverse, in both theory and practice. There are epistemological ones that follow the Enlightenment tradition and postmodern ones that do not (Lichtenstein, 1988; Alcoff and Potter, 1993). Feminist scholarship has intervened in the canons and debates of very nearly every intellectual and cultural endeavour. Feminist discourse has a noticeable tendency to be transdisciplinary. Moreover, it has shifted alarmingly so for some (Benhabib, 1989; Brodribb, 1992), from social to discourse analysis, away from power politics to representations of power.

Feminism has had many starts but it has always had its roots in the perception that women have been disadvantaged, even dispossessed and oppressed, throughout history and everywhere on earth. In a sense, it is one of the most broken and yet most continuous single movements of modern times (cf Spender, 1983). Since the suffragette movements of the middle to late nineteenth century, the women's movement has ebbed and flowed and at times ground to a halt. In a sense, then, calling the latest women's movement the

second wave is a misnomer. In Australia it would probably be more correct to call it the third wave.

Although fragmentation has been the fate of all feminist activism so far (Caine, 1995), the belief in 'rights' as a means to equality has existed continuously since the Enlightenment. For instance, the American Declaration of Sentiments (1848), and the French revolutionary Declaration of Human Rights on which it was based, rested on the principle that people, not the 'state', made up the nation. The US Declaration of Sentiments was most probably the first public political feminist statement. 'The history of mankind,' said Elizabeth Stone (who submitted the declaration), 'is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.' She promised to devote her life to changing this state of affairs, stating: 'we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object' (cit. Tuttle, 1986, pp.77-8). Connell regards it as a logical consequence for the doctrine of rights to merge into a social science of gender (Connell, 1987, p.25). This 'logic', one might add, exists only within the context of the Enlightenment tradition.

Feminism owes its existence entirely to the Enlightenment tradition and to the Industrial Revolution, with its shift in class constellations and changing requirements in the labour market. It is not correct to suggest that the key terms of feminism espoused within that tradition are used as 'universals' (cf Yeatman, 1995, p.43). The actors who coined them saw their social condition in a specific historical context. Terms such as social justice, self-determination, participation, equality, freedom, domination and oppression are markers of the Enlightenment tradition and of the systems of thought surrounding the disintegration of the *ancien régime*. These provided the tools with which new (and revolutionary) inquiries could be made. Women can speak about oppression only thanks to a system that gave it that name. Oppression was first identified in a context of a language of freedom, and indeed in a context of greater freedom than women had hitherto experienced. Feminism found that, like class, gender was an agent of division and a key to the distribution of privilege, money and power. According to Heller, women may require a specific form of polity because they spontaneously reject power and tend to desire a society without domination (Heller, 1982).

English-language feminism made a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', one that cannot readily be made in other languages. 'Sex' refers to the biological, reproductive difference between man and woman and is used to suggest no more than that. 'Gender', on the

other hand, signals the translation of biological facts into social meaning. The former is a biological product, the latter a sociohistorical construction from which a vast number of social, political, economic and legal consequences flow. The sex-gender split has been the theoretical point of departure for almost every enquiry by Anglo-feminists. Writing on sexual difference varies from an essentialist insistence on women as being fundamentally different from men, to a celebration of women and women's culture as distinctive yet not necessarily linked to biology.

For the movement it was crucial to understand what sex/gender/woman meant and how they should be used in strategies for change. Feminism accepted 'woman' as one of its core concepts. It perceived the world as gendered and took its further deliberations and conclusions from that starting point (Grant, 1993).

WOMEN AND GENDER ROLES

One of the most influential, although limited, theories from the very beginning of the movement concerned the perceived assignment of sex roles. The theory, known as sex-role theory, should have been named 'gender role theory', for it set out to show in a deterministic fashion that we are all products of socialisation. Early role assignment for women and men predetermined later outcomes in life and was therefore detrimental to women if they wanted to live outside or beyond an assigned role. Feminist appropriation of the role concept in turn gave initial leverage to the formulation of a political program that was translatable into submissions and policy development.

The concept of roles has several different origins within various disciplines of the social sciences, chief among them anthropology, sociology and social psychology. As a term, it was well established by the 1920s but because of different usages in the three disciplines its meaning was not entirely clear until it was appropriated in the '50s by functionalists such as Talcott Parsons and Radcliffe-Brown. The latter was incidentally the first professor of anthropology in Australia (at the University of Sydney). In social psychology, too, socialisation played a key role. There were some earlier studies on sex roles (Klein, 1946; Komarovsky, 1950) but by and large these were negligible in number and influence. Berger and Pullberg argued in 1966 (p.66) that in capitalist society gender roles were reified to such an extent that 'role playing precedes existence—or . . . replaces it'.

Until the feminist discovery of the centrality of sex roles as the

chief ingredient of a hegemonic gender system, sex-role theory tended to presume a 'natural' role division dictated by biology. Pregnancy and birth, or at least motherhood, are 'a part of the definition of women in our society as in many others' (Albury, 1984, p.178). Women reared children and made a home, and men worked outside the home protecting and supporting wife and offspring. Assuming a biological basis for gender-role divisions made these divisions appear natural. This assumption is generally referred to as biological determinism. It argues that genes and hormones are at the basis of behavioural differences and sex-role manifestations. Socialisation played a role but only insofar as it could suppress or foster what was biologically inherent in the individual (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974).

The biologically determinist position was by no means eradicated during the heyday of the women's movement. On the contrary, the literature on biological causation of sex differences in behaviour and role heralded its return, buttressed by new theories and assertions and by new organisations. This psychological and pseudoscientific literature is substantial and often blatantly sexist (e.g. Money and Ehrhardt, 1972; Money and Tucker, 1975). Although much has been written in reply to such reductionist thinking (Rogers, 1979; Kaplan and Rogers, 1994) it has persisted, presumably because it conveys simple messages in black and white terms. Reductionist thinking is always easier to 'sell' than complex ideas. Anti-feminists today but also some feminists have continued to insist on genetic explanations for sex roles. Sociobiology, which emerged in the 1970s, also argued for the genetic basis of sex-role behaviour. The risk here is that even for those feminists who perceive sex roles as largely constructed categories, their very linkage with biology, and the constant slippage between biological and social, help sustain belief in a biological basis of difference.

Nevertheless, one of the first changes to be effected by western women's movements was to wrest social meaning from sex roles. Such was the feminist interest in sex roles that the proportion of articles in sociology journals on this subject rose from 0.5 per cent in 1969 to more than 10 per cent ten years later (Connell, 1987, p.33).

In many ways, the early sex-role theories were rather naive, ahistorical and fundamentally apolitical. Socialisation was recognised as a key factor in determining sex-role behaviour, and liberal feminists in particular attached great importance to it. The point of attack was a relatively simple one. The supposed natural, biologically determined division of labour was problematised from the onset of the second-wave movement. Most argued that sex

roles were not entirely determined by biology. Beyond the reproductive difference between women and men, all other differences were socially constructed. Hence it was believed to be of utmost importance to 'smash' the existing assumptions and practices of sex roles as a precondition for women's liberation, according to concepts of ideal gender-based role behaviour.

By the mid-1980s, it had become clear that the systematic subordination of women was more than formal discrimination (Thornton, 1984). Most women's movements began to discard sex-role theory in an attempt to find broader explanations for gender dichotomies and the persistence of disadvantage for women. The prevalent model of sex-role theory came to be criticised also for its inability to deal with political activism, with conflict or with the implied voluntarism of taking on a role. Sex-role theory assumed a consensus model of society in which the parts fitted together to allow the whole to function and to perpetuate the status quo. Men and women are regarded as passive acceptors of their respective roles: society 'issues' roles and individuals wear them (Albury, 1984). In this static and mechanistic explanation it remained unclear where the roles came from (Edwards, 1983) and who the 'real' people were behind the masks (Connell, 1987). Socialisation was seen not simply as bringing out one's innate sex-role potential but as an active ingredient of the sex role itself—hence the emphasis on school curricula, on self-esteem classes, and on management advice for women from the early 1970s onwards.

Despite its shortcomings, sex-role theory has become firmly embedded in individualism and among conservative feminist groups. Briefly, it argues that individuals need improving or changing, not the 'system'. The system is implicated only insofar as it must be seen to aid the process of improving. Women themselves have to change. Reform programs based on these assumptions could not do away with traditional assumptions. Breaking the chains of the female role often meant simply discarding it in favour of adopting a role akin to that of males.

At another level that is no more benign, sex-role theory implies that women have been socially deprived as a result of biased socialisation and are thus actually deficient, albeit perhaps for historically explicable and excusable reasons. Hence, training is needed, the implication being that success should follow provided the woman has learned her lessons well. Anne Game commented in 1984 on the dubious subtext of the flurry of training programs for women:

There is a very clear subtext here that any failure can be attributed to women themselves, their inability to take up the opportunities. The 'catching-up' concept of equality is profoundly individualistic and lends itself to psychological and 'blame-the-victim' explanations for lack of success. (Game, 1984, p.254)

In this deficiency model, women were perceived as having to be 'brought up' to the standards of men; once *that* remedial training was completed, they would be able to compete with men on equal grounds. Inherent in the model is also a hidden assumption that the remedial 'classroom' consists of people with potential but not yet fully human status. As Yeatman rightly argued:

To be interpellated as a potentially but not fully human subject is to have a contradictory status. If those who are interpellated in this way can show that they can overcome the attribute of lesser development, or that this attribution is mistaken, they can claim admission to the rights of human beings. (Yeatman, 1995, p.48)

One can readily see that a group which accepts its own externally defined deficiency as a basis for political action is not in a strong position. It argues for equality in terms of a plea for admission to the same group whose 'oppression' it needs to break or overcome. One cannot storm the Bastille and tacitly accept at the same time that its structure and function are legitimate. One cannot defy and yet concede that the defied group should be setting the standard and has superior norms. One cannot ask for examiners from the group one wishes to attack. Yet in a sense this is what feminist reform programs set out to do. A fight staged from this premise cannot get very far.

Sex roles and token women

Interlinked with sex roles are role models. This concept was used widely from the beginning of the movement and was originally derived from the ideology of the family. Boys were said to need fathers because they needed a role model as a precondition for successful gendered socialisation. Girls may have needed mothers, but many felt that the only legitimated example their own mothers could provide was that of mother and homemaker, a set of roles that feminists either wanted to escape from or grow beyond. Alternatively, they did not want to share their mothers' guilt feelings (i.e. being a 'bad' mother) when they had actually pursued work outside the home. Role-model thinking has persisted, despite being criticised as naive (Condor, 1986).

The problem has remained that women in public life are often isolated and employed in a tokenistic fashion. This is a substantial

disadvantage for women in general, because a token woman, by definition, cannot be a model to another woman. Indeed, she is an anti-model. Token women are found in organisations and institutions with a predominantly male ethos (and staff), in positions which are coveted by men and retain their value precisely because similar positions are filled by men. A second, third or fourth woman in the same organisation (and rank) would be accorded a very different weight than the first. The token woman tends not to have problems in organisations if she performs her function well. Her success is due more to correct token-role performance than to good job performance. Women who emulate a token woman in the same organisation usually find to their surprise that the same strategies and behaviours do not achieve the same results. Token women and women in non-tokenistic positions usually find themselves at the opposite poles: consensus model (token) and conflict model (non-token). Their perceptions of the same workplace tend to be quite different. Since the 'image' position is already taken up, the non-tokenistic woman's only choice is to justify occupying her position through job performance alone.

Kanter points out (1977) that tokens function differently from minorities. Among members of a minority, alliances are possible which eventually can affect the organisational culture. Tokenism, by contrast, creates a self-perpetuating cycle of low opportunity and low power which serves to reinforce the paucity of women and to keep them in token positions. This, she argues, is achieved by seemingly contradictory situations. Token women are highly visible, as being different, yet are not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics. At the highest levels they are public figures and attract public notice. They are also treated as symbols or representatives of all women, expected to speak for women, and are generally scrutinised by those at lower levels. They are constantly on a tightrope, having to display loyalty in exaggerated ways to their male superiors because of their visibility, warding off criticism from below, playing the female and accentuating their differentness while assuaging men's fear and concern about difference. 'In short, organizational, social, and personal ambivalence surrounds people in token situations' (Kanter, 1977, p.239), and to some extent, 'powerlessness and tokenism constitute self-perpetuating, self-sealing systems, with links that can be broken only from the outside' (p.249). Token women change attitudes as little as Lady Chatterley changed morals. If tokenistic women become role models, then the models they provide serve only to reconfirm the status quo, not to change attitudes. As Eva Cox is reported to have commented:

Women that do get into those senior positions don't get there because they're raging radicals . . . They get there because basically they're sufficiently non-threatening . . . so I think it is unrealistic for us to expect them to then turn around and do something which basically undermines all the time and effort they've spent getting there. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1995)

Tokenism tends to diffuse the feminist content of a token woman's thinking and make her politically ineffective and generally innocuous. Those who dare to retain or develop individuality and challenge the organisation—and I know from experience how little it takes for a male organisational culture to feel challenged or threatened—will usually find their road strewn with obstacles. Cox aptly calls them 'kamikaze feminists' (*ibid.*).

Feminists have noted that women's ascent up the ladder of career success (in both public and private institutions) is painfully slow (Illing, 1995) and in many areas has not progressed at all. Indeed, in this respect Australia has one of the poorest records in the industrialised world. This lack of progress is not a signal that women are 'not ready', not capable, not trained well enough, but rather that greater and more equal participation requires systemic and normative changes at the macro level—a change in value hierarchies, no less. Role theory cannot help explain these phenomena. It is the difference of women as a category (a category perceived not just as a role but as an essentialist difference) that has kept them out of positions of power and independence.

Sex-role stereotyping

The concept of stereotyping is intertwined with sex-role theory and has been regarded as one aspect or outcome of assigning sex roles. It was first used in Lippman's *Public Opinion* (1922), to denote the formation of preconceived ideas and beliefs about people or things. In the broadest sense it could generate an entire world-view based on knowledge that was either spurious or non-existent. From Merton onwards (1957), stereotyping was more closely identified with people. Merton argued that the language used for stereotyping in itself lacked judgmental evaluation. He showed that it is possible to use the same descriptors for positive and negative evaluations, e.g. Abraham Lincoln was praised by Americans as ambitious, thrifty and hard-working, whereas the same descriptors applied to (American) Jews could be used to justify anti-Semitism.

When feminists took over the concept, then, it had a well-established place in social theory and was usually considered in the context of socialisation. Together with sex-role theory, it was soon

found wanting. Jean Blackburn, for instance, argued that sex-role stereotyping was far from being a satisfactory theory and that it failed either to take account of the complex role of agencies (institutions such as schools) in the construction of masculinity and femininity, or to serve as a comprehensive guide for action (Blackburn, 1984, p.9). The notion of sex-role stereotyping sees the individual as relatively passive, formed by outside influences but unable to resist or affect them in any but minor ways. Further, it fails to allow for change. This was particularly noticeable as roles became more open and began to accommodate gender behaviour and interactions beyond the stereotypical (Kessler et al. 1982). From roles and stereotypes, the emphasis shifted first to an all-embracing gender ideology and then to a view of gender as the site of power struggle (Millett, 1972) whose consistent outcome is women's subordination and oppression (Eisenstein, 1984).

GENDER AND IDENTITY

For those who argue that gender is a construction, it follows that laws ought to eliminate gender bias as far as possible. But the designation of gender as an analytical category has been criticised as resulting in a politics of sameness: women and men have the same potential and women are therefore entitled to the same rights and freedoms as men. In terms of policy making, this makes it 'dangerous' (Dietz, 1991) even to attend to women's sexual difference. In this context, formal political and legal structures become unconstitutional or untenable and, indeed, as Mezey points out, legal gender-based distinctions should be viewed in the same negative light as race-based distinctions (Mezey, 1990). Or, to quote Cornell: 'The wrong in discrimination is the imposition of rigid gender identities on sexual beings who can never be adequately captured by any rigid definition of gender identity' (Cornell, 1992, p.290).

The problem with these two perspectives is that they risk being seen as mutually exclusive. Women have fought for specialised services for women (politics of difference) and the same feminists may have attended demonstrations against the inequality of women (politics of sameness). The demands need not be contradictory at all. One's sex determines whether one can bear children or not. It is an entirely different matter what conclusions society has drawn from this reproductive difference between male and female and at what level of social and political organisation this manifests itself. I see no contradiction, for example, between demands for equality

before the law, equal treatment (appointments/promotions/training) at work, and equal access to services, and the demand for special breast cancer screening units.

However, the politics of difference and sameness should not be attributed exclusively to feminism. Anti-feminists, such as Women Who Want to be Women (WWWW), radical feminists and postmodernist feminists all pursue a politics of difference, but with substantially different intentions. WWWW claims that women are essentially different and are so in all respects, not just in their reproductive roles. Radical feminists acknowledge the social construction of gender but wish to assert 'woman' in this cultural and social context, while postmodernists argue that every speaking position is different, thus relativising gender to such an extent that theoretically 'woman' need not exist at all. The advocates of sameness are at least as diverse. Liberal feminism is sometimes regarded as epitomising a politics of equality (Curthoys, 1993), but I see it rather as a defender of equal opportunity and formal equality, i.e. defending a limited reformist agenda. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, regard equality as a revolutionary agenda for overthrowing current power, value and gender hierarchies.

Others argue, with justification, that 'gender' needs to be overcome or aided by other markers or concepts. Cornell, for instance, speaks of equivalent rights and Burstyn extended the term to 'gender-class' to encompass oppression which allegedly is conveyed by neither 'sex' nor 'gender' (Burstyn, 1983). Of course, the debate on other markers of social disadvantage (or even oppression) has now become widely accepted in feminist theory, but Mary Kalantzis rightly warns that the disadvantages produced by class, gender and ethnicity do not always parallel each other and that a critical dialogue between groups is needed to increase feminist sensitivity to these disjunctions (Kalantzis, 1990).

The questions: 'What do we want?' and 'Who are we?' are not easy to answer. At the onset of the second-wave women's movement in the 1960s and '70s, women expressed a feeling of universal sisterhood, common experience and unity of purpose. 'What we want' seemed clear until it was pointed out that a substantial number of women were at odds with white middle-class agendas. Activists who remained apart from the movement took as their starting point not 'woman' but identity. The politics of 'woman' and the politics of 'identity' are, or can be, different. Hence, lesbians engaged in lesbian identity politics, Aboriginal women in Aboriginal politics, migrant women in migrant politics. The urgency of their first label tempered the concern with 'woman', so that the latter often disappeared under the weight of those more

pressing political issues. The tension between a woman-centred and identity-centred politics can be substantial.

To some (male) philosophers the question has also arisen whether the distinction between man and woman is necessarily a useful one. Writers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in a sense have relativised human existence. The very essence of the women's movement, as said before, is the category 'woman'. Clearly, asking 'Who is a woman?' and 'Are there women?' implies the possibility of denying such a category. Derrida and Foucault have made women disappear into abstractions or turned them into immobile statues incapable of action (Love, 1991, p.85). Just as 'woman' was discovered by feminists, Foucault thought to celebrate the disappearance of 'man'. Just when women began to fight for social rights and justice, Derrida suggested that 'woman' did not really exist, that a woman was 'a non-identity, non-figure, a simulacrum—is distance's very chasm' (Derrida, 1978, p.49). Ironically, both theorists have become very influential in feminism, chiefly because, as Ramazanoglu (1993) said of Foucault, they propose 'new ways of understanding the control of women and especially the control of sexuality and bodies'. More important, Foucault's history writing and genealogical method have great appeal for feminists, dealing as they do with 'subjugated' knowledges that are excluded from the historical canon because, as Bailey (1993) argues, 'they disrupt the unity of history in its evolution towards claims of absolute truth and transparency'. Bailey goes on to say why genealogies appeal to feminism:

Genealogy does not seek to replace unitary histories with more authentic, more absolute and transcendent historical truths. Rather Foucault's genealogies demonstrate the specific historical contextual-ity of, and the interest invested in, all truths. Genealogies, as much as authorised histories, are interested and partial. This characteristic of genealogy should be particularly appealing to some feminists because of the emphases on subjective experience and limited truth claims. This enables a more guerilla-style attack, liquid and mobile, in the western tradition. Because the whole of western history cannot be rendered, explained, undermined and refuted, feminists are justified in practising limited interventions in areas of specific interest. Genealogical projects, further, are nothing new to feminists, though the name may be, 'Herstories', the reclamation of forgotten and overlooked women's histories, are a staple of feminist scholarship. (Bailey, 1993, p.102)

This passage demonstrates both the lure of Foucault's theorising and its pitfalls. 'Herstories' do not necessarily rest on 'subjective experience' and 'limited truth claims', as Bailey suggests. Rather,

their point of departure is whether women were merely regarded as 'objects' (passive) or as subjects (active players) in history. Theoretically, there is a deep chasm between writers proposing 'limited truth claims' (i.e. relativising women's experience) and those who wish to correct history writing by reclaiming 'forgotten' histories.

Until this century, history was written from the perspective of the victors—with battles, governments, wars, rulers as its hallmark. The perspective has now shifted to that of the victims. The authors of women's, gay and lesbian, black and colonised people's histories would deny that their accounts were less truthful or more 'limited' and would be offended if they were relativised in this way. Excavating forgotten histories is a way of exposing the male-defined ideology behind reporting on the winners and losers on the (male) power stage, and the class and power basis of public opinion. Postmodernist writers see the exposure of false ideology as a way to challenge and eventually dismiss its claimed universality. By contrast, radical writers, including writers of colour and radical feminists, regard the presentation of new facts as exposure of previous untruths by silence and omission, revealing vested interest in 'forgetting' those who, by means of usurpation and oppression, rendered others powerless.

In crucial ways, Foucault's perspective also undermines feminist perceptions of gender relations and the gendered basis of power. To radical feminists (but not to postmodern ones), Foucault and Derrida are merely representatives of the patriarchy. Brodribb has labelled writers like them 'Tootsie' philosophers who, in an act of transvestism, have attempted the 'masculine ir/rationalisation of feminism' (Lusty, 1994, p.4). 'Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?' (Brodribb, 1992) And, Benhabib (1989) has asked whether women are 'ready to fight on the streets and in the legislature for the needs and rights of a "non-identity", of a "chasm"'. The question is rhetorical, for all protest movements were fought for by women *as* women.

THE CONCEPT OF EQUALITY

Dahl, speaking with hindsight of the US civil rights movement, argued that the perceived inequality may have been the engine that propelled the uprisings. The US prided itself on its democratic

tradition but failed to extend it to a significant minority. Out of this tension five key questions emerge which, when answered affirmatively, represent a transition from objective inequality to demands for greater equality. These are: Do members of the disadvantaged group perceive inequality? Do they judge it to be relevant to their own condition? Do they appraise it as illegitimate? Do they feel anger, frustration, and resentment over it? Do they make demands for greater equality? (Dahl, 1971, p.95). I think that despite the rejection of equality as an adequate goal in the early days of the Australian women's movement, one would have been hard put to find any woman who could answer other than 'yes' to all these questions. They are therefore vital questions for the movement and it is thus of some importance to come to grips with the concept of equality itself.

The Australian women's movement's ambivalence about equality arose partly from the perception that it imposed undue limits on a broader liberationist agenda, and partly from the fact that the term implied a comparative approach to men. To whom and to what do we want to be equal? The equality issue sparked a crisis in liberal feminism (Eisenstein, Z., 1984). Radical feminists were dismissive of this approach because it was difficult to maintain the momentum of revolt against the oppressors (their term) and at the same time admit or express the desire to be like them.

Despite this ambivalence, however, the concept of equality became pivotal. On its interpretation hinged many of the strategies and practices of the Australian women's movement. The typical ways in which the desire for equality was translated into policy were anti-discrimination legislation, equal opportunity and affirmative action measures.

Affirmative action and equal opportunity mean different things, although they have been used at times interchangeably in Australia. Equal opportunity relates on the one hand to providing access to services and training irrespective of background, and on the other, to the application of the merit principle in selecting applicants for jobs and training positions. The idea is that the person with the best qualifications, skills or experience should win the position, irrespective of sex, religion or ethnic background. This assumes, of course, that those of a less desired status (women, migrants, Aborigines or the differently abled) have even made it into the pool for selection.

Affirmative action is the implementation of specific strategies to increase the likelihood that people with different backgrounds will enter the job-selection pool. For women, this may include childcare at the workplace, parental leave etc. In education, pro-

active strategies might be undertaken to encourage women's entry into key areas. In Sweden, it was decided that certain minority groups had been so substantially disadvantaged in the past that the only way to amend the wrong was by introducing a positive bias in their favour (Adams and Winston, 1980), a practice that was later adopted in parts of the US as well. In practice, this principle should also work largely on merit, with the rider that, if there are two candidates of about equal merit and one of them is a member of a minority group (e.g. women, black, or migrant), the job should go to the latter.

In Australia, affirmative action 'was formulated in response to the perceived inadequacies of reactive non-discrimination' (Poiner and Wills, 1991). Anti-discrimination legislation entitled individuals to complain of instances of bias but failed to correct or eliminate systemic bias. By contrast, affirmative action put the onus for correction on the large institutions where the problems originated. A 1984 green paper defined affirmative action as:

A systematic means, determined by the employer in consultation with senior management, employees and unions, of achieving equal employment opportunity for women. Affirmative action is compatible with appointment and promotion on the basis of merit, skills and qualifications. It does not mean women will be given preference over better qualified men. It does mean men may expect to face stiffer competition for jobs. This is not discrimination. (Department of the Prime Minister, 1984, p.3)

But let us look again at equality as the desired outcome. To understand the options seems all the more important in a society that professes to believe in egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is not identical with equality but it is nevertheless intrinsically bound up with it. Doctrines of equality have a long tradition whose basis was revolutionary (Mill and Mill, 1970). Investigations of inequality have thus usually combined descriptions of inequality with agendas for far-reaching change (e.g. Hiller, 1981; Sharp, 1991).

Equality is now overused in Australian discourse, as it is in the industrialised world in general, and its basic premises are too rarely questioned. Inequality is described empirically and rarely is it asked what the goal of monitoring it should be. Should it be the abolition of inequality in general, of unequal ownership of wealth or property, of social, educational or political inequality or of other specific inequalities and injustices? How is this abolition to be understood? As a levelling down or a levelling up?

Two modern equality doctrines have been described by Jayawardena as leading to very different results: 'There is the equality of political, economic, and other social rights and oppor-

tunities (the equality of social philosophers) and there is the equality of men deriving from their . . . personal human worth' (1968, p. 313). The latter may be a restrictive equality, achieved when a small group of people of similar status and/or class background come together. Feher and Heller have distinguished two basic forms, one concerned with the equality of people as individuals and another with equality of ownership (1977, p.7). In large social groupings and nations coercion was generally necessary to bring about the latter. Such redistributive equality has seldom worked in practice or over long periods of time, although, at times, small communes have achieved it on a voluntary basis. By and large, Australia has no more than toyed with the idea of abolishing material inequality (private property) and only very small groups might have seriously contemplated it as an option. Its advocates, however, maintain that this measure leads to intrinsic equality, which entails the abolition of competition and the celebration of individual achievement. In a non-Marxist but radical democratic tradition, intrinsic equality is thought to be achievable by equal sharing without requiring the abolition of property.

Jayawardena conceives of a more limited kind of equality, namely of political, economic, and social rights and opportunities. The problem is that such models couch the concept of equality within a structurally unequal framework. As Sharp argues:

The market is an inherently inegalitarian mechanism, a creator and reproducer of ever more subtle divisions and distinctions without which it could not function. The pursuit of profit . . . knows no moral commitment to justice and welfare. Self-interest is its *raison d'être*. Its demand for freedom from external interference has always been a recipe for substantial lack of freedom and equity for the majority. (Sharp, 1991, p.xviii)

Without radical economic change, equality will be and can only be partial. In most first-world countries it has found theoretical applicability in the legal and social domains. Equality before the law is now a widely accepted principle, even though the ideal often falls short in practice. Having been established in the legal framework, however, equality guarantees a range of essential rights of citizenship. It opens the door to institutions (education, training and work) and to political participation (the right to vote and be elected). It further affords the individual some measure of protection from crime and, in democratic countries, entails the right of assembly and of free speech. Equality before the law is hence a doctrine situated in public life.

Another principle is equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity, so Feher and Heller argue, is no more than an 'excellent

substitute for genuine equality' and is 'far more illusory than the idea of equality before the law, since it is positively formulated and as such contradicts the basic principle of property ownership and power influence' (Feher and Heller, 1977, p.9). One might reject the conclusion that it is 'illusory'. However, it is essential to recognise that its basic premise does not constitute a challenge to economic, social or value hierarchies which capitalist forms of production have postulated and developed. If anything, equal opportunity may function as a system for efficiently slotting individuals into the self-same hierarchies, rather than as a challenge to these hierarchies. Oxley, starting from a discussion of De Tocqueville's (American type) social equality, draws the logical conclusion:

A doctrine of equal opportunity is only meaningful in the context of unequal rewards. It could be used to legitimize the most degrading excesses of a stratification system so long as strata were not hereditary. It is potentially compatible with any inequality not ascribed at birth; winners can have riches and losers rags so long as they raced from the same starting point (Oxley, 1978, p.45)

In Australia it is unlikely that the doctrine of equal opportunity implies giving support or approval for or maintaining an indifferent acceptance of keeping 'losers' in 'rags'. However, a very broad spectrum of political persuasions in Australia and the western world in general regards inequality as a function of individual difference, and the Australian political right sees inequality as 'natural', ineradicable and moreover as serving useful purposes in modern economies. Supposedly, giving women lowly paid jobs is then also 'natural', suggesting a biological deterministic view of innate difference. According to this view, measures towards equality will not only be futile but will impede economic activity and the economic health of a society (Green, 1991).

By contrast, the more radical left groups will claim that inequality is socially constructed and inevitably a symptom of capitalism and that it can only be eradicated when the entire economic edifice is overthrown. Many of the branches of feminism subscribe to the view that Talcott Parsons had summarised under the term of 'instrumental activism' years earlier. Instrumental activism is based on the strong belief in the capacity of individual action for the welfare of society as a whole. Western individualism also embodies an inordinate concentration on economic and career gains as reward for individual achievement (cf. Simms, 1981, p.228). It goes without saying that this favours middle and upper classes.

Material egalitarianism in some ways is the opposite of equal

opportunity, as Oxley postulated: 'Since it stresses the essential sameness of winners and losers it must oppose unequal rewards; this damns competition for prizes, however fair the rules. In effect it demands that the more or less able be unequally protected and unequally restricted' (Oxley, 1978, p.45).

Equal opportunity, by contrast, is a much watered down version of what affirmative action can be. Australia has generally chosen the weakest of all options and the most easily manageable one, or, as is apparent from Poiner and Wills's account, also the most manipulable one (Poiner and Wills, 1991). It neither challenges basic assumptions of the society, nor has it become a strong tool for fighting discriminatory practices, both in the public and private sectors. As we shall see, equal opportunity measures in Australia and elsewhere in the western world have failed to take into account equality of outcome, with the consequence that structural inequalities have come under little pressure to shift relative to each other. They could not shift because the egalitarian principles that were employed *ab ovo* accept inequality as their premise.

It has been pointed out to me that employers dislike the term 'equality of outcome' because they read it as a reference to same promotion rates. Instead, they apparently prefer the term 'equality of treatment'. I fail to see how this in any way improves matters for women. Equality of treatment, it seems to me, can be used as merely another term for equality of opportunity. By contrast, equality of outcome refers to comparable outcomes for different candidates given the same background, with similar records of service, education and performance ratings.

Employers in Australia may have been 'encouraged' to take a proactive role in removing existing barriers to women's employment. As the latest figures on enterprise bargaining reveal, however, Australian employers in general (with some noteworthy exceptions) have used the new model without creating positive benefits for women. Indeed, a 1995 study concluded that enterprise bargaining has eroded what has already been achieved. The survey, conducted by researchers of the Department of Government, University of Queensland, shows that in the new enterprise deals studied, only 1.3 per cent of companies added maternity leave, 2.6 per cent included paternity leave, 3.9 per cent had any stated 'arrangements to advance women', and none included childcare as a strategy for women's employment (Boreham et al. 1995; cf Connell and Russell, 1995, p.3).

Australian egalitarianism would suggest a belief in the essential sameness of winners and losers, of the talented and untalented, and is expressed as resentment of demonstrative displays of difference

(good fortune or misfortune). One can measure whether there is any justification for this belief. Income distribution may be cited as an example. At least disparities in income in Australia are not as extreme as in many other countries. Still, they are substantial enough to refute the claim of equality on economic grounds alone (ABS, 1987).

However, income is not the only measure of wealth, and the picture changes substantially once other factors are taken into account (Piggot, 1987; Head, 1990). There are paradoxes in the Australian case and in some other OECD countries that are worth noting in the context of theoretical debates on equality. For instance, in the late 1960s when writers such as Donald Horne sang the praises of Australian egalitarianism Castles (1989b) demonstrates a strange relationship between income equality measures and welfare measures and shows that the two remain suprisingly unrelated.

When income equality is measured by the Gini coefficient of the distribution of post-tax, post-transfer personal income, Australia is one of the most egalitarian countries in the industrialised world (see Table 2.1). However, despite its claim to be a welfare state, in 1970–71 Australia's welfare expenditure (social security and welfare transfers to households), measured as a percentage of GDP, was less than that of all other western nations except Japan. In the

TABLE 2.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCOME EQUALITY AND WELFARE EXPENDITURE IN WESTERN NATIONS*

Rank	Equality	Welfare
1	Netherlands	<i>France</i>
2	Sweden	Netherlands
3	Norway	<i>West Germany</i>
4	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Italy</i>
5	<i>Japan</i>	Sweden
6	United Kingdom	Norway
7	Finland	Ireland
8	Canada	United Kingdom
9	Ireland	Finland
10	USA	USA
11	<i>West Germany</i>	Canada
12	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Australia</i>
13	<i>France</i>	<i>Japan</i>

*1970. Ranked from best provisions/measures (1) to worst (13) in each area

NOTES: Countries with the greatest discrepancies between the two measures appear in *italics*

SOURCE: Adapted from Castles, 1989b, p.58

25 years since, welfare expenditure has grown, but the signs are that inequalities in Australia are sharply increasing (Raskall, 1987).

Two contrary interpretations of these figures are possible. Either Australia is talking much more about welfare than it is doing, or there are aspects to the welfare/equality binary which make these contrasting terms. Clearly, the relationship between measures of equality and welfare is not a simple one (Castles, 1989b). Nor is it easy to say where one might find a just society, or an approximation to it. I would not proclaim Australia as an obvious candidate for the position.

Disconcertingly, a study in the 1980s found that Australians are not generally aware of large social disparities. Of all the people from OECD countries surveyed by Kolosi (cit. Castles, 1989a), Australians were found to be the *least* inclined to seek government intervention for change. The women's movement is thus a brazen exception of protest against unredeemed inequality.

TESTING THE WATER

It must be borne in mind that before 1968 'woman' did not exist as a political category. There were no special services for women, and in almost no area in public life, in scholarship or government were women named and included as a group with rights. Even in private life, women enjoyed few rights but, as in marriage, a set of duties. Rights remained largely the province of the husband to be used at his discretion. Women had to create the category 'woman' themselves and also claim special rights and interests.

It was never quite clear what women's issues actually were. To those seeking liberation, all of life became a women's issue. To others, only specific issues such as abortion or childcare were women's issues. 'Women's right to equal employment opportunity, child care and refuges are still at the heart of most definitions of women's issues' (Simms, 1984, p.119). Work was pivotal to all feminist and radical agendas, however. With hindsight it is arguable that this was a mistake, in the sense that the strategies were based on the assumption of full employment. The women's movement arose during a period of full employment and labour market confidence. Full employment has long since vanished and as jobs continue to disappear from the labour market the focus on work

warrants rethinking. Nevertheless, work was part of an important and often radical political agenda.

Some groups saw the diffuseness and diversity of responses to women's issues as a great political handicap. The small communist Spartacist League argued:

The political amorphousness of the present women's liberation movement must be replaced by a commitment to a socialist, working-class program of struggle. Its organisational diffuseness must be transcended by the creation of a non-exclusionist class-conscious women's liberation organisation with a perspective of becoming national in scope . . . The women's liberation movement must reject spurious unity across class lines in favour of a broad-based radical women's liberation organisation with a clear program of struggle. (Spartacist League, 1970, p.14)

The Spartacist program included demands for abortion, free full-time childcare facilities, free cafeterias in factories, divorce at the request of either partner, the abolition of alimony, women workers' rights and workers' power.

Apart from the political, the most prominent models for the women's movement in Australia were social and cultural. The latter is exemplified in the Women's Liberation booklet *A Feminist Tour of Perth* (1985). The authors (p.156) list their activities as:

- The Women's Dances (where women have fun and dance in a non-sexist environment)
- Consciousness Raising Groups (where women learn to interpret their own lives in feminist terms)
- Feminist Discussion Groups (where women learn about feminist theory)
- Lesbian Feminist Discussion Groups (where lesbianism is explained in feminist terms)
- Weekly Radio Programmes 'Out of the Gilded Cage' at 6NR in collaboration with Women's Electoral Lobby (1976–1981)
- Feminist living arrangements in Lake Street
- Sit-in and street theatre at the Department of Community Welfare to protest against cuts in funds for women's refuges (1977)
- Sit-in at National Labor Conference 1977 to protest against the Labor Party's lack of commitment to repeal abortion laws
- Demonstration at Murdoch University against the Fraser Government's treatment of women (1977)
- Skill-sharing weekends
- Women's Liberation farm 'Greenarm'
- First Reclaim the Night march in 1978 in Murray Street and Forrest Place (to reclaim safe nights for women, free of rape and harassment)
- Festivals of feminist films

- Making of video 'Don't Break Down, Break Out' in 1978
- Poster runs
- Miss Universe Demonstration in 1979
- Women's Band 'No Such Band' in 1980
- WA issue of 'Rouge' (1980) an Australian feminist newspaper
- 'Around the Cauldron', a collection of WA Women's Liberation papers in 1980
- Summer Solstice Celebrations in 1981 (the start of non-patriarchal religions)
- Interest in herbal medicines
- First wreath-laying at the Anzac Day dawn service in 1982 (to honour all women raped and killed in wars)
- First Information Tent at Hyde Park Festival in 1983
- Many demonstrations in collaboration with other women's groups
- Grapevine Newsletter (1980-)
- Lesbair Library (feminist lending library, 1979-)
- Involvement in Women's Peace Camps (1983-)

Cultural feminism was not, by itself, necessarily apolitical. Indeed, proponents of cultural feminism initiated many protest actions. The difference from political feminism lay in the autonomy of the membership. By contrast, social feminism, concerned largely with creating a special health and welfare infrastructure for women, was generally dependent on government funds. The interplay between federal and state government funding and the debates about securing new funds became the grindstones for feminist activism in this domain.

Vast regional differences in the development and breadth of programs and actions also played a role in Australia. Local feminism was only as strong as the commitment and ideological conviction of its adherents. The progressiveness or otherwise of state governments also played an important role. West Australian feminists, for instance, were extremely active, innovative and productive, especially considering the relatively small population of Perth compared to the east coast capital cities. It may be that their isolation from the rest of Australia contributed to a more pressing sense of the need for self-assertion and personal commitment.

The South Australian women's movement provided particularly strong leadership in the health-care field. In this it was undoubtedly assisted by a government and a community attitude that facilitated change. For instance, South Australia became and has remained the only state to legalise abortion (1969), a move that was accompanied by programs concerned with birth-control education and contraception. In 1971, women's groups distributed a (non-political/non-ideological) factual leaflet called *What Every Girl Should Know*

About Contraception, which was so successful that groups in Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane used it as well. An abortion referral service (1973) and a pregnancy testing service (1975) followed. There was little consciousness-raising activity in South Australia (Kinder, 1982), but plenty in the outer suburbs of Melbourne (Hartley and Parsons, 1982). West Australian feminists talked about (and even with) immigrant women and Aboriginal women; Melbourne feminists spent time with women and feminists at factories and issued a bilingual newspaper that was read in factories.

An undoubted strength of the Australian movement was self-education. Feminists became teachers, group leaders, organisers, librarians, filmmakers and entertainers. Their work helped liberation-minded women discover each other, and find mutual strength and joy in being together. Feminists were highly optimistic and much of the time celebratory in spirit. If the recognition of women's oppression brought women together, it was this spirit that gave them cohesion and energy.

Per capita, Australia probably had more feminist organisations, collectives, interest groups and social clubs than almost any other western nation. The movement grew extremely rapidly. In less than two years, women had created a cultural and a political presence of their own. Refuges, health centres, rural centres, feminist living quarters, films, journals, theatres, libraries, book shops, radio programs, dances, posters, music, fun shows and celebrations attest to enormous creative energies.

It is hard to judge how many women actually joined the movement because of its informal and spontaneous nature. In western Europe, about 1 per cent of adult women were said to be core participants, with an additional 5 to 20 per cent joining in on single issues (Kaplan, 1992). A 1993 Australian survey found that although many of the women surveyed disliked the term feminist, the great majority of their replies had feminist content (Horin, 1993).

Australia has developed its own brand of feminism, which is both utilitarian and egalitarian in principle. Australian feminists wanted services provided and infrastructures built, laws changed, books altered and equal opportunity instated. Although Australian feminism has not ignored consciousness raising, this has played a lesser role here than in some other countries.

The Australian women's movement, like most western women's movements, was autonomous from the start. With the exception of groups such as WEL, it was generally not well organised, which meant it had few identifiable spokeswomen. Unlike some of their European counterparts, such as Italian or French women, Australian

women had little access to political culture and hence little experience of organised political action, apart from a few political activists and unionists; those women's organisations with political skills tended to have a conservative viewpoint. What kept the Australian women's movement going in the absence of experience was an indomitable spirit and an unparalleled tenacity.

FEMINIST ORIENTATION AND ITS STRATEGIES

The strategies used in the actively demonstrative stage of the women's movement depended very much on the overall perspective and political colour of the individuals and groups concerned. Broadly speaking, Australia, like most of western Europe, the US and Canada, produced liberal, radical and socialist feminism. The relative prominence of these three orientations varied. The US is said to have been stronger in liberal feminism (Eisenstein, 1984), even though Denfeld (1995) believes the true liberal agenda now needs to be reclaimed. In western Europe, radical and socialist feminism probably dominate. In Australia, the picture is more equivocal. Dixon (1984) argues that socialist feminism has been extremely influential and, in her view, more so than elsewhere. Clarke and White (1983) thought that radical and Marxist feminism were the predominant orientations. This may have been true at the level of theory, but the practice seems to have been influenced strongly by liberal feminism, which my own research suggests has had the most lasting effect, has been the most visible expression of Australian feminism throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and, over time, has more or less succeeded in supplanting other theoretical political platforms.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is grounded in individualism and celebrates individual achievement. It is not to be confused with the Liberal Party. Liberal feminism espouses liberal values and its membership is largely middle class and committed to a reform agenda. Wedded to sex-role theory from the start, it gave rise to a set of activities that fully deserve the name 'women's rights movement'. Women's rights movements both in Australia and abroad have in common the basic premise of equal opportunity, understood as a measuring stick against which women's status can be objectively measured.

Women's inequality is perceived as a deficiency of the system, but one that can be fixed. According to the liberal feminist position,

there are no deep sources and roots to this problem (or these are irrelevant to action) and the state is certainly not to blame. Society as it stands can cope with and absorb these changes. It is a matter of being professional, efficient and analytical in approach. The goal is political reform, change in legislation, comparability of opportunities for men and women, and a progressive move from exclusion to inclusion of women in the social, economic and political life of the country. Education must be rearranged to avoid disadvantaging girls, who need encouragement to enrol and succeed in so-called male subjects such as engineering. As Burgmann puts it: 'Unlike their first-wave feminist foremothers, who wanted men to behave like women, modern liberal feminists take the position that women should behave like men' (Burgmann, 1993, p.83).

Liberal feminism suits boardrooms, bureaucracies and government because its strategies are not dissimilar from those used in mainstream professional and political life. From the perspective of a women's rights movement, the state is neither an enemy nor a conspirator with big bosses in the private sector. The state can be negotiated with and argued against, and the confidence to do so is derived from a firm belief in the suppleness of the democratic framework. The emphasis is not on dissent but on proposals, not on attack but on exposure, not on guerilla warfare but on committee meetings and debate.

Liberal feminism, like the liberal pluralist tradition, aims to resolve conflict and achieve consensus without affecting the system as a whole. It argues that inequality simply reveals a less than complete implementation of democracy and that there is a way to overcome such a deficiency.

One of the most successful feminist organisations, not just within liberal feminism but nationally, has been the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). WEL was founded in 1972 by a group of mostly professional women in Melbourne (cf Grimshaw, 1988) and quickly spread to other capital cities and many towns. WEL was perhaps the only truly national feminist lobby group in Australia (Mercer, 1975). White wrote at the end of its first year:

Women's Electoral Lobby, the fastest growing Topsy of Australian politics, has had its growing pains. The very speed with which it developed from an ad hoc group of ten women to a widespread lobby with over 100 Victorian members in little under three months, and, with interstate groups in Canberra, Queensland, Sydney and Perth, naturally caused confusion of aims and ideals. Some of those to whom the Lobby looked for support felt that, by working within the present political structure, the Lobby was running counter to

the aspirations of many of those who espoused the cause of Women's Liberation.

But for the members of WEL there are too many things rotten in the state of Australia, too many things that have been deliberately ignored, too many issues which need our energies *now* and too many voices silent too long. (White, 1972, p.41)

WEL was and still is well organised but non-hierarchical, efficient in its administration and thoroughly professional. It puts concrete and manageable items on the political agenda and works to implement them via political action and lobbying. WEL's success is partly due to its strict avoidance of party alliances, which allows women of all political persuasions to become active members. WEL included Liberal Party voters, socialist and Marxist feminists, and many leftist, Labor-leaning women. WEL's charter states that it is 'emphatically non-party . . . it not only endeavours to change all political parties, but to give women of all political beliefs an opportunity to work through their party to give women more equality and freedom and to gain confidence for themselves' (WEL, 1972).

For the most part, however, WEL was run by educated middle- and upper-class women. They confined themselves to achievable goals, holding the state to its own stated aims. They had no plans to start a revolution but used the accepted channels of change: submissions, inquiries, lobbying, directed at 'business leaders, government officials, councillors, and anyone else in authority to bring about the reforms needed to make women equal' (WEL, 1972). One of their first tasks was to send questionnaires to MPs about their attitude to women and their future program. The results were shocking to many: 'So far the *Hansard* search has proved a depressing task for it has revealed how pitifully small is the parliamentarian's regard for his female voters, how distressingly seldom he raises the issues which so directly concern the welfare of his electorate' (White, 1972, p.41).

Step-by-step reform, according to liberal feminists, can eventually transform society as a whole. Other feminists might disagree with this method, but all of them considered the potential of transformational change. Liberal feminists argue that changed practice leads to changed attitudes and can eventually undermine the systemic bias against women. The principle is to engage the state in providing funding for their proposals and the machinery to implement their ideas. These are reasonable women, well-versed tacticians who usually manage to avoid alienating the bodies from which they wish to extract funds and changes in policies. Their method is based on patient, time-consuming and continuous persuasion.

Among their chief targets for change are the education system,

the health-care system, and general equality of opportunity. They often emphasise work and careers. Liberal feminists are also concerned with childcare, discrimination and women's personal independence, including their right to borrow money, manage businesses on their own and maintain property independently in and through marriages.

R a d i c a l a n d s o c i a l i s t f e m i n i s m

Radical feminism and socialist feminism, by contrast, preferred to be largely unorganised, fluid, flexible, open and spontaneous and to be known as liberation groups.

There have been bitter public fights between the radical and the moderate wings of the movement. Much of the vitriol has been directed by so-called 'moderate' or 'emancipist' feminists against 'radicals' or 'women's libbers'. It is difficult at times to comprehend on what grounds these 'moderates' thought of themselves as feminists, since nearly all of their beliefs fitted in snugly with the most conservative views of women in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, many of their opinions (and their distaste for radical feminism) were in keeping with a position that was decidedly anti-feminist. In Melbourne in the late 1970s, a typed pamphlet called *Women's News* was put out by the Moderate Feminist Collective. In contrasting their own virtues with the flaws of the radical 'liberationists', the 'emancipists' were deliberately distorting and simplifying complex arguments, as shown in the box on the following page.

Publications such as these, which purposefully misled other women into believing that radical feminism was about coercing women and institutionalising children, helped to polarise the movement from its onset. Beatrice Faust, who in 1972 was one of the founding members of WEL, had once condemned feminists as 'crowing hens' (Faust, 1970). Judy Keene, an early member of the Sydney Women's Liberation group, countered:

What a pity Beatrice Faust did not actually go and talk to some of these so called 'crowing hens' before writing her silly and rather incoherent article on Women's Liberation . . . I could see Mrs. Faust earnestly sitting at her desk . . . and frantically trying to fit such behaviour into her middle-class concepts of the Stout Citizens Association for the Change of Something, which she would be familiar with.

In fact it is probably better that Mrs. Faust did not come to any real live Women's Liberation meetings as she would be appalled to find out that these groups have no membership fee, no presidents, vice chairmen, subcommittees, special subcommittees, backbiting,

Emancipists(a) *Sexual nature:*

The sexual natures of men and women are innately different. There are biological, physical and psychological differences between sexes, e.g. females generally have a slighter bone structure, males have more highly developed muscles which enable them to run faster, swim faster etc.

(b) *Homosexuality*

It cannot provide a deep and lasting happy relationship. It is not a natural relationship.

(c) *Family*

It is the natural and basic unit of society. People can be fulfilled carrying out the role of home-maker. Both parents should not have to work from economic necessity. The government should provide assistance to allow one of the parents to stay home and look after the children . . . Until an allowance is brought in women will not have freedom to choose.

(d) *Child care*

Children are best cared for by parents and parents who want to care full time for their children should be given financial help.

(e) *Human relationships*

Love is the basis of sex.

(f) *Men*

Men as a group do not oppress women and can be trusted and worked with.

(g) *Education*

Equal opportunities in all areas for women and men should be the rule.

(h) *Women's studies*

Should be objective.

(i) *Work*

Equal pay, promotion opportunities, conditions etc. should prevail. Women should have a choice—enter the paid workforce or stay at home and look after the family.

Liberationists

The sexual natures of men and women are identical. The only differences between sexes are biological and are confined solely to reproductive organs. Physical and psychological differences are caused by social conditioning.

It is a valid life-style and it is natural. All people should either practice it or at least accept it.

The family is an obsolete and destructive institution. It should be destroyed. Women cannot be fulfilled as wives/mothers. A woman can only be fulfilled if she is in the paid workforce. Women should be pressured into leaving their homes/families for the workforce.

Children are best cared for in institutions. Free 24-hour childcare centres should be established and parents pressured into working full time.

Self-gratification is the basis of sex.

Are oppressors of women, are not to be trusted and worked with.

There should be discrimination in favour of women when employing academics, granting admission to courses etc.

Should be biased towards 'educating' women to accept liberation 'ideals'.

There should be discrimination in favour of women. Women should be pressured into the paid workforce. It is not a legitimate and fulfilling function for them to look after their family.

Note: This circular is undated. It was received as a two-page typewritten copy by the State Library of Victoria in December 1980 and is incorporated in the F.J. Riley and Ephemera Collection.

oneupmanship, infighting or any of the usual paraphernalia of such groups.

Mrs. Faust reacts to Women's Liberation as though she sees it as some sort of threat to herself—as though she is afraid she has something to lose. Interestingly enough, in my experience it is usually men who try and dismiss it as lesbian and kinky—yet it's Mrs. Faust who suggests that 'frightened women aren't frigid, but angry women are'.

Statements like this make one realize how long it is that women have been exploited and divided, and how much further we have to go before women will come and work and organize together as sisters. We have nothing to lose but our chains. (Keene, 1970, pp.7-8)

Faust now writes a regular column for *The Australian* on feminist issues. But Keene's response illustrates the gulf between women's liberation and the later women's rights groups that was to remain a feature of the Australian women's movement.

Radical feminism and socialist feminism eschewed any clear working relationship with the state, although for very different reasons (see Table 3.1). Despite their substantial differences, various radical left feminist groups tended to see the state as an enemy. Anarchists wanted to destroy the power base without creating another. Marxists feared that a separate women's movement could only weaken the power base of the labour movement and therefore play into the hands of the state. It was essential to retain the working-class momentum in the labour movement as a whole if true change was to be achieved. Indeed, Trotskyite writers argued, not unlike Soviet officials at the time, that the women's liberation movement was nothing but a 'bourgeois deception' and ultimately against working-class interests (see Cliff, 1984). Radical separatist lesbians wanted nothing to do with the state or with men and thoroughly disowned or mistrusted liberal feminists as collaborators with the state. Socialist feminists and radical feminists did not see eye to eye either. Socialist feminists considered it a major weakness, indeed 'a counter-revolutionary indulgence' (Yeatman, 1970, p.21) to identify men as the source of all evil, while radical feminists thought that blaming capitalism alone was insufficient to explain the universal oppression of women.

Of all leftist groups, only radical feminists felt that a separate women's movement was absolutely necessary, but, unlike liberal feminists, they insisted on the movement's retaining full autonomy. In their view, this was necessary to effectively target the problems and issues related to a gendered economy as a 'system of segregation, control, exploitation and social struggle of awe-inspiring scope and complexity' (Connell, 1987, p.36). Radical feminism identified

TABLE 3.1 FEMINIST ATTITUDES TO COLLABORATION WITH THE STATE

	Women's Rights Movement	Women's Liberation
State as enemy	no	partly
Feminism as non-partisan	yes	no
Political reforms as main strategy	yes	no
Seeking integration	yes	no
Actual integration	marginal	not applicable
Following the rules of the game	yes	no
Using direct action	yes	no
Ideology	equality	liberation

SOURCE: Dahlerup, 1986, p.225

men, rather than governments, as the source and maintainers of power and sought to explain patriarchy as a system, a set of specific relationships between women and men. It regarded the Marxist focus on class and capitalism as inadequate.

One notes that those feminists who have been coopted by the state have usually come from the liberal feminist camp.

All of these groups wished to be known as women's *liberation* groups. There were vast differences between the radicals and the socialists, as well as between splinter groups. However, all groups rejected existing power and value hierarchies and aimed to liberate women from the chains imposed by male privilege. They further agreed that action was needed to achieve such a liberation and found the thought of liberation exhilarating. All groups stressed autonomy from the state, but for different reasons. Sydney's Scarlet Woman Collective argued:

The reasons for an autonomous women's movement remain unchanged. Women are oppressed as a sex whatever differences class and race bring to bear on this: all men have a vested interest in women's oppression. Women must devise their own forms of struggle against this oppression.

If women are to fight alongside men . . . the priorities, partly imposed by patriarchal capitalism, in male dominated political parties and movements will overshadow the struggle for women's liberation. (Scarlet Woman Collective, 1977, p.28)

This perspective struck at the very core of socialist thinking, which required close connection with the labour movement. But some dismissed the idea of patriarchy as a conspiracy theory that would lead nowhere in practice: 'One is left searching for Patriarchy Headquarters to explain what goes on' (Franzway et al., 1989, p.29). Radical feminism inspired consciousness-raising meetings, some-

times to act in accordance with new insights, but sometimes as ends in themselves. In the latter case, they often became totally depoliticised, personal and introspective.

Socialist feminists, on the other hand, tended to be as pragmatic and goal-directed as liberal feminists. High on their agenda was the issue of women and work and its subsidiary but interconnected concerns. Socialist feminists (of various shades and in various women's organisations) were conspicuous among the few who actively collaborated with working-class women and discussed strategies for action with them. In Melbourne, the Working Women's Centre, founded in 1975, succeeded in bringing white- and blue-collar workers together. It was also responsible for one of the few successful attempts to bring Anglo-Celtic and immigrant women together in joint action, although there were intermittent trade union activities and strikes by migrant women which were supported by the rank and file.

Movement strategies

Actions by the Australian women's movement were generally not as colourful, overt or dramatic as in some western European countries. But they were dramatic enough within the Australian context. Demonstrations occurred throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, with growing numbers of women meeting in the streets, in conference venues or at parliament houses. There were dramatic acts such as the chaining of Zelda d'Aprano and others (cf Aveling and Damousi, 1991). Then there were the ANZAC Day marches against rape in war, which created outrage and consternation. In 1975, at a Women and Politics conference in Canberra, the statue of King George V was draped with a placard reading 'Women and Revolution, not Women and Bureaucracy', and the slogan 'Lesbians are Lovely' was written on windows in Parliament House and on mirrors in the men's toilets (Reid, 1987, p.19). Street theatre was also a widely used strategy.

The lack of a peak body representing women's organisations was to some extent considered a weakness in the women's movement, which many believed needed a strong, centralised body like the National Organization of Women (NOW) in the US. However, women felt rather strongly about organised structures that would quickly copy male structures and create inequalities among the members. Hence, while it was possibly a disadvantage in macro-political terms, autonomy also gave flexibility and enabled the movement to remain an unpredictable political opponent.

THE PROJECTS

Much of Australian feminism was project oriented from the start. It talked about aims and objectives and attempted, usually successfully, to follow through on a plan of action. The splintering of the movement into various factions was thus by no means just a negative development. Separation of issues, for instance, made it possible for some groups to devote all their attention to one set of specific concerns and transform practice in these areas.

Building an infrastructure requires at least a three-pronged approach: one is to focus on services (be this in health, welfare or education), a second is to infiltrate positions of decision making (such as government, unions, representative and affiliated committees), and a third is to develop an independent network.

It was important to build an infrastructure for at least two reasons. One is related to the question of identity. A culture which does not represent half the population is as impotent as a colonial culture which does not represent the local population. The second reason is related to need. *Monthly Cycle*, a publication launched in October 1975, for instance, reported regularly on the needs and problems of women in refuges and crisis centres. It makes informative reading today as it clearly indicates the high level of demand for such services.

Fund-raising was an exciting new experience for grass-roots activists (Rosenfelt and Smith, 1975). However, there were many difficulties placed in the way of implementing specific projects. An analysis of funding models reveals one layer of problems faced by community organisations. Sawyer pointed out that most funding arrangements, especially in the first decade of the women's movement, were 'submission-driven' rather than being based on government planning models. Submission funding, Sawyer argues, places the onus on the applicant and leaves the funding body to pick and choose whom it will fund without requiring any detailed commitment. For the fund seeker this becomes a guessing game with unknown variables. For instance, it requires a knowledge of the availability of grants,¹ of relevant submission deadlines and the purpose of individual grants, of expectations and accepted models of presentation (Sawyer, 1990a, pp.80-1). It also requires a degree of sophistication in presenting one's case in terms of the standards of the bureaucracy. Most applicants, however, lacked such insider knowledge and often wondered what 'they' in Canberra ought to be told or want to hear.

Thus, groups with the greatest needs for infrastructure development are also the least likely to get funding. Eva Cox, in a 1995

edition of the 'Life Matters' program on ABC radio, reiterated these points in relation to the latest round of funding by the Office of the Status of Women. She argued that OSW was out of touch with grass-roots women's groups and that its expectations with regard to the quality of submissions were unrealistic. In 1995, many organisations had their funding reduced or cut and others were refused grants altogether. The reason, as OSW explained somewhat officiously, was that some submissions 'did not provide measurable outcomes or satisfactory methods of evaluation'. While such assessments sound reasonable, how valid are they in the case of severely under-funded projects that barely cover running costs?

W o m e n ' s h e a l t h a n d w e l f a r e

The refuge movement (cf. Johnson, 1981; McFerren, 1990) and health-care movement (cf. Broom, 1991) probably played the most active role in health and welfare for women, although outreach courses at TAFE level and other educational courses were also important, particularly in capital cities. The refuge movement is one of the undoubted success stories of feminist infrastructure and culture building across the western world. Yet it is a sad success, because it attests to the untold misery of women and their children (Fairleigh, 1989). The Elsie Women's Refuge, Australia's first, was established in Sydney in March 1974, followed by the first women's halfway house in Melbourne the same year (Women's Liberation Halfway House Collective, 1977).

In Australia, the refuge movement grew quickly, and fast became a national one. The first national conference was held in 1978 and since then conferences have been held biennially. At no stage was it possible to doubt that refuges performed an important service in the community (Waterford et al., 1982), even though funding remained a problem for some years. By June 1975, eleven refuges were operating across Australia—despite an initial shortage of funds, first, because refuges did not fit any established government program. This problem was alleviated later that year, when federal funding put the movement on a firm footing (Sawer, 1990a, pp.12–13). By 1980, there were 96 refuges and by 1988 there were 190 refuges throughout Australia (49 in New South Wales alone). The first backlash came in 1981, under the Fraser government, when refuge funding was devolved to the states, disadvantaging refuges in some states more than in others. The Queensland government was particularly opposed to refuges and acted accordingly, at first refusing to pass on any funds granted by the federal government! The Women's Emergency Services Program, intro-

duced in 1984, became part of the federal Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). As a member of the ministerial advisory committee for SAAP, I vividly recall the tense debates and undercurrents in meetings between grass-roots feminist workers and bureaucrats in the late 1980s. The refuge movement quickly learned to play the political game and in my opinion became one of the longest lasting and most effective grass-roots feminist organisations in Australia. The 1987 review of SAAP concluded that the refuge program had been a successful and cost-effective means of providing intensive support (Chesterman, 1988, p.59).

Changed government attitudes, along with increased awareness of violence against women, led to public campaigns against domestic violence between 1988 and 1990. The National Committee on Violence estimated in 1990 that violence by men against their partners affects one in three couples at some time in their lives, one in ten couples at least once a year and one in 25 couples almost continuously. Half of all family law clients are victims of domestic violence, and one in four females and one in eight males suffer some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18 (National Committee, 1990).² Homicide rates are not nearly as high in Australia as in the US or Germany, but this criterion aside, the National Committee classified Australia as a very violent society.

The women's health-care movement in Australia must be regarded as a great success. It certainly has been among the most intelligent, well-informed and successful activities of the women's movement. Feminists found that distinct gender patterns exist in morbidity and mortality. Women stay longer in hospital, have a higher rate of morbidity and use more health services than men (Broom, 1991; Australian Institute of Health, 1992). This is partly attributable to child-bearing and medicalisation, partly to a longer life expectancy: women live about seven years longer than men. In addition, there are diseases and medical problems which concern women alone, but which had been sorely neglected in medical research, teaching and practice—including cervical, ovarian and breast cancer and other disorders associated with the reproductive organs.

The women's health movement started very much at grass-roots level, with women's health-care centres in major cities. If anything, this movement has gained in strength over the years and throughout the 1990s, although the same cannot be said of its funding. The first women's health centre, the Leichhardt Community Women's Health Centre in Sydney, opened in March 1974. By 1986 New South Wales alone funded nineteen such centres. In 1989, the NSW Women's Advisory Council also prepared the first

information booklets and workshops on cervical and breast cancer for women of non-English-speaking background; health information is now routinely available in several community languages. Melbourne and Perth followed very similar patterns at around the same time. In Adelaide, a lobby group for a health-care centre had existed already in 1973.

Women's health care has become part of the national health-care strategy and very clear results have been recorded. In short, the health of Australians is improving, thanks to feminists' continuous fight to get more attention paid to women's health-care issues in medical training, equipment and practice. There is now much emphasis on preventative medicine. The development of women's health-care centres, of breast screening and general health campaigns (Commonwealth Report, 1988) has resulted in a decline in the number of deaths caused by heart disease, circulatory ailments and cancer. Maternal and neonatal death rates have declined gradually over the postwar period and are now as low as those in Scandinavian countries.

The issue of rape was controversial and difficult to keep on the political agenda (Carmody, 1990). However, in 1991, a \$12 million campaign package was developed to obliterate the culture of violence in Australia. The Office of the Status of Women was given \$3.48 million over 1991-95 to set up a national community education program on rape. Fifty per cent of all reported rapes occur on the weekend and more than half of all between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. Further, 61 per cent of rapes occur at home (Strang, 1991, p.10) and fewer than 10 per cent in public parks, beaches, shopping areas and the like (Moran, 1993). Only 25 per cent of rapes are perpetrated by strangers; all others are committed by a person known to the victim, be this a family member, friend, acquaintance or neighbour. Most rapes happen to young women under the age of 16. The vast majority of those committing acts of violence against women are men and the vast majority of the victims of violent assault are female (Strang, 1991). Attacks on gay males however, are underreported. In this area, a good deal of work remains to be done.

Glaring weaknesses still exist in the system. Follow-up services for rape are one such example. Apart from New South Wales, no state has internally consistent policies, and services vary widely, both in number and in quality, across Australia. Women from rural areas have almost no access to such services, and levels of funding for counselling and similar services range from abysmal to excellent (Carmody, 1990). The differences are less an indication of the relative wealth or poverty of state governments than of state

independence and attitudinal differences on issues pertaining to women and/or containing a 'morality' element.

THE INFILTRATION OF WOMEN INTO DECISION-MAKING BODIES

Women's entry into decision-making positions took at least two different courses. The strategy of liberal feminists was to infiltrate government and the strategy of socialist feminists was to focus on union membership and mobilisation among the rank and file. Neither route was an easy one.

U n i o n s

There have always been women involved in the trade union movement in Australia (Community Research Action Centre, 1980, p.3) but overall, although there have always been outspoken women in Australian unions, female union membership was low and marginalised. Among the unions in which women predominate are the Hospital Employees Union (HEU) and the Clothing and Allied Trades Industrial Union (CATIU); more than 80 per cent of members of each union are women. These particular unions tend to be industrially weak. Their strike record is almost non-existent: between 1972 and 1982, CATIU held no strikes and HEU only two (Thiele, 1982, p.358).

Between 1969 and 1975, female union membership, particularly in the service industries, rose dramatically—by 63 per cent, compared to 26 per cent for males (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976). This had several causes. One was compulsory union membership, which automatically increased female membership in some unions. A second reason was a proactive approach by women themselves. For instance, in 1971, 1973 and 1975 women organised alternative trade union women's conferences for the purpose of creating a better lobbying base (Costello, 1984, p.45; Fanebust, 1985). Partly as a result of these activities, women began to join unions in larger numbers (from about 1974 onwards), forming cells or women's groups within their specific organisations and workplaces (Burgmann, 1980, p.480). In feminised unions such as the Australian Teachers Federation, the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association and the Australian Public Services Association it was not so much a matter of making women visible as of making them count and enabling them to develop some power of their own.

The presence of large numbers of women is, by itself, no indication of influence. Both Labor governments and male union

members were extraordinarily tardy in thinking about women. Although there were exceptional individual unionists who supported the women's movement, for many years they were too few to make the difference. When the Whitlam government established a Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA), there were no women on its interim council and no brief to look at women's needs. Later, however, TUTA became an important resource for women for information on union practices (Costello 1984, p.46). In 1975–76 there were no women on the 270-member South Australian United Trades and Labor Council, and the best gender 'balanced' trades and labour council at the time, in New South Wales, could boast just twelve women out of 400 members (Sawer, 1990a, p.67). No women were on the seventeen-member executive of the ACTU or the twelve-member executive of the Council of Australian Government Employee Organisations, and only two women were included in the eighteen-member executive of the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations (Women's Trade Union Commission, 1976, p.2). In 1975 there were 23 women among the 700 delegates to the ACTU Congress.

Key union executive positions, such as those of paid full-time secretary or assistant secretary, were almost always occupied by men (Martin, 1979). The Royal Commission on Human Relationships in 1979 found that women held only 2 to 3 per cent of presidential and secretarial positions in union branches (see Table 3.2).

A 1980 study found that women were underrepresented at each level of decision making, from shop stewards and office representatives to organisers, research officers and members of executive committees. If they held such positions, they were appointed rather than elected; often they were confined to jobs such as welfare officer. Access to training courses, seen as a precondition for certain union positions, was limited for women (Community Research Action Centre, 1980, p.12, 20). The Hawke government made 22 appointments to the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, only two of them women (Sawer, 1990a, p.90). In 1987, women constituted only 4 per cent of members of the tripartite industry councils dealing with restructuring issues (O'Donnell and Hall, 1988, p.142). Between 1982 and 1990 union membership declined again (by 8 per cent) for men and women alike, dropping to 45 per cent for males and 35 per cent for women (Social Indicators, 1992, p.203).

International Women's Year, in 1975, provided not only a grant to establish the Working Women's Centre in Melbourne, but also an independent Women's Trade Union Commission (WTUC) in Sydney. The WTUC organised important conferences in 1976 and

TABLE 3.2 WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS IN AUSTRALIAN UNIONS, 1979

State	President		Secretary	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Victoria	3	71	1	74
Tasmania	0	24	2	56
New South Wales	1	99	3	99
Queensland	0	28	2	38
Total	4	222	8	262

SOURCE: Royal Commission on Human Relationships, 1979, pp.48-49

1977 with the slogan: 'Unions are for Women Too' (Ryan and Prendergast, 1982). The first attracted more than 600 delegates, and more than 2000 attended the Working Women's Charter Conference of 1977. Only at its 1977 congress did the ACTU drop its support for the 'family wage' and adopt a working woman's charter (Costello, 1984, p.47). Outside the union movement, the Committee on Women's Employment was created by the National Labour Consultative Council in 1979. This committee played its part by preparing equal opportunity guidelines for employers in 1981. The Women's Bureau within the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations also continued to concern itself with training issues for women. The Women's Employment, Education and Training Advisory Group, together with the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, worked to find ways and means to reduce gender divisions in the work force.

Bureaucracy

The position of women in government and the bureaucracy, especially in the latter's policy arm, was an entirely different story. Here, it was not a matter of expanding membership and providing better opportunities for women in future, but of infiltrating a political machinery that was largely devoid of women. Very few women had been part of decision making bodies before the women's movement started. When they first entered federal politics and the bureaucracy it was often in the firm belief that they were infiltrating male bastions with the explicit aim of effecting change from within. As Lynch argued:

Some of these women took up positions as part of a conscious political strategy to effect certain reforms through state structures. Such women typically made the move during the early, and optimistic, days of the various Labor governments (e.g. Canberra 1972 and maybe 1983; Victoria, 1982, South Australia 1970 and 1982;

New South Wales 1976); they were usually hired for their feminist politics (or at least a muted version thereof), their political skills and networks and they are to be found in large numbers among the 'femocrats'. (Lynch, 1984, p. 39)

These 'femocrats' were in a difficult position from the start, a point that Summers (1983) made by dubbing them 'missionaries' and 'mandarins'. Within the bureaucracy women were expected to be objective, rational and instrumentalist. An ideological commitment such as the feminist agenda entailed seemed out of place and 'missionary'. For the women's movement, femocrats had become 'mandarins', representing the bureaucracy (Lynch 1984, Franzway 1986). In Scutt's experience with the WEL Sexual Offences Law Reform Action Group, femocrats were also manipulated:

Some women . . . will side with 'the establishment', with the patriarchy, against those on the feminist 'side'. Under the influence of members of one Department involved in the exercise, women in the bureaucracy were manipulated into being used against other women, for the benefit of male bureaucrats (Scutt, 1985b, p.21).

By the mid-1980s, the rise of managerialism saw women with no specific feminist credentials enter the bureaucracy (Sawer, 1990a, p.32). Another developing weakness was the lack of that 'continuous pressure from the independent women's movement' which Dowse had identified at the IWY conference as the political base for women working within the bureaucracy and in the legislature (Dowse, 1975, p.9). Co-option itself had a negative effect on the movement. Because many of the feminist activists of the 1970s had gone into government, autonomous women's organisations lost some of their most outspoken members. Infiltrating government as a strategy has remained problematic, although there are grounds for hypothesising that *without* the input of feminists into the bureaucracy, far less might have changed than did so.

Women as representatives of constituencies rather than as members of the bureaucracy were glaringly absent. WEL's role here was very important in the early 1970s (Glezer and Mercer, 1973); a coalition called Women into Politics has undertaken similar lobbying functions in the 1990s. The proportion of women in government has gradually increased, reaching 14 per cent in 1992. In 1994 the Labor Party made a commitment, at least on paper, that by the year 2002, 35 per cent of candidates preselected for safe Labor seats will be women. At present the party appears to be stalling on this undertaking. Australia has begun to lag significantly behind France, Spain, Portugal, Germany and especially Finland in this regard (Women in . . . 1991), with fewer female politicians than

any industrialised nations except Japan, Greece and Britain (Kaplan, 1994). So far, the only sustained structural addition to the political edifice has been the various affiliative bodies advising state and federal governments—such as the National Women’s Advisory Committee, and state Women’s Advisory Councils—but, as we know, their direct power and influence is very limited indeed.

THE CONFLICTS

At the core of women’s political activism lay fundamental and deep-seated issues, involving taboo subjects such as sexuality and moral values. Although most of these issues were eventually raised, the controversies surrounding them have by no means abated.

Ideological background

From the outset, the women’s movement was profoundly secular. One of the consequences of this is that religion has barely been raised in feminist debate. There are of course exceptions (Bell, 1972, Crowley, 1973, Willis, 1977) and some specialists have investigated the relationship between various religions and feminist ideas (Franklin and Sturmev-Jones, 1987) or tried to reform religious institutions. One such attempt concerns the ordination of women (e.g. Stewart, 1986; Gleeson, 1990, 1991; Field, 1991).

The movement as a whole has rarely discussed the importance of religion to its participants. Yet it is clear that many of the conflicts within the movement have been fuelled by religious and/or cultural beliefs. If there was a debate it was brief and pointed (Summers, 1973). Religious women of any denomination probably agreed most with feminists on pornography but least on reproductive and biological questions and other issues of morality.

There are five million Catholics in Australia. One wonders about the effects on Catholic women of Pope John Paul II’s continuing condemnation of abortion, artificial contraception, and reproductive technologies, as again in his 11th encyclical (1995). The encyclical condemns abortion, euthanasia and contraception as a ‘culture of death’, which is ‘without legal, moral or democratic foundation’ (Fray, 1995, p.3). There is rumoured to be a quiet rebellion with regard to these issues by Catholic women from inside the Catholic institutions.

The women’s movement in Australia has not succeeded in dispelling doubts in some women’s minds. A vocal minority has led an almost revengeful reprisal against the movement. Australia is among the few western countries with a strong anti-feminist

lobby. No one to my knowledge has yet fully analysed why anti-feminist outbreaks have occurred in some countries and not in others. It is possible that the strength of religion in Australia has been misjudged or the pervasiveness of parochialism underestimated.

A b o r t i o n

Morality issues in Australia have raged for most of the last 25 years. Undoubtedly, the right to legal abortion was one of the most important and contentious issues in the women's movement in Australia and in most other western countries. Most feminists argue that laws pertaining to pregnancy and abortion should disappear from the statute books; in a sense, this is an argument for the 'privatisation' of the body (as opposed to its nationalisation).

It is rarely spelled out that abortion, although always officially prohibited by the church, had been a relatively obscure issue until the nineteenth century. It had always been practised widely and rarely prosecuted. Secular laws prohibiting abortion are a modern phenomenon. In Europe anti-abortion laws are no older than the Industrial Revolution and were mostly framed at the beginning of the twentieth century. They tended to be passed at times of nationalism and racism, fascism and the preparation for war. Many countries had criminalised abortion by the time World War I broke out in 1914, and several others (e.g. Germany, Italy) had revamped their abortion laws by the 1920s or 1930s, introducing strict penalties and long prison sentences for offenders and accessories. Historically, in the western world at least, anti-abortion legislation has always been part of a nationalistic, war-oriented and anti-civil rights syndrome. Australia was unnecessarily drawn into this European debate, copying decisions which have been among the most enduring legislative legacies of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, affecting even non-fascist countries.

While in Australia several of the ingredients of the European abortion debate were missing or weak, the ongoing Australian 'population debate' has no equal anywhere in the world. The fear of underpopulation has been an Australian characteristic since before Federation (Hicks, 1978). Population inquiries are a regular feature of government activity and the main question asked until recently tended to be an anxious 'Have we got enough?', rather than 'Will we have too many?' It is remarkable that a government should hold a royal commission concerned entirely with the reproductive success of its citizens, but this happened in Australia in 1904. The official report of the Royal Commission on the Birth Rate in NSW found: 'The restriction of population growth, whether owing to

restraint of natural increase, or discouragement of immigration, is unfavourable to the moral, physical and economic welfare of the people.'

More often than not Australia thought of itself as dangerously underpopulated for its strategic safety, especially after World War II (Cuthbert, 1947). From the early 1930s, the birth rate declined rapidly as a consequence of the Depression. In 1944 the National Health and Medical Research Council cautioned that if current trends continued, declining birth rates after the 1950s would lead to an absolute decline of the Australian population by the 1980s (cit. Appleyard, 1971, p.7). The 'empty cradle' syndrome remained a feature of Australian life through the 1950s, even at a time of high immigration. There have been many critics of this mentality (Birrell et al., 1984; Hugo, 1986), which has been further attacked in the more recent environmental debates.

South Australia was the first, and has remained the only, state to legalise abortion. The state's Abortion Law Reform Association was formed in 1968 by members of the Humanist Society, and the first relevant law, the Criminal Law Consolidation Act Amendment Bill, was passed in 1969. The Australian Capital Territory came close to legalising abortion but, despite intense lobbying, the McKenzie-Lamb Medical Practitioners' Clarification Bill failed in 1973. New South Wales and Victoria still rely on precedents, such as the Levine judgment and the Mehennit judgment respectively. These precedents establish only that under certain conditions abortion is not illegal (which is quite different from saying that it is legal).

None of the Australian provisions enshrine a woman's right to choose, thanks to the intensely vindictive campaigns and appalling photographic material circulated by the Right to Life lobby in the 1970s (see National Right to Life, 1973), which argued that abortion was doing 'violence to the marriage by helping to remove the right of a husband to protect the life of the child he has fathered in his wife's womb' (Petchesky, 1981, p.221). In the Netherlands, legal abortion was introduced in the 1960s, in England it was readily available by the early 1970s (after legislative changes in 1967), and Scandinavian countries not only legalised abortion but made it part of their health-care scheme (Kaplan, 1992), but in all these countries abortion remained a matter of conscience rather than civil liberties.

Despite the finding that making abortion freely available (both legally and financially), does not increase the abortion rate, abortion has remained an extremely sensitive issue. Simms argued in the mid-1980s, and she might as well have done so a decade later, that 'the continued strength of the taboo is reflected in the failure of

most women candidates to mention it as a “women’s issue” or to raise it in their campaigns’ (Simms, 1984, p.119).

In Australia, abortion continues to be under the control of professionals rather than of women—which constitutes a remarkable deficit in democratic rights. Albury pointed out that the role of the medical profession in the definition of women’s sexuality and life experiences is not raised sufficiently often, ‘nor is the increasing literature analysing that role ever acknowledged, much less discussed. It would seem that medical technologists and their apologists are ignorant of a serious and systematic critique of their practice’ (Albury, 1984, p.179).

The ongoing difficulties have done nothing to reduce the incident of abortions, let alone reduce the dangers to which some women continue to be subjected through backyard abortion clinics. The Australian Parliamentary Pro-Life Group was patently and frivolously incorrect when it suggested in 1989 that legal abortions had resulted in more deaths than illegal abortions had done in the past. We shall never know the precise number because illegality also affects stated cause of death.

Continued illegality in some parts of Australia and the US and in some European countries instead fostered abortion tourism. They led to scores of women travelling from one state or country to another to obtain legal and safe abortions. A 1994 report on abortion by the Women’s Studies Unit at Flinders University, South Australia, sparked renewed debate with its finding that doctors still treat women badly—and its citation of horrific examples of ill-treatment (Ryan et al., 1994; Armitage, 1994).

Whether this is good news or bad news, freedom of choice has not caused a decline in the birth rate, which is associated more strongly with external events, with parental affluence, and with dual-career couples. Numerous studies since Malthus have confirmed that whole societies collectively ‘shut down’ reproduction or accelerate it (i.e. with baby booms) in response to large-scale events such as wars or economic booms and depressions.

Germaine Greer’s comments on abortion on ABC radio in 1972 have lost none of their poignancy today. Ultimately, as she said, abortion, like other issues involving reproduction and sexuality, is much more than merely a matter of legislation and access:

Now when you have abortion laws as extraordinarily muddle-headed and as viciously prosecuted as they are in Australia, you end up with a situation in which the guilt of everybody is compounded, and their ignorance becomes greater. They become less and less capable of understanding the pros and cons of the situation. Liberalisation and relaxation of abortion law is simply not enough! The society

will have to take a more coherent stand than that, or it will simply have more and more human distress, and more and more guilt—the same guilt which it promotes while it piously laments that guilt is a consequence of abortion. Guilt is a consequence of many things including the birth of unwanted children. What we are all guilty of, under these circumstances, are the crimes that were in fact considered most serious by some medieval theologians. The crime of apathy and moral cowardice. The crime of inability to love. The crime of accidie—of sloth of the spirit. And law protects us all in our sloth of the spirit. We hand the decision to someone else and slumber ignobly while crimes are committed in our name. (cit. Carney, 1972, p.16)

Indeed, not just abortion but the entire new terrain of reproductive technology has produced an air of uncertainty, a feeling of unease and strong disagreement within the women's movement itself and between the medical establishment, spearheaded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, and the women's movement. In-vitro fertilisation, for instance, hailed as a major achievement in Australia (Rutnam, 1990), raised still-unanswered questions regarding its consequences, costs and ethics (Albury, 1987; Klein, 1989; Rowland, 1992). The literature on reproductive technologies in Australia is now extensive (see bibliographies by Hepburn, 1992, and Morris, 1993). Reproductive technologies have been developed since the start of the women's movement and the issues surrounding them have kept feminists on their toes, particularly those working in the health field.

S e x u a l i t y , b u t w h e n ?

Sexuality was certainly a taboo subject in the early 1960s. It no longer is, at least not in a sense bleached of eroticism. Sexuality as sexual activity, be this for reproduction or for pleasure, entered school curricula in the 1980s and 1990s, usually in the garb of human relationship courses or health education. AIDS has added another dimension, not just prompting a concern with safe sex but at times carrying overtones of a new morality, wrapped up as a health issue.

Persuading the young not to have children until they are mature enough to take care of them is certainly better than forcing teenage girls to carry them to term. But sex education linked to teaching 'responsible sexuality' remains mere prudish talk if contraceptives continue to be unavailable to the very young. Children are having sex at a young age, even as young as twelve (Thorpe, 1995, p.13). Fear has been expressed that making contraceptives available to children will result in promiscuous behaviour and will expose them

to experiences with which they cannot cope psychologically. Historically, this is putting the cart before the horse. It is not necessarily a case of children starting to have sex at a younger and younger age—an argument that always seems tinged by moral outrage or alarm. Recent legislation and policy changes have in fact served to prolong legally defined ‘childhood’ by several crucial increments.

One is the change in the minimum school-leaving age from 14 to 16 between the 1950s and the 1970s. No one has yet proven to my satisfaction that the extra two years of schooling result in measurably more knowledgeable school leavers; and no one can possibly prove statistically that more schooling results in full employment. Youth unemployment is particularly high now, further widening the gap between assumed childhood and adult independence.

The other measure to prolong childhood dependence is the increase in the age of consent. It is sobering to remember that until February 1961, when the Commonwealth Matrimonial Causes Act came into force, family law in Queensland, NSW and Victoria set the minimum age for matrimonial consent at 12 years for girls and 14 years for boys. The Act changed this to 16 for girls and 18 for boys. Even then, it was possible for girls of 14 and boys of 16 to marry with a magistrate’s approval (MacKenzie, 1962, p.390).

A third measure for prolonging dependence has been the raising of the age of criminal accountability. I fail to see much scientific evidence for the damage that sexual intercourse is purported to inflict, at whatever age. I am not speaking of sexual abuse here, and the line between independent choice, self-expression and exploitation can get very blurred in specific cases. But for many girls, the gap between sexual maturity and legal sexual activity has been artificially widened, and this has led to hardship and confusion. The Social Welfare Act of 1970, for instance, defines a child as a person under the age of 15, and a young person as someone aged between 15 and 21. The legal age of marriage for girls is 16. Officially, then, between the child and the young adult lies one year in which the child is to mature sufficiently to get married a year later. Any sexual experience falling within ‘childhood’ is deemed an ‘exposure to moral danger’ (Leaper, 1974).

The law does not elaborate on this term, but it enabled applications to be heard for the ‘care and protection of children’ by the Department of Child Welfare. In 1972 in Victoria alone, police brought 1843 protection applications before the Children’s Court, 26 per cent of them on the grounds of ‘exposure to moral danger’. Fewer than 25 per cent of all the cases heard concerned victimisation of a young person (rape, incest etc.). Three-quarters,

however, concerned the proven sexual experience and sexual practice of a girl. Girls could be made wards of the state if they were 'infatuated with an older and/or married man or with a youth' (i.e. with any man) or for 'indulging in a sexual relationship with a friend' (see Clunies Ross and Foreman, 1974, pp.254-5). These were not punishable offences because the principle of accountability did not apply to children, but they were nevertheless considered serious enough to warrant the child's placement in an institution of 'reform'. The large number of girls who continued to come to the attention of children's courts for 'carnal knowledge' (leaving aside the many more who got away with it) would suggest that sexual activity under the age of 15 was not so rare even 25 years ago.

Since educational qualifications now take so long to obtain, sexual development has become out of kilter with 'rational' future career decisions, and teenage pregnancies have become unwanted and embarrassing. Technical changes in the length and conception of childhood by legislators and policy makers are a breathtaking piece of social engineering, which has actually created some of the current problems. Significantly, girls are affected more than boys, and women have played their part in turning on girls who are considered wayward. 'Waywardness', a term which in the 1970s was very much in vogue despite the women's movement, contained two condemnations of girls: one for having broken the seal of society's concept of childhood and another for having displayed an active interest in sexuality that girls are not meant to possess. The implicitly negative assessment of female sexuality is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the case of rape. Rape crisis centres have never achieved the same level of funding and public support as refuges have, even though refuges too exist as a consequence of violence perpetrated on women (McFerren, 1990).

Prostitution and crime

Another noteworthy area of moral conflict is prostitution. No unequivocal position has ever been reached by the women's movement on this question and, like abortion and 'child' sexuality, prostitution is seldom named as a women's issue, almost as if prostitutes were not women. Some feminist groups have actively campaigned for the decriminalisation of prostitution, among them most notably WEL, while other feminists have found prostitution wrong in principle. As Sullivan rightly argues, however: 'Prostitution occupies a significant position at the intersection of feminist

debates about the relationship between power, sex, sexuality and work' (Sullivan, 1995, p.184).

Almost all states have now decriminalised prostitution to some extent, but most of them set strict limitations on time, place and circumstance. Decriminalisation commenced in the late 1970s in NSW and continued over the next fifteen years. The Australian Capital Territory was the last to embrace reform in this area, as recently as 1992 in the new *Prostitution Act*. The Northern Territory went the opposite way, criminalising prostitution in 1990. Despite reforms, much is still prohibited and regulated (see Neave, 1994 on all current legislation pertaining to prostitution, especially pp. 94–9).

Much has been written about prostitution, especially in the last ten years⁴. Some have argued that the dichotomy between prostitutes and other women constitutes a form of social control of female sexuality (cf. Jackson & Otto, 1984). Historically, prostitutes have been singled out for special (and especially bad) treatment. The Australian Contagious Diseases Act of the 1860s applied only to prostitutes, not to their customers. The prohibition of prostitution led to its going underground, and to the abuse of prostitutes, including blackmail by police. In the 1960s, one prostitute reported that in her immediate precinct hefty sums of silence money had to be paid to police. If someone did not 'weigh in', as it was termed, continuous arrests and fines were the consequence (Jakobsen and Perkins, 1994).

Harassment of female prostitutes by police continues to be possible because some of the legal conditions pertaining to prostitution are open to sweeping and very generalised interpretations. For instance, the New South Wales *Summary Offences Act* (1988) makes it illegal to behave in an 'offensive manner' (Neave, 1994, p.80). This could mean anything. Police corruption, extorting payment from prostitutes for not booking them, became an issue in New South Wales in the 1980s and was finally submitted in a parliamentary report in 1986 (Jakobsen and Perkins, 1994). According to a gay male prostitute, the stigma attached to prostitution by women apparently does not apply to men—or not to the same degree (Goodley, 1994).

Australian feminists have generally dealt with prostitution more tolerantly than their American counterparts, and this is one of a number of areas where Australian women have rightly not taken the American 'lead'. American feminists are stronger in their condemnation mainly on two grounds: that prostitution promotes sexual and economic inequality (Shrage, 1989), and that it subjects women to disease, indignity, and physical and psychological abuse

(Overall, 1992). Pateman, an Australian who lives in the US, has condemned prostitution as sexual slavery (1988). The strongest objection is that prostitution is the sale the body, if not of the self. Australian feminists remain in two minds on whether to support or condemn it. However, they have shown little of the 'principled opposition' to prostitution that some American feminists so righteously proclaim. In any case, their critique is not directed towards the clients or the issue of why large numbers of men seek sex with prostitutes. In the state of Victoria alone men have 45,000 transactions with prostitutes per week (Neave, 1994).

As a comedienne from New York said in brief interviews of Mardi Gras visitors on ABC-TV recently: 'You are so incredibly lucky here in Australia. You were settled by convicts, we were settled by the Pilgrim Fathers. That's why the biggest mardi gras in the world [the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras] is located in Sydney and not in New York.' In Australia, prostitution was redefined in terms of work rather early in the women's movement (cf. Aitkin, 1980). Sex worker is not just a synonym for prostitute. Striptease dancers, actors in the pornography industry, pornographic telephone services and the like are all now termed sex workers.

From some of the objections raised against prostitution, it seems quite clear that many feminist writers do not actually know what prostitutes do. Prostitution is not the sale of one's body but of a sexual service, which in fact may involve rather little of the woman's body. In bondage and discipline, the prostitute's body is of little concern but her skill to create the illusions and make the drama unfold counts a great deal. Prostitutes who wish to branch into B&D now often undertake training courses first (Blain, 1994, p.119 ff.). It is the customer's satisfaction that counts.

Likewise, there are doubts whether many feminists actually know who prostitutes are. The old image of the (uneducated) street worker might still persist, although only 3 to 5 per cent of prostitutes actually work the streets (Neave, 1994). A sizeable proportion work on their own and from home, and as many as 23 per cent in this category have completed university degrees (Perkins, 1994, p.153). While most prostitutes can look after themselves very well, it remains dangerous work as long as they are alone with their customers without recourse to help. In some European countries, prostitutes now have their own unions, run their own kindergartens, have created their own health insurance schemes and bought their own brothels as a community venture. The risks, the abuse, the blackmail and the criminal exploiters have either been eliminated or minimalised purely by treating prostitution as work. 'Sex work' can be comprehended as a service industry and can be

freed from the underlying puritanical elements in the critique of prostitution so evident even in US feminist writing.

In summary, moral standards are gendered. Transgressions result in sanctions which are measurably harsher for girls and women than for boys and men, with the exception of Aboriginal men and gay boys and men. As late as 1988, the project officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres pointed out some stark gender inequities at work in prisons Australia-wide, with specific reference to her own experiences at a Victorian prison:

Until recently, up to half of the female prison population were held in maximum security conditions at Pentridge's 'B' annex. Women at Pentridge were locked in unhygienic cells smaller than the average bathroom, sixteen hours a day. Women had less access to recreation, work and education than the men at Pentridge. Women considered suicidal or in need of extra discipline were placed in 'observation' cells. These cells contained only a canvas mattress and the women were made to wear canvas nighties. No distractions such as books were allowed and the light was often left on day and night. The cells were freezing in winter. It has been reported that women have been kept in these cells for up to three months . . .

The psychological suffering of women is intensified by separation from family and children. About half the women in prison have children and about ninety per cent [of them] are single parents. Although many male prisoners have children it is unlikely that they will be single parents and female partners are likely to ensure that children visit or at least are adequately cared for whilst the man is incarcerated. The problems for women are not confined to prison life.

Despite the commonly held belief that women get off lightly in the criminal justice system there is evidence to the contrary. For example, the Neave Inquiry into prostitution [referred to above] found that while a significant number of women are imprisoned for working as prostitutes few men in Victoria had been imprisoned for being a client despite the provision of similar criminal penalties . . .

In addition, women are more likely to be imprisoned for a first offence. Child care responsibilities are sometimes seen by magistrates and prosecutors as a reason for excluding women from programs designed as an alternative to prison. Most women are imprisoned for poverty or drug-related crimes and are less likely than their male counterparts to have committed violent crimes . . .

In comparison to the male prison population, a greater proportion of female prisoners are imprisoned for fine default. The same is true for Social Security fraud. Many women imprisoned for this crime are single mothers trying to survive on supporting parent benefit. Many of the crimes involve working part-time to supplement incomes far below the poverty line without notifying the Department . . . Other frauds have involved women failing to notify the Department of de facto relationships. Yet often the men involved

have not supported the women or children economically. All this suggests that far from being treated leniently women are particularly vulnerable to being charged with crimes of poverty and once before the courts subject to harsher penalties than men. (McCulloch, 1988, pp.7-9)

Unfortunately, McCulloch offers no interpretation of her data. It appears, however, that different moral standards are applied to men and women coming to the attention of the courts, with greater indignation expressed towards women who might also be mothers.

In Western Australia, women's liberation groups intervened in the conviction of three women who performed 'sexual acts' with men at a football club buck's night. The women were each sentenced to one year in gaol. Their male sexual partners were not charged. One of the men involved testified against the women and was paid a witness fee, and after the trial no one from the legal profession spoke on behalf or in defence of the women. Such was the state of justice along gender lines in the early 1970s. The convictions were entirely out of line with comparable sentences (McIlwraith, 1972, p.4). The principle here too is gendered morality.

The enemies of feminism

An important source of ideological differences between women was their political beliefs or, rather, their overall world views. Traditionally, women have supported conservative parties more readily than radical or progressive ones. The enemies of feminism congregated around the abortion issue, rallied around the 'saving' of the family, defended the traditional roles of mother and homemaker and were generally identifiable as proponents or supporters of the New Right (Petchesky, 1981). This dignified role was contrasted with the undignified behaviour of feminists (Stephenson, 1970). A woman of the 1950s and '60s did not just look after children. She was 'raising a family', which, by implication, included her husband. She did not just do housework but was a 'homemaker'. Her role was couched in a positive language hinting at an active and worthwhile life.

The alternative to women's homemaker role provided by liberationists promised only a vague sense of identity and a good deal of uncertainty. Especially for those women who had married well-to-do men, the feminist 'vision' suggested a loss of status. For them, the constraints of a paid job seemed an unattractive exchange for afternoon tea parties, tennis matches and mothers' club meetings. The alternatives to 'raising a family' were cast as irresponsible. This

remained a thorny issue. When WEL was founded in 1972 in Adelaide, Anne Levy stressed that she did not 'wish to engage in arguments as to whether mothers of young children should or should not work outside the home. I feel this is a matter of choice for the parents of individual families.' (Levy, 1994, p.15).

One of the most prominent anti-feminists was Babette Francis, a university graduate, married to a Melbourne lawyer. She has five children, a fact that she never failed to mention at any public address. At the height of the women's movement she gave lectures on many university campuses, wrote articles in daily newspapers and eventually became a founding member of the leading anti-feminist lobby, Women Who Want to be Women (WWWW) in 1979. She argued that the very idea of equality was absurd because women and men were fundamentally different, biologically and therefore also socially. Sameness was not in the interest of a just society or of stability, and directly worked against families, undermined childcare and failed to address the situation of women who wanted to be homemakers and mothers. Francis took as a biological premise the intrinsic femininity of women and the intrinsic masculinity of men. Women's higher life expectancy was her main proof that women were not oppressed, for 'an oppressed group does not outlive its oppressors' (Francis, 1976). Consequently, she said, women who wished to fulfil their true nature must fight the misleading claims of feminists. Arguments based on intrinsic difference were also made by the Nazis, who celebrated difference while systematically excluding women from all areas of public responsibility (Kaplan and Adams, 1990). From them stems the distasteful habit of advertising how many offspring a woman has 'produced'. Members of the women's movement who were familiar with recent fascist history were somewhat sensitive to the campaigns of Francis and her growing group of supporters.

WWWW was based on US organisations such as the Eagle Forum and the Moral Majority. It sometimes worked together with church networks and in some actions was joined by the extreme right-wing Women's Action Alliance. Its opposition to the feminist agenda was by no means apolitical. Its support of unpaid labour by women at home tied in well with the Liberal-National Coalition's belief in small government and efforts to cut back community services (Sawer, 1990a, p.52). WWWW was opposed to the formation and maintenance of any bodies and organisations that might be perceived as promoting women's personal and social independence, including such relatively formal and politically innocuous bodies as the National Women's Advisory Council. The WWWW fought vigorously against the inquiry of the Victorian

Committee on Equal Opportunities in Schools. Francis claimed that it was misguided in its aim of eliminating sexism in schools (Francis, 1979). WWW also rallied against anti-discrimination legislation, achieving a delay in its implementation, attempted to be an unsettling influence at the Canberra conference held to mark the midpoint of the UN Decade of Women (1975–85), and continued to lobby against abortion.

WWW also attacked the Australian ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in July 1983. The group saw the ratification as dangerous and provoked the most outlandish fears in the Australian public, including that the family was dead, that the Bible would be banned, and that children would be taken away from their parents in infancy. The ratification prompted more letters and telegrams than the federal government had ever received on any issue (Sawer, 1990a, p.208).

One might forgive the public for being deceived by such a crude smear campaign. But it is difficult to understand why the public reacted with similar acrimony to the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984. Throughout all the debates, one cannot help but notice, *any* change wrought by government policy was greeted with suspicion. Australians have been accused of inertia and political apathy often enough, but the flurry of public activity that greeted simple measures for ending discriminatory practices indicates a latent resentment of equality. Ironically, the country with one of the world's strongest mythologies of egalitarianism bares its teeth most when less than perfect realities are hinted at.

SAPPHO'S NEW SISTERS

In the late 1960s, few people in Australia were acquainted with lesbians. Outside a closeted, clandestine network, lesbians were usually very isolated and, as consciousness-raising groups later revealed, it was not uncommon for them to think of their 'affliction' as unique. Many heterosexual women had never heard the term 'lesbian'; those who did might respond with disbelief (What do they actually do?). Most heterosexual men and women thought sex between women was impossible because of the 'missing' penis; in any case, they considered it inferior to heterosexual intercourse. Within these rather hazy perceptions (Ford, 1992), lesbians were seen mainly as women who had 'missed' out on a male suitor (Storr, 1970, p.71), or were mad (Chesler, 1972) or immature. Lesbians were so invisible that less was 'known about the lesbian and less accurately than about the Newfoundland dog' (Kennedy and Coonan, 1975, p.34).

When I arrived in Australia in 1968, I thought that life for lesbians, and to some extent gay men also, was probably much more difficult here and in other English-speaking New World countries than in Europe. Broadly, in western Europe, the existence of libertinism among the European aristocracy had traditionally enabled the maintenance of a permissive, if not promiscuous, subculture in

which expressions of an 'aberrant' sexuality were possible and not uncommon. There were rituals and occasions for both women and men to seek and maintain same-sex lovers. Such practices and favours were occasionally extended to members of the bourgeoisie, usually when these were either wealthy or beautiful. When George Sand made the mistake of carrying out her love affairs, especially that with Marie Dorval (Jordan, 1976), too publicly and in male attire, the full force of 19th-century French law, written largely by the aristocracy for the 'lower classes', descended on her. Oscar Wilde, the Irishman placed at the mercy of an English public, in his typically acid wit said 'The public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything but genius'. His Irishness, his genius were certainly issues. However, his demise and the reason for the 'extraordinary zeal with which Wilde was being prosecuted' (Ellmann, 1988, p.446) lay elsewhere. Dubbed the 'High Priest of Decadents', probably the worst error of Oscar Wilde was to have stepped outside his class. But such personal tragedies never really dented a homosexual subculture that had flourished initially at courts throughout Europe and from this court culture in the 17th century had later trickled down into bourgeois and bohemian culture, generally into enclaves of people who were economically independent.

A Rosa Bonheur (cf Ashton and Browne Hare, 1981) or Colette would have been unthinkable in Australia or the US. Women such as Sylvia Beach,¹ Gertrude Stein and her lifelong companion Alice B. Toklas moved to Paris so they could live a life that was impossible in the US (Benstock, 1986). Some Australian lesbians went to Paris for the same reason.

A comparative history of the lesbian subcultures in the Old and New World has yet to be written. It is my contention that the Australian experience of lesbian and gay liberation must have been very different from that in continental Europe, for Australia had none of Europe's longstanding homosexual subculture.

In Australia—and the US, with few exceptions (Garber, 1989; Faderman, 1991)—differences between small towns/rural environments and larger cities were undoubtedly less pronounced than in Europe, where cities were known to offer everything. I am not sure how lesbians in Australia ever found each other. In one NSW country town gay males apparently signalled their sexual preference by wearing socks or ties of certain colours. But even that required some 'insider' knowledge.

Moreover, a sexual revolution in societies that are fundamentally puritan and frown on public displays of affection is bound to be more difficult to achieve than in societies in which such displays are socially acceptable. In most European countries women walk

arm in arm, and displays of affection are common. Such customs do not make homosexuality more acceptable, but the taboos were set differently. I remember seeing same-sex couples walking hand in hand in the streets of most major cities in Europe in the early 1960s. In Melbourne in the early 1970s, two women walking hand in hand were charged by police under the Offensive Behaviour Act.

I do not think it surprising that the gay and lesbian liberation movement had a slow and clandestine start in Australia. Dennis Altman put the difference between Europe and New World countries nicely when he said that James Baldwin and Gore Vidal (in the US) portrayed *outsiders*, while in the novels of Iris Murdoch or Angus Wilson (UK) the homosexual is 'a participant in a world of social relationships' (Altman 1973, p.11). The movement in Australia, at least at the beginning, was a gathering of outsiders meeting in the cold light of day, usually on university campuses. To become 'a participant in the world of social relationships' was part of the exercise—and of the learning process of lesbians and gays in Australia. There had been some 'radical homosexuals' in the 1950s but without community support they remained isolated.

The 1969 Stonewall riots of gay men against police in New York provided the impetus for change throughout the western world. In Australia, a Homosexual Law Reform Society was established in 1971. Possibly Australia's first gay and lesbian public group was CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution), in Sydney, which had its own newsletter, *Camp Ink*. Also in 1971, the first gay rights demonstration was staged in Sydney. Political lesbians were active in Melbourne by 1972, when many women joined the gay liberation movement. In the early 1970s, Society 5 in Melbourne, a 'closeted' homosexual organisation which promised total discretion, secret membership lists and the like, had about 800 male members, but only half a dozen female members. The club's name referred to the then-current estimate that about 5 per cent of the population were homosexual.

It is possible to trace a separate lesbian movement. By 1970, there was a group called the Australasian Lesbian Movement (Burgmann, 1993, p.169), but it was little known. By early 1973 (at least in Melbourne), some lesbians had broken off from the gay liberation movement and began to meet and organise independently. Lesbians first went into print in 1973 with the *Melbourne Radical Feminist Collection*. These groups tended to be very small, personal and informal. The first conferences of lesbians, one at Sorrento, Victoria, in 1973 and one national one in February 1976, resulted in a hive of activities, including the formation of political

action groups, collaboration with women's liberation centres and, in Melbourne, a Lesbian Resource Centre. Badges (such as 'Lesbians are Everywhere'), handbills and posters became part of a concerted campaign to change people's views on lesbians and to end their oppression.

The cover of *Lesbian Newsletter's* first issue in March 1976 was entirely taken up with a list of 'lesbian demands':

End heterosexism: We demand an end to the expectation that every person will only seek out the other sex for all emotional, sexual and economic partnerships.

Lesbian mothers: We demand the right to bring up children whilst openly living a lesbian life style.

Lesbians at work: We demand an end to discrimination against lesbians in the workforce. We should be free to be open at work without fears of intimidation, rejection or dismissal.

Lesbian sexuality: We demand that accurate information on lesbian sexuality be freely available to all women. We demand an end to treatment of lesbians as sexual deviants.

We demand the right to live openly as lesbians.

Lesbian is a political definition not just a sexual one.

Despite the substantial commitment and effort of a core group, the lesbian movement never really took off as a separate entity. The reasons for this are complex and embedded in the gender relations and sexual perceptions of the time. There were numerical limitations insofar as the lesbian movement spread itself too thinly among available organisations and groups. This weakened it from the outset. Lesbians were split into at least three major groups: lesbian women who joined the women's movement, those who joined the gay and lesbian movement, and lesbian separatists.

Lesbian separatism had Australia-wide appeal, especially following the delivery of a paper on the subject at the 1975 International Women's Year Conference in Canberra. Separatism was either political or non-political. Some argued that it was essential if lesbians were to find a platform of action uninfluenced by 'male stream' culture and by heterosexism (see Jeffreys 1993). A second group of lesbian separatists often remained social (rather than political) and they were joined by non-feminist lesbians who appreciated the social opportunities but were loath to take action otherwise. The model of women's environments worked for some and became a network throughout Australia, sustained by festivals, conferences, weekends, dances and newsletters. While it brought lesbian separatists into contact with lesbians outside the movement, it also meant forming personal and social alliances with women who were at times not feminists or who were even anti-feminist. Some lesbian

separatists bought commune land, usually in the outskirts of cities or in rural areas, and, as far as I know, there still are some functional lesbian communes today.

THE LESBIAN AND THE GAY AND LESBIAN MOVEMENTS

Lesbians were in fact placed in a difficult position. For women, much more so than for men, it was difficult to find an effective site for their protest. Men, if they managed to hide their homosexuality, were still able to participate fully in a society geared towards males. Gay men who entered the gay liberation movement were not confronted by hostile heterosexuals as were lesbians in the women's movement. They were safe in an all gay environment. I am not sure whether I agree with Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling that it was 'easier to admit to being a gay male than to being a lesbian' but I would agree with them that it is easier to be a male than a female: 'Men, after all,' they write, 'have the status that gives them the courage of their convictions, whereas a woman without a man is seen as doubly lacking' (Bradstock and Wakeling, 1987, p.12). Lesbians could hide their sexual preference but not their status as women and, if they were amongst women, they would share their status as women but could feel obliged to hide their lesbianism. Some political lesbians therefore sought their allies in the gay movement.

In some crucial ways, gay and lesbian liberation was of a very different kind and built on very different assumptions from the women's movement. One obvious issue is the difference between a fight for basic rights (gays and Aborigines) and a fight against social custom and discrimination. Further, the structural and attitudinal differences are profound. As a gender, woman has always been highly necessary, and even the Catholic Church agrees that she is 'complementary', highly visible, necessary, and can find respect and love if she follows convention. By contrast, gay and lesbian liberation functioned from a position of invisibility. Identifying oneself as gay meant recognising one's status as intrinsically subversive, unappreciated, disrespected and regarded as sick, deviant, unlawful and possibly even evil and dangerous.

The lesbian and gay liberation movement had as much or even more claim to being revolutionary and transformational than the women's movement.² The most important aim was to free all lesbians and gays from stigma and tear down the veil of ignorance and silence. This presupposed that gays and lesbians would engage

in their own social as well as sexual revolution which, in turn, generally required a substantial amount of homework and house-keeping (Altman, 1987). They needed their own personal sexual revolution first, both to rid themselves of stereotypes about homosexual love and to learn to think of themselves in positive terms. This was often no easy feat, since they too had imbibed some of the poisonous public and professional attitudes to homosexuality.

Part of the baggage of the 1950s and 1960s was the view of homosexuality as a perversion or disease. When offenders were not sent to gaol, they were directed to the medical profession for treatment, usually with the intention of obtaining a 'cure'. Aversion therapy was practised in Australia from the 1950s to the 1970s, using electric shocks or emetic agents producing prolonged vomiting (Rowe, 1962, p.321). Another method was the so-called hot-plate 'treatment', in which the subject was asked to view a series of explicit photos and to place his/her hand on a hot-plate if s/he dwelled for too long on the wrong picture (Watson, 1979).

In the 1960s and 1970s frontal lobotomies, and their variant, cingulotrachotomies, were also performed on women and men, one presumes, to create what Delgado termed the 'psychocivilised society' (Delgado, 1971). Such 'treatments' hide the profound oppression of a substantial number of people.

Lobotomies rarely attracted publicity in Australia. I am not aware that the media have ever raised lobotomies as an issue in Australia—even at the time when they were performed regularly. The only reference to the practice in the literature of Australasia is in Janet Frame's autobiography *An Angel at My Table*. Frame, a New Zealander, was awarded a major literary prize shortly before she was scheduled to undergo a frontal lobotomy. The prize saved her from the operation, suggesting very strongly that lobotomy and similar interventions tended to serve social-control functions rather than medical ones. In cases of perceived 'deviance' heterosexual women came under the same fire as lesbians and gays.

Today, as Steven Rose has argued in *Nature*, methods of social control 'are a little more sophisticated . . . and drugs rather than the knife become the approved approach' (Rose, 1995, p.381; cf. Kramer, 1994). From the 1970s onwards a spate of theoretical proposals linked homosexuality to hormonal imbalances in utero (Dörner, 1976), thus reintroducing homosexuality as a medical problem. It was at this point that proposals for chemical castration were raised within the medical profession.

In the context of constant and powerful onslaughts by such public institutions as the medical profession, science, the police, the church and the law (Thompson, 1985), it was difficult for many

to think of themselves outside those deterministic constructs of defects, deviation and decadence. Hence, a good deal of soul-searching, healing and reassessment of self needed to precede any political action. The Gay Liberation Front argued in a 1975 pamphlet that the 'guts, the heart and soul of the movement is the consciousness-raising group . . . Personal oppression through social conditioning is the feeling of guilt, shame, anxiety, frustration, despair' (from a pamphlet distributed by the GLF at Monash University, 1977).

In the early days of the lesbian and gay liberation movement in Australia and elsewhere, consciousness-raising groups were highly important and often life savers. Lesbians and gays had to first learn that they were not alone. Second, they had to learn to shake off the yoke that the condemnation of gayness placed on each and every one (Wotherspoon, 1986). Third, they had to learn not to despair.

The despair was hidden from view but it was ever present. Gay people's stories tended to be marked by rejection, repulsion and hopelessness. As Adrian Dixson described the discovery of his own homosexuality:

Whatever favourable qualities I'd inherited . . . now seemed permanently and incurably blighted by a curse so distasteful and disgusting that society unanimously refused to discuss it. Resentment gave way to despair . . . what was the point in studying hard to enter university or planning any sort of professional career? No amount of effort was ever going to improve my gloomy prospects. (Dixson, 1986, p.73)

Society 5 ran volunteer lifeline services for gays and lesbians throughout the early 1970s. Nevertheless, during my time at Monash University many gay students committed suicide. When a student jumped off a thirteen-storey building, the incident was hushed up for fear that this might start an epidemic. I knew of twelve suicides in the early 1970s alone which were largely, if not exclusively, related to the homosexuality of the young person. Few in the general community or the women's movement, however, realised the extraordinary burden that lesbians and gay men suffered in silence.

Mutual suffering and oppression brought gay men and lesbians together. There were times of close collaboration between the two groups but they also had separate interests. Gay men had to pursue a different agenda in part because of the criminalisation of male homosexual intercourse. In that sense, Burgmann is right to say that the gay liberation movement grew out of the Homosexual Law Reform group, but one needs to remember that women joined

the movement not so much as part of that agenda but to eliminate the oppression of all gays and lesbians in general.

Ultimately, it was also clear that gender divided lesbians and gay men at least as strongly as it divided women and men everywhere else in society. How fragile the gay and lesbian union was is well demonstrated in the 'post mortem' of a 1973 lesbian demonstration. Radical lesbians, asked why they had had a masquerade ball, answered:

It was to raise money for the fines for sisters who were arrested in the last gay liberation demonstration; we had a lot of trouble in that demonstration. Three of us were arrested. The Gay Liberation Movement itself collapsed just after that; we left just after the demonstration because we couldn't handle the sexism within Gay Liberation. ('a place to come to', 1974, p.15)

LESBIANS AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The relationship of lesbians to the women's movement was similarly at once close and problematic. Some individual women and some groups within the women's movement were sympathetic and supportive; others felt that the publicly acknowledged presence of lesbians would harm the movement as a whole. Ironically, the undisclosed lesbians often served as role models for the independence for which some heterosexual women strove.

To the women's movement, then, lesbians were either a threat or an embarrassment. Yet, often they were the engines of the movement, or, as Burgmann says, 'arguably the conscience of the [women's] movement' (Burgmann, 1993, p. 171). 'Conscience' needs to be understood here in two ways, both as a model for a woman-centred world, and as a reminder that heterosexuality is a construct. For Adrienne Rich, writing in the US, heterosexuality was 'something that has to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized and maintained by force' (Rich, 1980). For Monique Wittig, writing in France, 'consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction against oppression. It is also the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts' (Wittig, 1992). For Wittig, a lesbian consciousness entailed the political transformation of key concepts. The heterosexist regime, to her, and possibly to a number of Australian lesbians as well, was a *political* regime which heterosexual feminists were proposing to rearrange rather than eliminate (Turcotte, 1992, p.xi).

In theory, the women's liberation movement was capable of serving lesbians in at least two substantial ways. For women who define themselves socially and sexually in the context of women,

it should have offered a new haven, a relatively safe ground psychologically and a stepping stone politically for gender-defined if not lesbian-defined activism. Somewhat arrogantly, Kingston maintains that 'for lesbians themselves the women's movement has meant a sudden superb, if also terrifying expansion of their horizons, the chances of achieving validity outside their own narrow world' (Kingston, 1974, p.3). The 1976 'Manifesto of the Socialist Homosexuals' argued more positively:

The women's liberation movement was the historical beginning of the fight against sexism (male supremacy and male chauvinism) in recent times. As such it allowed homosexuals to see themselves in an oppressed situation, able to attain liberation in a similar way. And so gay liberation emerged after the women's liberation movement, as an autonomous movement, using similar methods to achieve its aims. These were the formation of consciousness-raising groups and militant activism. Special features for homosexuals were 'coming out' and 'gay pride'; these correspond to women's assertion of independence as women and the need to assert some autonomous power that goes with that independence. (Manifesto, 1976, p.15)

There were clearly differences in emphasis on pragmatic issues between lesbian and heterosexual groups and these at times created tension. For instance, heterosexual intercourse, reproduction and birth control, were only of marginal interest to lesbians, even though many had children. Conversely, the various manifestations of distinctly lesbian oppression by society at large were often not of interest to heterosexual feminists. At the 1974 Radical Feminist Lesbian Liberation Conference near Sydney, one reporter noted: 'Some women felt that it was a Radical Feminist conference with lesbianism as one of the issues, most felt they were at a Lesbian conference on Radical Feminism!' (Bebbington, 1974, p.6).

There were some feminist groups which took up the case of lesbian oppression publicly. At its 1974 conference, WEL took a public stand by issuing four recommendations:

- 1 That WEL resolves that all statutes dealing with sexuality (including female and male homosexuality) should be repealed. WEL believes that matters involving coercion can be dealt with adequately under laws relating to assault.
- 2 Believing that female and male homosexuals are particularly discriminated against in hiring and firing practices in the various public services, WEL urges federal and state governments to review hiring and firing practices with a view to disregarding previous convictions arising from sexual activity, mental health admission histories relating to sexual proclivities, etc.
- 3 With regard to human relations and sex education courses in schools WEL urges that sexual variations should not be treated

as deviations, as this gives the impression of abnormality and unacceptable behaviour.

- 4 The WEL believes that female and male homosexuality should not be considered a cause for loss of custody of children on grounds of unsuitability as a parent. (WEL 1974, p.29)

The greatest overlaps between lesbians and the broader women's movement occurred in the fight against sexism, which to lesbians comprised not just male chauvinism but also compulsory heterosexism. This, as well as the general welfare of women and the building of a women's culture, was a common meeting ground between lesbian and heterosexual feminists. Lesbians were particularly active in the women's refuge movement, in the women's health movement, in rape crisis centres and in volunteer telephone counselling work (Ross, 1988).

But the relationship was an uneasy one and the tensions were never resolved. Unlike lesbian feminists in the US, who had confronted the heterosexual feminists very early in the movement (see Koedt, 1971; Johnston, 1973; Kaplan, 1993), the Australian lesbians largely missed that opportunity. Bebbington, reflecting on the 1974 Radical Feminist Liberation Conference, said:

After my second Lesbian-feminist conference the question which worries me is what now? The first glorious flush of Gay Pride is over and for many of us who have Come Out and still operate within the Patriarchy there remains a feeling of cold exposure. Gay Liberation is badly weakened by the exodus of most of the women and offers little in the way of support and political activity. The Women's Movement has filled the vacuum for most of us but for some this merely represents a return to the closet. (Bebbington, 1974, p.7)

A number of lesbian writers have recorded anti-lesbian remarks, attitudes and behaviours within the women's movement itself. Their experiences, as well as those reported in US publications such as *Sappho was a Right-on Woman* (Abbott and Love, 1973), led to explicit examinations of the relationship between lesbianism, feminism and sexism. Abbott and Love argued that the women's movement had been extremely reluctant to examine closely the substantive links between feminist theory and lesbianism. The reasons were strongly related to sexism and the willingness of heterosexual feminists to accept the company of lesbians only on the understanding that the latter would subsume their own demands under the 'broader' aims of the movement. The Hobart Women's Action Group in 1973 made a telling catalogue of negative experiences by lesbians at the hands of 'straight' feminists:

- 1 Being called a bull dyke for speaking out at Gay Lib/Women's Lib sessions on sexism.
- 2 Having one's consciousness 'raised' by a discussion on how to cope with being called 'that horrible name' at our first women's meeting.
- 3 Being told to keep out of the movement because 'some women won't come if lesbians are there, and those women shouldn't be put off because Women's Liberation is for all women'.
- 4 Having to change the pronouns at consciousness-raising meetings (or just shut up) for the above reason.
- 5 Being told you're simply a media problem. (Remember?)
- 6 Standing on the edge of the dance floor at a Women's Lib party knowing that sisterhood is only for the straight sisters.
- 7 Throwing yourself into the childcare/pram, bus, struggle to prove you haven't got any interests of your own.
- 8 Being told to 'come out' and risk your job (if you're honest) and then working flat out to help other women to get jobs of their own.
- 9 Being told lesbianism is a 'passing phase' in women's lib.
- 10 Finding out that the lady you're in bed with is a 'real woman' (liberated variety) and you're only a hardened lesbian (sick variety) (Hobart Women's Action Group, 1973, p.30)

The role of lesbians in consciousness-raising groups is highlighted particularly well by these statements. 'Honest' discussion of lesbians' personal relationships abutted precariously on prejudged gender roles and heterosexist expectations. Many lesbians felt either too coerced to 'come out' or compelled to shut up. The incongruence of their experiences and those of heterosexual women could rarely be bridged. Many lesbians were never truly inducted into the movement because their first encounters with it, in consciousness-raising groups, had shown them that they could not belong in any true, relaxed sense. The stories they had to tell were essentially and fundamentally different from those of the 'straight' feminists. At the 1973 Women's Liberation conference, the movement missed a valuable opportunity to debate its own sexist beliefs and practices, endorsing what Hollibaugh and Moraga (1981) aptly term 'sexual silences in feminism'. Sexuality itself fell in between the cracks of the barren soil of social prudishness.

The divisions were extremely energy-consuming, and the closeness of some small lesbian groups was offset by endless bickering, highly charged emotions and deep disappointments with the 'sisters'—straight or not. In addition, there were stereotypes of the butch/femme variety to be overcome within the movement itself, and such struggles did little to enhance understanding of the complex and difficult situation in which lesbians lived and somehow

survived. The 'liberation' of lesbians was not going to be easy, even within the women's liberation movement.

The most that lesbians have to say to the women's movement is that they really know what oppression is about—not oppression which can be escaped or evaded by leaving home, fucking around, getting an abortion, or flinging one's arms about the neck of some poor hapless sister, but oppression which is real, continuous, and has nothing to do with sexual politics at all; oppressive because one is a woman in a society which continually puts women down, but where, unfortunately, the only people you feel comfortable with are equally put down and hopeless. The best one can do in such a situation is to pretend that it does not exist by setting up mirror worlds, by pretending to be a man, or else by glorifying the oppression until it becomes a kind of living martyrdom. (Kingston, 1974, p.5).

In conclusion, throughout the first half of the 1970s at least, lesbian feminists slipped between two stools (Rogers, 1987, p.109), whichever way they turned. They were either put in the position of devoting their time and energy to issues that were of greater importance to gay men than to lesbians (e.g. decriminalisation); or they chose a woman-centred environment in which their lesbianism was often considered of little or secondary importance. In both the women's and the gay movement, lesbians were asked to take a back seat and fight for agendas that did not entirely speak to their own concerns, either as women or as lesbians. Alternatively, they joined the lesbian separatists, who at times regarded feminism as irrelevant.

By 1976, some feminist lesbians came to regard the divisions and the failure to listen to lesbians' demands and issues, as a shortcoming of the movement as a whole. As Dianne Otto observed:

Like most feminist lesbians, I know little about lesbians outside the Women's Liberation Movement. We haven't needed to because we have created our own round of parties, dances, bars and friends that is well apart from the furtive lesbian culture that has existed for years behind guarded doors, often with entry fees and membership cards. Few of us know anything about the intricacies of the subculture that these scenes encompass, the search that leads one to them, the struggle to survive within them, and the assumptions upon which they are built.

To date, we feminist lesbians have neglected to seriously consider the importance of drawing other lesbians to the Women's Movement, let alone how this might be done. We have evaded questions about organising with other lesbians around specifically lesbian demands. Like most women in general, most lesbians don't identify with our theory or practice. They vigorously deny our claims

that we represent them, and that we even have anything in common with them. (Otto, 1976, p.23)

The fragmentation of lesbian solidarity was not just a matter of gay, feminist or separatist groupings. Further fracturing inevitably resulted from the political/ideological orientation of the various women's groups, because of divisions by class or ethnicity, and the attitude different women's groups took to lesbian women and vice versa. Some lesbians were rather militant and purported to be both the 'heroines of oppression' and the 'high priestesses of a new life', whose battle cry 'No revolution without us' was indeed 'both a threat and a prophecy' (Kingston, 1974, p.3).

Whatever the claims might have been, lesbian feminism was 'seldom understood, discussed, or written about by Australian feminists' (Scarlet Woman Collective, 1976, p.3).

THE OPPOSITION TO LESBIANS AND GAYS

When opposition and antagonism to gays and lesbians in Australia became formally organised, the gay liberation movement was paradoxically revitalised.

Among the most active and visible opponents of gay liberation were small but relatively influential groups such as the Festival of Light and the Community Standards Organisation, which wasted no time in lobbying against relaxation of the laws. In 1975, for instance, these two groups asked the South Australian parliament not to further liberalise laws against homosexual practice, arguing that further reform would be damaging (Bednall and Court, 1975). Homosexuality, they added, was anti-family and antisocial. Gay law reform, in their view, would be unfair to those gays who were 'genuinely distressed'. (This presumably refers to those who had internalised the view of homosexuality as a treatable disease/perversion.) They said reform would open the door to the seduction and corruption of the young and 'would be reactionary, taking us back to pre-Christian days, when immorality was a characteristic of pagan societies'. I know of no non-Christian society without strict moral standards, but the submission here equates morality with a narrowly socially defined 'normality'.

The CSO and FOL further argued that homosexuality is not a matter of privacy and of private morality. The issue, they said, has 'extensive social implications', and the question of blackmail of gay men and lesbian women was 'no longer a substantial one'. Significantly, the two groups' opposition to law reform focused on gay men rather than lesbians. In their view: 'Male homosexual

behaviour is significantly different from lesbian activity in as far as social repercussions are greater with the male (more aggressive proselytising: greater V.D. problem)' (Bednall and Court, 1975). The authors evidently did not realise that women also seduce, may be as sexually docile or promiscuous as their male counterparts and may also lead their sexual careers across gender lines. Instead they argued from a vantage point of gender stereotyping, assuming that women are naturally docile and passive and that the absence or presence of a penis decides how much social 'damage' one can do. Still, for lesbians such ignorance was perhaps a blessing in disguise.

One may surmise that it was partly the hostile reception and the very active lobbying of such groups as the Festival of Light and the Community Standards Organisation which helped to shift the balance from consciousness-raising groups to militant activism.

FROM CONSCIOUSNESS- RAISING TO MILITANCY

The watershed for the Australian gay liberation movement occurred in mid-1978 in Sydney. If a lesbian and gay community exists, it began in that year. The response of police and the media to a series of gay events helped convince many isolated (and largely apolitical) lesbians and gays that the public victimisation of some of their fellows demanded their solidarity and support.

The first Gay Mardi Gras, now called the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, took place in Sydney on 24 June 1978. It was held to commemorate the New York Stonewall riots and thus the anniversary of the birth of the Gay Liberation Front. The date later became International Homosexual Day. The first Mardi Gras was a celebratory demonstration that was meant to send a political message to the wider community. Obviously, the message was received. The parade, in which about 2000 demonstrators participated, turned ugly when police were called in. Several people were wounded and 53 were arrested. David Urquhart, a former gay activist, later said: 'We were literally ambushed by the police' (cit. Connell, 1994). According to the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, the march became 'the most violent demonstration Sydney has seen since the Vietnam moratorium protest'.

Within a day, more than \$5000 was collected for the bail of those who had been arrested and gay rights demonstrators waited at Sydney's Central Court to see that they were released. Press accounts of the numbers involved varied widely, but there is no doubt that this follow-on protest succeeded in getting public

attention. In Melbourne, a solidarity march was organised late in June in which 250 demonstrators carried signs saying 'Better Blatant than Latent', 'Gays are Fighting Back', 'If I'm recognised, I would lose my job', 'End Police Violence', and the like (*The Sun*, 1 July, 1978, p.13).

This time, police intimidation, far from weakening the movement, strengthened it, provoking more marches, one on 15 July which again led to arrests and scuffles, and a larger one on 27 August. In the latter, several hundred protesters marched from Martin Place to Kings Cross and from there to the Darlinghurst police station near Oxford Street. Even twenty years ago Oxford Street was considered a gay enclave. These actions were needed to generally protest against constant police harassment of gays and, in the case of the first, of arrests made at Kings Cross a fortnight earlier. Women, who made up half of the protesters, spoke of atrocities by police against gays and lesbians. When the 27 August march changed venue, police descended on the crowd in large numbers and arrested protesters. Again, the newspapers disagreed but a majority said there were 110 arrests (28 August, 1978: *Melbourne Age* p.2).

The media were not on the side of the protesters. Today, the story would be a little different, given the exposure in a series of royal commissions of a number of Sydney police as corrupt, brutal and unprincipled, (McClymont, 1995). Nevertheless, the conflicts had occurred in public and people were able to see for themselves that police hostility was not a fiction of the gay communities' imagination. Morrison (1978), who reported the entire incident, writes:

One good aspect of the Darlinghurst Police Station incident, and the previous two, is the resultant increase of interest in gay rights and the gay liberation movement. Before the Mardi Gras in Kings Cross, the average attendance at Gay Liberation meetings was apparently about a dozen. Now it's between 70 and 100. Not all people attending the meetings are gays—some are supporters whose interest is human rights in general. (Morrison, 1978, p.29)

The confrontation on 27 August also incurred police brutality. Both events were reported in detail in many women's and gay newsletters and magazines, among them the Melbourne *Women's Liberation Newsletter* and the *Lesbian Newsletter*. The widespread reporting among women's groups was amply justified, since the daily press saw fit to base its report solely on the interpretations provided by 'police informers'. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, for instance, argued that the purpose of the rally was 'to interrupt the

lawful and peaceful rally being held in Hyde Park by the Right to Life Movement'.

The feminist and gay press saw the events a little differently. The 27 August march was organised to protest against homosexual oppression in general and the activities of Right to Life in particular. The Right To Life demonstration held a permit for a rally at Hyde Park, but the police denied a permit to the gay and lesbian groups, who were, however, told they could walk on the footpath. The demonstration was to proceed peacefully, and all participants agreed to disperse when police asked them to do so. As soon as they set off from Paddington Town Hall, a contingent of about 300 police (about as many as demonstrators) entered the scene. Near Taylor Square, police had formed a cordon and blocked off exits. They instructed demonstrators to disperse and seconds later started moving in. The *Lesbian Newsletter* (no.13, Oct., 1978) reported that marchers were 'being kicked, dragged and bodily thrown into police vans, often hitting the metal doors as they were flung'. About 127 were arrested, the majority of them women. Unreasonable bail was set and the police were apparently as uncooperative as possible, refusing to release the names of those inside and generally dragging proceedings out as long as possible. Women were released after the men because, according to police, 'the women were badly behaved'. By 4 a.m., all those held had been released to the crowd waiting for them outside Central Police Station on a cold and rainy winter night. Those who had been inside reported

that many had been humiliated and physically mistreated. Men had been forced to strip, women had been slapped around the face and thrown against the walls. Forty women were held in one cell with only three blankets, and some women in a cell were forced to spend over 12 hours on cold, hard concrete floors with no heaters. ('Sydney arrests', 1978)

The mistreatment was further assisted by the daily press. *The Sydney Sun*, for instance, on the day after the demonstration, printed a report heavily biased against the protesters and including the names and addresses of those who had been arrested. *The Sydney Morning Herald* printed the same list on 29 August. Some of those whose names were published, then received anonymous threatening letters, several were evicted from their homes by landlords and some were threatened with dismissal by their employers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 September 1978, p.3). In this aftermath, gays and lesbians had had enough and took a complaint to the Press Council and the NSW Privacy Committee.

Between June and August of 1978, nearly 200 arrests were

made in Sydney alone. In November, 300 gay and lesbian activists marched again, this time in protest over the pending trials of 184 of those individuals.

In June 1978, in a newspaper series on 'Homosexuality in society', Dennis Altman wrote that although 'Australia has as yet not seen a mass political homosexual movement similar to the one that has appeared at various times in the States during the 1970s, there are a number of gay organisations and groups; the national homosexual newspaper *Campaign* counted close to 30 in Melbourne alone last month' (Altman, 1978, p.7). The rolling protests from June to November were as close as the Australian lesbian and gay community got to a 'mass' movement, and although they were not quite what the US protests had been, their effects have been felt ever since. There was no turning back, and changes started to be made.

That same year, several landmark industrial-relations decisions were made. The Public Service Board decided to disregard criminal convictions for homosexual acts between consenting adults in private in cases of recruitment or promotion and announced this decision in its annual report. Further, Australia's largest white-collar union body, the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations, drew up a homosexual rights program which included anti-discrimination clauses to protect both gay males and lesbians in the white-collar workforce. It was largely thanks to Sylvia Shaw, then both a coordinator of the Working Women's Centre in Melbourne and a federal councillor of the Australian Social Welfare Union, that this program won overwhelming support at the national conference of the ACSPA, which represented about 400 000 white-collar workers in 40 unions. It was the first union body in Australia to investigate the rights of lesbians and gays in the workforce.

Activity also increased around the contentious issue of lesbian and gay teachers. One of the landmarks in lesbian and gay activism was the production in late 1979 of the booklet *Young, Gay and Proud* by the Melbourne Gay Teachers and Students' Group. The booklet created a public outcry as well as substantial approval and media coverage.

In 1979 the Gay Solidarity Group in Sydney published its first newsletter, with a clear message for political activism. In what was dubbed Gay Solidarity Week, the Mardi Gras parade was repeated, this time as a dual celebration: of the first anniversary of the riots at Kings Cross and the tenth anniversary of the Stonewall riots. The 1979 Mardi Gras was a peaceful and colourful party. Police action and the activists' response had helped enlarge the movement

to a size unseen and unheard of before. This time, not 2000 but 5000 people chanted and danced in Taylor Square and through the streets of Sydney, constituting 'the largest mobilization of homosexuals and supporters ever seen in Australia', according to the news reporting in *The Battler* (21 July 1979, p.4). The Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is now known worldwide and is probably the largest nighttime parade in the world.

LESBIANS AND THE LAW

Too often it has been assumed that laws leave lesbians alone. Recent international historical scholarship has shown, however, that the belief in lesbian impunity is a myth (e.g. Crompton, 1981). It is true that Australian law, like British law, has never specifically singled out lesbians as has gay men. Since the Crimes Act was silent on women's sexuality, there was no clear battle to fight, at least not with respect to changing laws relating to homosexual acts between women. Such legal silence, while at times a good thing, may also hide a host of behaviours, social conventions and negative attitudes.

As far as the law is concerned, the lesbian is really a nonentity or, if you like, a non-person. The lesbian under English and Australian law has about as much legal significance as a tree and about as many rights. Since the lesbian's sexual activities are not a criminal offence, the law has virtually ignored their existence, but although lesbians do not suffer the same legal sanctions as male homosexuals they are still oppressed and deprived of their civil liberties in a variety of ways (Kennedy and Coonan, 1975, p.34).

There remained a host of laws which affected lesbians and gay men equally. On reforming most of these they worked together. Social control can be just as effectively achieved by social as by legal means. For instance, disclosure or discovery of one's homosexuality may result in the loss of one's job, or at least one's career prospects, as well as the loss of family support, 'friends' and to a degree even freedom of movement. The silence of the law may implicitly have permitted people to rob, abuse, offend or discriminate against lesbians without fear of retribution. However, police seldom charged lesbians with sexual or public-order offences. There were exceptions, as in the case of the lesbian couple charged with offensive behaviour for holding hands on a tram (Rogers, 1987). Other such cases may have existed and been borne and buried in silence.

Some organisations ensured silence via regulations which clearly discouraged gays and lesbians from identifying themselves. For instance, the notorious Circular 69 (sic) of the South Australian Education Department stated that communists, gays and other 'extremists' were forbidden to 'proselytise' in government schools. It remains a matter for interpretation whether saying one was a lesbian would have been regarded as proselytising. In NSW, the student teacher Penny Short was declared unfit for the teaching profession because she had published an explicitly lesbian poem in the student newspaper of Macquarie University. The dismissal of gay trainee teacher Greg Weir in Queensland prompted action by gay and lesbian activists as well as the national Australian Union of Students to ensure that he regained his position.

On one very important question, however, the law has never been silent: who is the most suitable guardian/parent of a child, particularly in cases of divorce (Plaister, 1979). Many lesbians are mothers, and the possibility of being considered 'unfit' parents has hung over them like the sword of Damocles. This leverage of the law has forced countless women into lives of hiding, insecurity, anxiety and fear. Whelan (1978) argues that custody cases in Australia have often been decided in favour of the father for several distinct reasons. Before the 1970s, the reason of 'unfitness' due to 'sexual perversion' was sufficient. Professional opinion among psychologists and psychiatrists supported such judgment. By the late 1970s, after the Labor government's family law reforms, and after the Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatrists withdrew homosexuality from its lists of diseases and syndromes, the custody continued to be awarded to the father, on the assumption that *social* ostracism against a lesbian mother would disadvantage the child. Whelan (1978) rightly points out that this was (is) a dangerous argument indeed. There are many other groups of women who are ostracised, such as Aboriginal and immigrant women. Are they too to be deemed unfit parents—especially if they are married to or in a de facto relationship with a white Anglo-Australian, or if they have a disability? Such cruel practices may have prevailed in earlier times but by the 1970s women had come to expect different and fairer outcomes.

Another trend, as Whelan points out (1978, p.14) was for judges to award the child to the (lesbian) mother but only on the condition that she made certain undertakings: not to tell the child of her sexual orientation, never to sleep with a sexual partner in the same room, and not to behave in any manner demonstrative of her lesbianism. McMann cited the case of a lesbian who was awarded custody of her child only on the proviso that she would not live

with her female partner. She defaulted and the children were placed in foster homes (McMann, 1979).

There is a host of areas, from taxation and superannuation to hospitalisation and death—and even immigration—where lesbian and gay male couples can suffer personal and fiscal disadvantage and have no recourse in law. A lesbian or gay partner is not defined as next of kin, and this gives rise to potentially tragic problems. A lesbian may be prohibited from seeing her partner in hospital, or from acting on behalf of her partner in cases of urgent medical decisions, to say nothing of the stress the ill person suffers as a result of not being able to see her partner. When a partner dies, especially in an undisclosed lesbian relationship, the ‘secret’ turns against the couple as ‘family’ gather around the bed and ask the ‘friend’ to leave. Hospitals have turned into prisons for many lesbian and gay male couples.

The surviving partner may also be challenged by relatives and lose everything (house, belongings) to the ‘family’ (who may be distant and hostile) with no recourse at law. Even in 1995, gay men and women who give up work to be with their (working) partner are unable to gain benefit transfers in case of the latter’s death. Superannuation is lost to the state and the surviving partner may fall into poverty.

The law may well be silent on the lesbian, but in many ways such silence is strong evidence of discrimination. This is evident, for instance, in legislation relevant to couple relationships, such as the Stamp Duties Act, the Victims Compensation Act, the Wills and Probate Administration Act and the Family Provisions Act. Further, taxation regulations have treated gay and lesbian couples as separate individuals rather than as *de facto* spouses, with a correspondingly higher tax rate for each party; some health insurance companies still do this. The latter practice was recently successfully challenged by a gay male couple (Condren, 1995).

Moving house or country, or just travelling may become a nightmare because the same-sex partner becomes an invisible or inexplicable appendage. For instance, if one member of a couple is transferred or is offered a job in a new location, she cannot say she is willing to come provided her partner can find work as well. If she does, she may well find the offer withdrawn. Selling and buying a house together can pose difficulties insofar as it may be difficult to obtain a loan (Connell, 1987). The immigration of lesbian or gay couples has been handled clandestinely for years in Australia (Hart, 1992), but it has not been part of open policy to permit such couples to relocate together.

A gradual improvement, at least in some areas, began in 1973,

when the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists became the first professional body in the world to declare that homosexuality was not a sickness. In 1975, South Australia became the first state to decriminalise homosexual acts under the progressive Premier Don Dunstan. In 1984, NSW also removed homosexuality prohibitions from its Crimes Act. The laws governing or failing to include lesbians and gays have been slowly repealed or rewritten. The Carr government in NSW, elected in 1995, has promised to make amends and to regard a number of laws as anomalies (Sharp, 1995).

The issue of legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples has been debated since 1994 in various states. The ACT for instance, has ruled that same-sex couples should be given the same property entitlements as *de facto* couples. In April 1995, a historic agreement was reached between unions, the ACT state government and employers to provide more flexible definitions of the term 'family'. It was proposed that the right to take leave from work to care for a sick family member be extended to gay and lesbian couples as well as to members of extended families. This proposal was based on the legal concept of affinity, or a 'spiritual relationship or attraction held to exist between certain persons'. Affinity 'is recognised to exist mostly in Aboriginal and non-English-speaking cultures as a bond as important in many instances as those of the family' (Russell, 1995a, p.1). On 12 May 1995, the proposal was accepted in a landmark decision by the NSW Industrial Relations Commission. By widening the definition of family the ruling has put pressure on the federal IRC to consider these issues in forthcoming debates (Marris, 1995).

After years of debate in and about the women's liberation movement, the language of rights, rather than victims, began to predominate, placing lesbians' demands within a political context of social justice. In 1978, a Lesbian Action Group (LAG) was formed in Melbourne and, instead of staying closed and secret, decided to go public. Because of the risk of losing their jobs, some individual members wore masks or balaclavas. As a group, however, they became visible. By December 1977, for instance, the NSW Royal Commission into Human Relations made recommendations not only to decriminalise homosexuality but also to include lesbians and gays in anti-discrimination legislation. In 1982 the NSW government finally amended the Anti-Discrimination Act to cover homosexuals. The last bastion of legal homophobia, Tasmania, had its buttresses shaken by a recent application to the United Nations to censure it for human rights breaches. A UN committee found

that the state's laws against homosexuality indeed contravened the UN Convention on Human Rights.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

In Australia, the lesbian feminist movement, either in itself or in conjunction with the broader women's movement, in many ways has not developed significantly since the 1970s. Separatists are still as staunchly separatist as they were twenty years ago, even though valid attempts have been made to create lesbian spaces and culture (Renew, 1987). By the late 1970s, lesbian separatism had become 'an inward looking response to decline' (Ross, 1988, p.104). According to Ross, lesbian separatism took a wrong turn by becoming apolitical and thereby lessening the chances of political success for lesbians generally, whether in the gay and lesbian arena, within the women's movement or even just among separatist feminists.

[Mary Daly's] book *Gyn/Ecology* became the bible of lesbian separatism. It was a kind of feminist *Pilgrim's Progress*, with awful stories of women as victims of rape, mutilation and murder; stream-of-consciousness ravings, and an exhortation to weave webs to solve the world's problems. The real world was necessarily male-dominated, according to Daly, so she recommended complete withdrawal from it. It was no wonder that the Rockefeller Foundation gave Daly an enormous grant to write the book. What better way was there to derail women's fighting potential than by encouraging them to isolate themselves in a world of fairytale solutions? The reactionary nature of lesbian separatism became the major focus of debates among lesbians, particularly for those who were trying to build a different way forward to socialism. (Ross, 1988, p.107)

Some of the tensions within the lesbian community, as Sheila Jeffreys rightly noted, have been the result of conflict between separation and assimilation (Jeffreys, 1993, p.169). The lesbians of the women's movement have continued to stay in the twilight, with occasional meek support from their heterosexual allies, such as the acknowledgment, in the words of Dale Spender, that 'some of us are gay'.

There are also fragmentations, challenges and uncertainties in the lesbian groups today which are rarely acknowledged because some lesbians regard airing differences of opinion as a betrayal of 'the cause'. There are issues of sexual practice, and of AIDS, and there are others more concerned with imagery and the politics of a lesbian identity. One such issue, not altogether unimportant in lesbian thinking, is the development of 'commodity lesbianism'

(Clark, 1993) and to an extent the 'lipstick lesbian' (Debelle, 1994). Is it 'ideologically sound' for lesbians to wear lipstick and high-heeled shoes (rather than 'sensible' flat shoes), and power-dress? Is that 'buying into' heterosexist, male-defined culture, and if so, what does this mean for the integrity of the person and their lesbian politics? In the introduction to her chapter on commodity lesbianism, Clark states:

While earlier feminism's anti-fashion stance has been largely replaced by a new sense of fashion as the site for female resistance and masquerade, capitalism's ability to restyle such transgressive self-representations into the trendy and the chic calls into question the possibilities of agency that resistance implies. At the same time, the ability of lesbian consumers to read dominant media images as lesbian-coded, or to find in purposefully ambiguous sexual and gender images aspects of lesbian culture that yet remain inaccessible and uncolonized, undercuts heterosexual feminist analyses of media which depict women as passive bodies for male spectatorship or as narcissistic self-observers. (Clark, 1993, p.186)

In Australia, we have not yet seen much of an overt rebellion against a lesbian-feminist credo of political correctness, but we have seen, as in other countries, the rise of 'lifestyle lesbianism': a recognition of the 'diverse subcultural pockets and cliques . . . of which political lesbians are but one among many' (Stein, 1989, p.39). Young lesbians in particular like to experiment with fashion and image:

You can dress as a femme one day and a butch the next. You can wear a crew-cut along with a skirt. Wearing high heels during the day does not mean you're a femme at night, passive in bed, or closeted on the job. (Stein, 1989, p.38)

Political-feminist lesbians and postmodernist lesbians have also engaged in a debate that has often been more destructive (not deconstructive) than constructive, a jarring disagreement that is evident in Sheila Jeffreys's *The Lesbian Heresy*:

Before readers affected by postmodernism start to assume that such use of the word 'lesbian' bespeaks essentialism it should be said that when lesbian feminists speak of 'lesbian' anything, they are generally speaking of something that has to be consciously created by lesbians as a political act, not any natural 'essence'. Attacks by postmodernist lesbians and gays on lesbian feminist theorising using male authorities such as Foucault and Derrida to back them up, should perhaps be understood as either wilful misunderstanding or deliberate attempts to constrain the construction of an alternative lesbian vision. (Jeffreys, 1993, p.169).

A further controversy concerns the admission to the lesbian

lobby of male-to-female transsexuals whose sexual orientation (i.e., their love of women) has remained unchanged. By current definition, they are now lesbians. Challenged by transsexuals to admit them into the lesbian castle, lesbians have raised the drawbridge and hidden behind the wall. It seems that some are not ready for queer theory, let alone practice.

The transsexual lobby is an interesting phenomenon of the 1990s because it demands rethinking the existing, and for political expediency, rather narrowly defined concepts attached to sexual orientation and gender. Until about ten years ago, one was either male or female, heterosexual or homosexual. Now the lines have been drawn rather differently and the supposedly clear divisions have been challenged. For instance, where does bisexuality fit in? It would lead too far from the women's movement to delve into these arguments, but it is important to point out that these new challenges to some extent fly in the face of lesbian and gay identity politics. They are also important in the context of feminist theory: What is a woman? and What is a female body? These are not questions to which we can any longer presume to have unequivocal answers (Grosz, 1994).

Even apart from these issues, the public face of homosexuality in Australia is changing. In 1990, NSW Labor parliamentarian Paul O'Grady became the first Australian politician to announce his homosexuality. This was an act which was fifteen years behind some European countries. In Norway, for instance, Wencke Lossow, MP, announced in the early 1980s that she was a lesbian. The papers raked her through the mud but when election time came, she almost doubled her votes (Kaplan, 1992, p.73). In the Netherlands, as in US cities like San Francisco, male and female politicians campaigned openly as gay. Nevertheless, the belated Australian start was a start and one that took a good deal of courage.

Official attitudes to gays and lesbians have changed dramatically. Such changes can be observed at a number of levels, among them, surprisingly, the police. Probably few police officers who treated lesbians and gays as scum and helped the general community to sustain its homophobia would have believed in the 1970s that two decades later lesbian and gay police would 'come out' themselves and create their own task force (Harvey, 1995). In 1984, when the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras was again the site of violent confrontations between police and participants, the Wran government in NSW set up police gay-liason units. These units were only small and had no more than four officers in the first few years of operation. By 1995 there were nearly 100 gay liaison officers and gay and lesbian police officers were beginning to come out.

In June 1993, the first Gay and Lesbian Research Centre in Australia was opened at Sydney University. The centre, while small and as yet underfunded, has provided legitimacy and a new, perhaps even respectable, visibility for the gay and lesbian communities in Australia. In 1995 alone, Australia hosted eight major conferences on gay issues, many of them held at universities: 'Less than the Sum of Us: Representations of Homosexuality on the Australian Screen', 'Emerging Asian/Australian Lesbian and Gay Communities', the first national conference on Violence against Gays and Lesbians (in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Criminology, 'Representing Sexualities', 'Queer Collaborations', 'HIV/AIDS and Society', 'Gender and Sexuality in Modern Thailand', and the second 'Queer Lit' conference. There are also a variety of gay and lesbian academic journals, such as *Critical Inquiries*, *The Journal of Australian Feminist Lesbian Studies*, and the *Australasian Gay and Lesbian Law Journal*. The Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research publishes its own newsletter and is currently preparing guides to library holdings on gay and lesbian literature.

Even the conservative newspaper *The Australian* has recently devoted space to debates on gay politics and has allowed sympathetic and rational voices to be heard. One writer—himself the editor of *The Adelaide Review*—has suggested that serious reform, including taxation reform, be undertaken to take account of valid differences in the lifestyles of lesbians and gay men (Pearson, 1995).

In 1994, NSW introduced two new anti-discrimination laws, one on age discrimination and the other on homosexual vilification. Homosexual vilification, like racial vilification legislation, is defined as the public inciting of others to hate, have serious contempt for, or severely ridicule a person or group of people because they are, or are thought to be, lesbian or gay. Other legislative changes have already been mentioned and it is likely that many of the anomalies hidden in existing laws will disappear in a relatively short time. By 2000, legislative support for discrimination against lesbians and gay men may be a thing of the past.

In 1995, the Governor-General, Bill Hayden, thought of gay and lesbian marriages as conceivable. He argued:

Because we do not discriminate against same-sex partnerships it is difficult to see how there can be a sustainable objection to partnership contracts similar to marriage. (Larriera, 1995)

Hayden has long been perceived as a champion of human rights and a noteworthy supporter of women and of lesbians and gays. He was possibly the first Australian politician to propose measures

to diminish discrimination against women (his private members bill in 1964 helped end the marriage bar for women in the public service well before the onset of the women's movement) and to speak openly in favour of gay and lesbian rights. Fittingly, it was he who opened the Lesbian and Gay Research Centre. When he was introduced in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney, which was packed to capacity, he received a standing ovation. The applause saluted a rare politician who had shown remarkable integrity and courage on controversial issues and had not hesitated to support lesbian and gay rights even at a time when such support was decidedly unfashionable.

Like their political presence, lesbians' cultural presence in Australia has been extremely subdued. Notable spokeswomen on lesbianism such as Adrienne Rich and Kate Millet in the US and Monique Wittig in France have been lacking here. But there are signs now that a broader lesbian culture is establishing itself. Public interest in matters lesbian and gay is growing, along with willingness to treat such subjects seriously and openly, particularly in the news media and the film and TV industry. Homosexuals have featured in a spate of films, including *Forbidden Love*, *Desperate Remedies*, *Basic Instinct*, *Three of Hearts* and *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. Lesbian producer Martine Coucke has become fairly well known for co-producing such films as *Feed them to the Cannibals* (a documentary on the Mardi Gras) and *Thin Ice*, a romantic lesbian comedy which was shown at the 1995 Sydney Film Festival. The *Sydney Morning Herald* has published articles such as 'Life with the Lipstick Lesbians' (Debelle, 1994). Penguin has published lesbian anthologies and the gay literary market is thriving. Gradually, public images of lesbians are moving away from earlier stereotypes.

BACKLASHES

The ball has started rolling, but there is still a long way to go towards full equity. According to the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, at least 160 pieces of legislation still need to be amended (Russell, 1995b) before the law is brought in to line with current social attitudes. Whether or not such changes can then be translated into practice without a backlash is another matter. In some western industrialised countries, public opinion has swung strongly against gays and lesbians. In Germany and the US, gay bashings are on the increase.

'Poofter bashing' is typically practised by only a minute number of people, but one wonders how many in the wider community

tacitly support or condone the violence. The Festival of Light, for example, has openly promoted violence in print. In a 1977 pamphlet, it declared that even murder was a reasonable response to a perceived accosting by a gay male (Thompson, 1985).

Barbara Creed's analysis of images of lesbians, ranging from evil seducers to vampires, in her book *The Monstrous Feminine* makes instructive reading. It is interesting to note that in the early 1970s, as the women's movement reached its height in western industrialised countries, the image of the female vampire—touching on the relationship between gender, sexuality and death and symbolising lesbian desire in a package of images of horror—became prominent (Creed, 1993). Just as lesbians were trying to correct images of them as exotic, sick, perverted and distorted, a new group of horror films resurrected these images in a sophisticated form. It is my belief that, like pornography, horror films pander to society's basest, most unsophisticated, regressive and prejudiced views. Only rarely do such genres become art and openly explore or expose values and taboos.

It is not clear how much society's deepest attitudes have changed as a result of gay liberation. With regard to lesbians' role in Australian society, there are certainly, for the first time, women who openly live lesbian lives and have lesbian partners. But it is not known how many women in Australia are lesbians. One suspects that the number who live openly as such is still rather small. Formally, some discriminatory action on the grounds of sexual orientation has ended thanks to equal-opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.

Informally, however, there is still tremendous scope for discrimination, harassment and ostracism. Lesbians tend to regard work as a lifelong activity. Many reach positions of seniority and distinction in the professions, the public service, private enterprise, academia and so on. But very seldom do lesbians attain such positions *as* lesbians. The lesbian and gay community as a whole in Australia (as elsewhere) is thus thought to occupy the upper end of the economic scale. If this belief were investigated through a nationwide survey, however, I surmise that gay men would be found to have above-average incomes on the whole but that the incomes of lesbians would be found to be even more polarised than average (i.e., a substantial group would have below-average incomes and a similarly large group would enjoy very large incomes).

Employers are now forbidden to ask for details of family affiliation of job applicants. This is a good step. But for lesbians, the right to compete for a job 'like anybody else' is still qualified

by the necessity to keep their sexual orientation secret. Many working lesbians feel constrained to relegate social outings with their lover/partner to weekends and to attend social functions with co-workers, family etc. alone.

Few lesbians in top positions or in politics have come out. There are no openly lesbian MPs and very few managers, professors, company directors, senior public servants, principals, or senior executive officers in administrative positions in any kind of organisation, public or private, in the military, the church or in civil life. Privately, some of us know that lesbians are disproportionately overrepresented in upper-echelon positions. Yet they remain a clandestine group who often have a mutual understanding that their sexual orientation remain a secret.

As long as lesbians feel it necessary to remain silent, things are not as good or as free as they ought to be. US studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, suggest a sad persistence of negative stereotypes and extremely negative attitudes. For instance, it has been shown that doctors (Mathews et al., 1986) as well as nurses continue to hold overwhelmingly negative views of lesbians. In one study, 64 per cent of nurses interviewed reported feeling pity, disgust, repulsion, fear or at least unease and embarrassment when dealing with a known lesbian—whether colleague or patient (Young, 1988). A study of nurse educators found that 52 per cent believed lesbianism was unnatural, 23 per cent thought it immoral, 19 per cent saw it as illegal, 17 per cent as a disease and 15 per cent as perverted. One-fifth thought that lesbians transmit AIDS, 17 per cent said they molest children and 8 per cent thought them unfit to work as nurses. The educators tended to avoid lesbian issues in the classroom (54 per cent) and to feel uncomfortable teaching or providing care to lesbians (28 per cent) (Randall, 1989). We have no comparable data for Australia but it may not be far-fetched to think the situation here is similar. Lesbians may have helped the Australian women's movement in ways for which the movement as a whole has taken credit, yet been denied the support of that same movement *because* they were lesbians. However, as long as we do not know who the lesbians and gays are in our community, we cannot even begin to understand the complexities of their oppression or success.

In my estimate lesbians, all other variables being equal, are at least three times more likely to reach the top of the career ladder as are heterosexual women. It might be very useful to find out why. A 1971 study found that lesbians scored higher than heterosexual women on autonomy, spontaneity, orientation towards the present and sensitivity to their own feelings (Freedman, 1971). It

would be useful to establish in what ways lifestyles and sexual orientation impinge on career outcomes. Do heterosexual women need different strategies and considerations from lesbians to enable them to succeed? Or does lifestyle play more of a role than sexual orientation?

One day, perhaps, sexual orientation may be seen as no more significant than hair colour, hobbies, or perhaps religion. At the moment, however, we are a long way away from the freedom that the Gay Liberation Front hoped for in the late 1970s, when it declared in a pamphlet circulated at Monash University: 'Gay Liberation means freedom from that sexual oppression which may be imposed by social institutions or conditioning'.

It may be as good a starting point as any other for the general heterosexual community to believe that lesbians and gays are good for business. Money has often spoken louder than conscience and mobilisations for social justice. Some businesses now cater explicitly to a lesbian and gay clientele. The tourist industry has also begun to cash in on a hitherto untapped market and now offers packages specifically for lesbians and gays (Swift, 1995). But the question remains whether the clientele of these businesses would be as affluent as they are if they were open about their gayness. The answer is probably that they would not. Oppression, then, remains a precondition for success.

Silence has at least two psychosocial consequences. As the women's movement well knows, being omitted from history books and lacking public recognition has consequences for one's self-perception and identity. Claiming a history, a context, an existence prior to and beyond oneself is a deep psychological need, a cultural right and ultimately a social-justice issue for modern democracies (Dubermann et al., 1989). The theft of a group's existence, forcing them to live without themselves, as it were, is a great crime. Today it is generally acknowledged that indigenous people need to reclaim their history as part of the process of healing, reconciliation, and progress toward equity. Yet another significant minority (in Australia as elsewhere) continues to live in fear of discovery, feeling forced into a life of concealment, thereby adding to the pool of unsaid, unheard and unrecorded history.

If difference can be tolerated only through silence, then it is not, in fact, tolerated at all. In that sense Jagose is right in arguing that the early slogan of the gay liberation movement 'Lesbians are everywhere' has remained instead 'Lesbians are elsewhere' (Jagose, 1994, p.2). Invisibility remains a dictum for social situations and spaces that are defined by the predominant culture. Evans argues that 'Behind the rhetoric of universal rights . . . there stands a

citizenship machinery which effectively invades and corrals those who by various relative status shortcomings are deemed to be less than fully qualified citizens' (Evans, 1993, p.5).

Freedom from oppression and—much more deep-seatedly—from repression may not just be a matter of lifting a few prohibitions. Sexuality, as Foucault argued, does not exist beyond power relations: it is actually produced by these power relations by which it is both repressed and saturated. His famous dictum, 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault, 1978, p.93), suggests that the current framework is overdetermined.

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, of whose success lesbians are an integral and important part, nowadays draw around half a million spectators and in 1995 was televised in full by the ABC. A survey by the Australian Graduate School of Management in 1993 found that the Mardi Gras added \$38 million a year to the economy, bringing in more foreign exchange than any other event.

One may wonder why the Mardi Gras has become such a success. Stallybrass and White argue (1986, p.13) that 'most politically thoughtful commentators wonder . . . whether the "licensed release" of the carnival is not simply a form of social control of the low by the high and therefore serves the interests of that very official culture which it apparently opposes'. Such claims are healthy reminders that our current agendas for liberation, whether in the women's movement or the gay and lesbian movement, are limited indeed.

Further, the progress of liberatory reforms through the labyrinth of legislation rarely encounters direct opposition. The enemies of liberatory movements are to be found elsewhere—for example in the theory that homosexuality is caused by genes and hormones (Kaplan and Rogers, 1990; Rogers, 1994). As we are currently in the grip of yet another round of reductionist genetic-deterministic thinking, it is perhaps more important than ever to fully understand the genetic arguments and counter-arguments. The moment a new theory of homosexuality is proposed, social policy makers, politicians, lawyers and other professionals step in, eager to draw conclusions on how to treat, deal with, or assess this sexual-lifestyle minority group.

If being gay or lesbian is genetically determined, so the argument goes, then homosexuals must be accorded full citizenship. If gayness or lesbianism is socially constructed or personally chosen then little or no allowance need be made for the individuals concerned. Citizenship rights, social rights, legal rights and a host

of other aspects of personal freedom and safety have hinged and still do hinge on this debate. Researchers claim to have found a gene sequence for male homosexuality on the X chromosome (Hamer et al., 1993) and are now seeking a gene sequence for lesbianism (Rogers, 1994). There have already been suggestions that if a 'gay gene' exists, such 'defects' could be removed by human intervention.

Such approaches to homosexuality suggest that citizenship rights should hinge on one's genetic makeup or on the moral assessment of others, not on the principle of citizenship. This is no longer the official government view, but the public is being educated only very slowly. For instance when COAL (Coalition of Activist Lesbians), Australia's peak lesbian body, won a federal government grant in 1995, talkback radio host John Laws attacked the notion of lesbians using public funds. He was rebuffed by federal Health minister, Carmen Lawrence, who declared: 'these are taxpayers too' (Machon, 1995).

The spread of AIDS has also done some damage (see Altman, 1986) by arousing the Judaeo-Christian superstition that illness is divine retribution for moral wrongdoing. It gave an opportunity to those whose homophobia had been muted by public support for anti-discrimination legislation to reemerge with old messages derived from either religious or professional prejudice. John Menon, spokesman for the group Private Doctors in Australia, argued in 1989 that 'The time has come for a return to the medical definition of homosexuality as a "form of sexual perversion". Let us stop pussyfooting and get on with the job of treating this serious disease' (cit. Burgmann 1993, p.147).

Human diversity is obviously too difficult a concept for some. I have not seen too much interest by heterosexual feminists in entering these debates. It is as if they have forgotten that reductionist theories of biology have been used as weapons against women since the nineteenth century. The diminishment of lesbians must surely also diminish all women.

SISTERS OVER THE FENCE

M I G R A N T W O M E N

Immigrant women were also a 'discovery' of the 1970s, preceded by a few years by that of Aboriginal people. However, because of Australia's (mostly male) convict history, the issue of the 'balance of the sexes' was discussed well into the 1960s, and via this route women attained some importance in the context of planned immigration. Australia was rather ill-equipped for mass immigration in the 1950s. It expected labour and people came instead. Most immigrants, especially those from southern Europe, were not assisted and usually spent years repaying the cost of their passage. This required both husband and wife to work. Immigrant women often went into domestic service, light industry and process work and into so-called service industries (i.e. cleaning). Women of non-English-speaking background in particular were forced into jobs that were 'the least attractive, most dangerous, and paid the lowest base wage rate' (Jakubowicz 1989, p. 271). The Victorian Migrant Task Force Committee, set up in 1973, found that one in four settlers returned home (Sterel, 1973).

Then as now, immigration programs focused on household heads, with disastrous consequences for women. There were no or

too few English classes available, or they were at the wrong time of day or inaccessible. Opportunities for women to form social networks were minimal, and many found themselves socially isolated, their old family and social networks not replaced in the new country. Isolation was also noticeable among English, Scottish and Irish immigrant women. The results began to appear in the 1960s, reflected in mental and physical ill health (e.g. Cade and Krupinski, 1962; Giggs, 1977) and suicide (Burvill et al., 1982). Immigrants were powerless while harnessed into the manufacturing sector of Australia's burgeoning economy (Martin, 1978) and to this day, many have remained a 'workforce at risk' (Lin and Pearse, 1990).

Attitudes and practices began to change under the Whitlam government, which strongly endorsed multiculturalism. At first, this was simply a recognition that Australia's population contained a large minority of people born overseas, from diverse countries and speaking diverse languages. Whitlam openly supported the maintenance of ethnic languages and the work of ethnic organisations and institutions, and argued that it was essential to spend money on immigrants and their needs. Despite the less than favourable attitude to multiculturalism of the Fraser government, multiculturalism has survived as government policy to this day.

Multiculturalism has been interpreted as meaning and doing different things. Some believe far too little has been done for multiculturalism (Price and Pyne, 1977); others argue that it is wrong to spend public money on it (Rimmer, 1992). Multiculturalism has been considered controversial (Jakubowicz, 1984), regarded as the 'daggy cousin of radical chic postcolonialism' (Gunew et al., 1993, p.54) and criticised as being too superficial and occasional to evoke a sense of community (McQueen, 1984).

The response to multiculturalism, and to immigrant women in particular, had three principal aspects: political, cultural and social. The latter entailed a two-pronged development of social critique on one hand and policy formulation on the other. Of undoubtedly great influence was the Henderson Report on poverty in the early 1970s, which tied in with the discovery of migrants as a poverty-stricken, ill-adjusted, unassimilated and ill-treated group. Most alarmingly, the report concluded that the Australian-born children of immigrants were poorly integrated and not doing as well as they should educationally (Fitzgerald, 1976). Poverty was common in non-English-speaking-background groups, who also faced socio-legal problems (Jakubowicz and Buckley, 1975). Migrant women suffered from a 'double disadvantage' (Boero, 1987) or 'triple disadvantage' (Neumark and Eldestin, 1987). Conditions for migrant workers were described as appalling in several reports (e.g. Storer,

1972; Cox et al., 1975). The first government report on immigrant workers (by the Commissioner for Community Relations, Al Grassby, in 1976) discovered breaches of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. On top of extremely poor working conditions, immigrant women often faced sexual harassment, which was discussed openly for the first time in the late 1970s (see Ethnic Affairs, 1978).

Development of a 'migrant affairs' infrastructure lagged behind that of women's affairs, generally occupying a much lower priority and confined to a few spectacular gestures, such as the NSW Immigrant and Refugee Women's Speakout (1982), or the appointment of bilingual public service officers. A little more was done within the community. There were Anglo-Australian feminists who spoke on behalf of immigrant women and worked with them on specific issues, e.g. at the Working Women's Centre, founded in 1976. That same year Monash University founded the first Centre of Migrant Studies in Australia, and held a seminar on migrant women. Ethnic community councils began to play a role as the number of foreign-born Australians increased. Voices like Paolo Totaro's (1978), pleading for migrants' active participation in Australian society and in ethnic affairs were strengthened. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs was set up in Melbourne and later replaced by the Canberra-based Office of Multicultural Affairs, charged with developing and monitoring access and equity programs which included consideration of the special needs of migrant women.

Despite these advances, immigrant women ultimately had to take action themselves. Neither ethnic community organisations nor the government gave enough weight to migrant women's concerns and often failed to include them in mainstream women's issues. For instance, migrant women were not a responsibility of the Office of the Status of Women and were instead 'dealt with' by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. One may well ask why all women's issues were not handled together by one body. It was the stated aim of the Office of the Status of Women to improve the status of all women in Australia. One must ask who 'the women' are. It was at this point that government organisations structurally cemented in the division between women of non-English-speaking and women of Anglo-Celtic background.

Ethnic organisations offered little active support. The first national conference of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia in 1979 had exactly one female delegate and no woman on the executive, a glaring absence which reflected the substantial underrepresentation of women in the state ethnic

communities councils. The first woman was appointed president of a state ECC (in Western Australia) in 1982.

Thus some dedicated, and often second-generation women of non-English-speaking background (NESB in government parlance), began the long process of establishing networks and representative bodies. Whether or not this process of lobbying, organising, meeting and of writing submissions can be classified as a movement in its own right is as yet unclear. But it met with some visible successes in the 1980s. For instance, in 1984 the NSW government established a parliamentary committee representing a migrant women's network which remained the only such body in Australia. In 1985, the first Immigrant Women's Resource Centre was established in Lidcombe, Sydney, and in 1986 women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, including many who were born in Australia, formed the Association of Non-English-Speaking Background Women of Australia (ANESBWA). Muslim women and also Vietnamese women began to lobby for their own refuges, claiming that they had felt unwelcome and uncomfortable in the refuges run by Anglo-Celtic women. Overall, change for migrant women and their descendants lagged about fifteen years behind that for women in general.

To learn why this was so, we turn to the political dimension. Wilson has argued that 'most immigrant groups have shown little interest or activity in Australian political matters' (Wilson, 1980). This is patently untrue. The low level of activity by immigrant women and the underrepresentation of women in politics had little to do with degrees of 'interest' and much to do with lack of opportunity and degrees of oppression. Participation requires first and foremost that the persons or groups wishing to participate are seen as having a legitimate right to do so. In the case of migrant women, this right of participation has been questioned even in the workplace. Well into the 1970s Australian institutions strongly resisted outsider participation (Jakubowicz, 1984, p.20). To a large extent in Australia, political legitimacy is derived from nationality and (white) birthright. It is also gender-based.

In the early 1970s, the dominant Australian view was still assimilationist. Immigrants were permitted to settle but not to participate. Such permission was granted on the implicit and even at times explicit understanding that ethnic, cultural, linguistic and any other differences should be left behind like an old coat. More poignantly, the immigrant should also be hard-working, quiet, make no fuss and certainly not meddle in Australian affairs. As Galvin points out (1980, p.22), one of the underlying assumptions was the belief that non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants were automatically inferior. Working-class immigrants, Di Nicola argued (1984, p.178),

'could not fulfil their political potential partially because of a hostile/indifferent trade union movement' and were not numerous enough to get an immigrant candidate elected on the migrant vote alone.

This social ostracism ran counter to assimilationist expectations and led to marginalisation (Johnston, 1965). How was a person to assimilate without access to an Australian group? How, one might add, could anyone in the migrant groups conceivably have thought it legitimate to participate in Australian politics? In a climate of Anglo-conformism, 'non-belonging' was even more accentuated than now (see Birrell and Hay 1978). It makes little sense to retrospectively argue that immigrants were not interested or did not understand or were 'still learning' (Mistilis, 1984). After 50 years of mass immigration it should be clear that the lack of first-generation migrants and even their children in mainstream Australian politics is not explicable by deficiency models, just as the absence in politics of women in general is not well described in those terms. Neither, for that matter, do they explain why the children of immigrants are a particular concern in the 1990s with issues such as poverty and disadvantage (Taylor and MacDonald, 1992).

There are, of course, several other layers of politics: associations, informal organisations, interest groups and individual electors. Ethnic affairs is not just a discovery of the 1970s. Two years after Federation, there already existed an Italian newspaper in Australia with the telling title 'Unite' (*Uniamoce*). Between 1922–45, there was a strong Italian anti-fascist movement in Australia, which the Australian government repeatedly attempted to silence (Cresciani, 1978). The point also needs to be made that Australia was keen to suppress political activism by migrants. Prospective migrants with a record as political activists were usually screened out, especially if they hewed to the left of the political spectrum (see Kelly, 1984, p.127).

VISIBILITY, NEW EXCLUSIONS AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The shift of immigrants from cultural, political and social invisibility to being seen as social problems came at a price, particularly for women, who suddenly found it difficult to escape being perceived as victims. Thus typecast, it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to establish easy, friendly and unselfconscious relationships with women of Anglo-Celtic background. There were

some gestures that a few recognised as important: 'A simple demonstration of interest like introducing yourself to a migrant, visiting his family and inviting them to visit you can mean the difference between isolation in a strange country and settling in easily' (Arnott, 1973.)¹ Significantly, Arnott goes on to say: 'Many Australians treat migrants like they do Aborigines . . . They ignore them. They seem embarrassed about approaching them and so they never meet' (ibid). One might have added disabled women to this list, but so invisible were they in the 1970s that no one even thought of mentioning them.

Migrant women of different linguistic backgrounds were by and large not welcomed in the women's movement. Here the question, 'What can we do for you?', became patronising. To move on from this *modus operandi* to the question: 'What can we do with you?' or even more atypically: 'What can you contribute to our goals?' or 'Are our goals relevant to your needs?' was often too demanding (see Martin, 1984, 1991a). Few treated migrant women as their equals. I keenly recall an instance where a feminist organisation was asked to propose six nominees for one coveted position on an outside body (two from Aboriginal, two from immigrant and two from Anglo background). Hostility raged for weeks when an immigrant was selected. Ostensibly, the complaint was that due process had not been followed, but the true reason was never named.

Part of the attitude problem towards immigrant women has been enshrined in official shorthand, which refers to many immigrants by a negation—of non-English-speaking background (NESB)—rather than by their attributes. This descriptor has stupidly offensive connotations—as if one were bereft of language. When I arrived in Australia I had passable knowledge of six languages, to which I was soon to add English. In the early years of the women's movement, a monolingual Australian (who also happened to be a feminist) once pointedly and condescendingly inquired about my non-English-speaking background in a manner that almost implied that I had no language at all. Such situations leave one speechless if one does not want to embark on an exercise in defensive oneupmanship. The point is that many (continental) European, (black) African and Asian immigrants are bilingual or multilingual when they arrive—or become at least bilingual in the process of settling in Australia. The Australian-born are largely monolingual, yet some manage to argue that knowing several languages makes one worth less! Bilingual and multilingual people usually speak other languages as well as, rather than instead of, English. Radio host John Laws recently attacked ANESBWA, asking: 'Why are they

here if they can't speak English?' (Machon, 1995, p.4). It has taken a long time for some very determined linguists, such as Michael Clyne, and 'second-generation migrant' women (Herne et al., 1992) to persuade governments and sections of society that knowledge of different languages and different kinds of knowledge are assets. Nevertheless, the term NESB has stuck, and is now used widely in official documents and even by immigrant women themselves. I shall use it too, but I do so reluctantly.

I know of no single immigrant woman of NESB background who is a stranger to the experience of ostracism and exclusion by other women and by feminists. The government had to introduce and pay for 'migrant women support groups' in certain sectors of publicly funded services (with a majority of staff being female and many of those claiming to be feminists). My own experience with such groups suggests that they were highly necessary. Sheer lack of acceptance and active unpleasantness in the workplace caused some to fall seriously ill, others to become suicidal (Lin and Pearse, 1990). There were many sessions which were purely crying sessions. For immigrant women in white-collar and professional work in the 1970s and today, problems of ostracism are often intensified because here NESB women tend to be found not in groups but as individuals, as isolated phenomena and oddities. Non-acceptance leaves no fall-back position.

There is also the issue of harassment, which is suffered to a greater extent by women from non-English-speaking background than by Australian-born Anglo-Celtic women. Table 5.1 shows remarkable correlations between Aboriginal and NESB women in the distribution of different kinds of harassment as well as surprising similarities between the experiences of Australian-born women of Asian descent and Australian-born Anglo-Celtic women.²

Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women and NESB women in the higher education sector report abuse at a higher rate than other groups of women in Australia. Aboriginal women top the list by a long way. The similarity between the ATSI and NESB groups is nevertheless striking. This flies in the face of assimilationist assumptions that integration is automatic once someone has learned English and can comfortably adapt to the 'Australian way of life'.

One needs to remember that these figures are drawn from women in the relatively privileged environment of universities who generally have tertiary qualifications. Racial harassment is the most common complaint among overseas-born NESB women, accounting for almost half of all harassment complaints by that group (Office of the Director . . ., 1991, p.50). The figures suggest cultural tensions of the kind that speak of disintegration, disharmony and

TABLE 5.1 COMPARISON OF MIGRANT AND ABORIGINAL WOMEN WITH OTHER WOMEN BY TYPE OF HARASSMENT, 1990¹

Type of harassment	NESB (overseas born)	ATSI (indigenous)	ESB (overseas born)	NESB (Australian born)	Asian (Australian born)	ESB (Australian born)
Racial	49	41	31	29	18	14
Sexual	23	23	37	37	41	42
Marital ²	19	23	25	25	41	35
Phys. disab.	9	13	7	9	0	9

SOURCE: Office of the Director of Equal . . . , 1991, p.84

NOTES: 1 These figures refer exclusively to data derived from the tertiary education sector in New South Wales; all figures are percentages.

2 The inclusion of marital harassment appears odd in work-related data. It has been retained here for completeness' sake.

of a specific and profound racism (or racialisation and ethnicisation) over a long period of time. Unfortunately, these figures do not indicate who the harassers are. Although harassment of women in our tertiary institutions is largely perpetrated by men, on racial grounds women may well do as much harassing of other women as men.

Which is worse: sexual or racial harassment? Any form of harassment is undermining. Even the toughest, the survivors, spend much of their energy warding off attacks. Aboriginal women, like immigrant women (of any class, background, education) have developed a sixth sense for prejudice, racism, discrimination and ostracism. In my own experience, it is like living constantly with pain or with disease, with a heaviness, a cloak, a feeling of illness and unwellness. There are days when one does not wish to get up for yet another round of fighting just to maintain one's own little dignified space. No one who has not experienced racial or ethnic discrimination can understand just how it feels. O'Shane (1976) is entirely justified in arguing that it is largely racism, not sexism, that has killed her people.

There is a negative consolation. Overseas, in almost any western country, racism and prejudice are worse than in Australia and people of different colour and background are regularly bashed, beaten, and killed (Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1994). Australia comes out best on almost all scores of racism and hence it has justifiably acquired the reputation of being a nation tolerant of difference. However, this fact does little to reduce the anguish of those who are constant targets of racism within Australia. Marie de Lepervanche rightly argues that most commentaries on Australian

racism falsely assume that men and women are affected equally by racist behaviour (de Lepervanche, 1989, p.163). The interplay with sexual harassment alone supports de Lepervanche's point sufficiently well to highlight the fact that ostracism is indeed 'gendered'.

Pat O'Shane's 1976 invitation to the women's movement has lost none of its force. She said: 'When the white women's movement takes head-on the struggle against racism, which is the greatest barrier in our progress, then we've got a chance of achieving sisterhood' (O'Shane, 1976, p.34). Some NESB women have become 'sisters' for the saddest reasons, as a bond of oppression. Overall, however, the relationship between them and the broader women's movement has remained tenuous. Normal social interactions are often difficult to achieve even among feminists, and eventually this leads the NESB woman to give up and seek a circle of friends, generally of a more international complexion (not merely from her own ethnic group),³ among whom acceptance is not so hard-won. The women's movement as a whole has remained rather too silent, or insincere, on the issue of racism.

One Australian feminist recently told me that my criticism of racism in the movement was unfair. 'We have done so much for them,' she said, the 'we' referring to those Anglo-Celtic feminists who took up the banner for women less fortunate than themselves and fought many battles on their behalf with the bureaucracy, in unions, schools, universities and even in the private sector. But my point is that, by casting themselves as 'we' and NESB women as 'them', Anglo-Celtic women are playing out the tradition of exclusion in a different way. In other words: to do something *with* people rather than *for* them may be the better strategy (Martin, 1991a).

For the women's movement of the 1970s, the separation of NESB foreign-born women and Australian-born, English-speaking women was a particular failure—and a disadvantage. It would have strengthened the movement substantially if all women, no matter what their background, had found ready acceptance in the movement. There were exceptions, but my experience with groups in Melbourne and Sydney suggests little thought was given to encouraging equal participation by women with different backgrounds. This problem was by no means confined to Australia, as black feminists in the US (e.g. hooks, 1981), and some socialist feminists in western Europe, testify. In 1995, at the International Women's Day celebration in Sydney, Juliana Nkrumah, a Ghanaian by birth, made the point that both feminism and multiculturalism have failed to unite women. 'Multiculturalism in Australia,' she said, 'has failed us in many ways: there is still no sense of you and I, in our

difference, being one. I am looking for the oneness, the unity that makes us a nation' (cit. Carruthers, 1995).

Imperialistic culturalism, or prejudging another group or individual to be culturally inferior to one's own group or oneself, closes many doors to communication. Moreover, such judgments pertain to only one aspect of the other person. Another aspect of the NESB woman is her experience not just of the migration process, of dislocation and of uprooting, but also of cultural confrontation, including possible shifts and tensions in gender relations. The latter has rarely been explored by activists and only some writers have taken it into consideration (e.g. Bottomley and de Lepervanche, 1984; Martin, 1986; de Lepervanche, 1988; Saunders and Evans, 1992). Pettman writes:

Women come from particular sets of gender relations in their home country, although there may be contradictory pressures and demands between them, especially if they had minority status in their country of origin. Gender roles may already have been unsettled by shifts to an urban centre, or by political unrest or exile.

The gender relations of the new country intrude even before migration, in definition of the family, for example, and in the selection of the male migrant as the worker (usually). It becomes ever more pronounced through resettlement and negotiation through a range of social, welfare, economic and other arrangements which are clearly gender-specific (if not always acknowledged as such). (Pettman, 1992, p.51)

These dynamic processes, as Bottomley has argued, are not a static 'either-or' of two cultures. The shifts and tensions may create entirely new constellations. At one end of the spectrum there may be an over-anxious adherence to traditions, even to those no longer followed in the country of origin. For instance, in the early 1980s the proportion of Greek couples entering arranged marriages was 73 per cent in Australia but only 25 per cent in Greece (Bottomley and de Lepervanche, 1984, p.6). Folkloric traditions may be preserved, frozen in time, which the country of origin has long forgotten. Alternatively, exposure to the new culture may lead to a radical break with the culture of origin yet not necessarily assimilation into the new culture. I suggest that women in this situation are particularly predisposed to embracing new and even radical ideas. They represent a pool of potential members that the women's movement has failed to tap.

Part of the process of prejudging, if not stereotyping, is a tendency to pick out one or two morsels from another culture, inspect them in isolation and then conclude that women from the other culture are even more oppressed than Australian women (e.g.

the 'veil' has become, for the west a symbol of Muslim women's oppression). Yet, like our own culture, other cultures usually have checks and balances, providing freedoms and easy passage in some areas and not in others. The freedoms and closures in all cultures need not be the same. Two examples may suffice here. In a women's workshop, a Turkish woman said: 'It is nice and easy for working mothers in Turkey. Here it worries me all the time' (cit. Pettman, 1992, p.50). Another example concerns Muslim cultures in general. Muslim cultures in Asia Minor are overtly sex segregated. Apart from the obvious limitations that segregation imposes (as we know in Australia of the labour market), universal segregation through all social strata also has many positive outcomes for women, some of which are actually aims of feminism. Consistent segregation, among other things, means Muslim women may not consult male doctors, lawyers, dentists or any other professionals. If they need such services, they need to approach women. Hence, in a country like Iran the proportion of women in professions and careers is probably higher than in Australia or in other western countries (Rajendra and Kaplan, 1992). Strict segregation produces new and different spaces (Marcus, 1992). For instance, the attitudes of Muslim women towards each other are generally much more positive than in the west. Such women tend to create networks and support groups of a size, stability and duration that western women do not understand very well and which, if they did, they might envy.

In Australia, the exclusion of NESB women from the movement was particularly short-sighted in terms of sheer numbers. Every fifth or sixth woman in this country is overseas born and of non-English-speaking background and every fourth woman is from an immigrant background. By contrast, in most European countries, fewer than 10 per cent of the population are immigrants. Leaving NESB and immigrant women out of the political lobbying process means substantially reducing the potential power base. This was as true at the height of the women's movement as it is in the 1980s and 1990s. Furthermore, many women who arrived in Australia in the 1980s, from countries like Chile, Argentina or India, brought with them substantial political experience (Jacquette 1989).

In specific contexts, the exclusion of NESB women from the women's movement was also ironic. This point is well demonstrated with respect to South American and Italian women. I would submit that in the 1970s Italian and some South American women generally knew more about political action than their Australian counterparts, a fact that eluded some sisters in the movement. Italy has long been a highly politicised nation, with a vigorous trade-union history and a lively working-class political culture in which women played a

significant role. Its remarkable resistance movement in World War II was largely sustained by women, and it had more women in government and formal politics in 1945 than Australia has even today. In International Women's Year, in 1975, the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and Their Families (FILEF) was the only migrant association whose women members spoke out (Pieri et al. 1982, p.397). The women's movement's battles with the Clothing and Allied Trades Union on behalf of migrant outworkers also involved Italian women, who participated in or instigated a number of other public actions and workers' strikes (Butler 1978, Bloodworth 1983, Vasta 1993). As migrant women argued: we are ready and here to contribute to the women's movement (Pieri et al. 1982). Very few in fact did and most of these were, not altogether suprisingly, Italian women (cf Scutt, 1987).

Perhaps this may suffice to indicate that migrants did not 'lack interest' in political affairs but that their exclusion, be this by choice or otherwise, meant they had no practical framework in which to exercise their interest.

Exclusion of migrants led to exactly what Anglo-Australian society had wished to avoid, namely the formation of independent, parallel institutions, clubs and networks, all forms of resistance to the demands or attitudes of the dominant culture (Vasta 1990, Herne et al. 1992). Today, celebration of difference in multiculturalist Australia is considered good manners. Writers from different cultures now win Australian literary prizes or grants. Ideally they do so when speaking about their childhood—in short, about their 'migrant experience'. Proof of equality will come when such writers can readily speak about Australian subject matter.

Not all the exclusions are the result of prejudice but many are the result of thoughtlessness. Thoughtlessness, as Hannah Arendt pointed out, has done at least as much harm in the world as outright racism. 'The sad truth,' she said, 'is that most evil is done by people who never made up their minds to . . . do evil or good' (Arendt, 1978, p.180). But thinking of others needs to be done in a particular way. For instance, to think of a person merely because she is an immigrant and ask her to address women's organisations about 'the migrant woman's experience' may appear kind, but if this is the only legitimate context one gives the woman's voice it labels her as being devoid of any other experiences or knowledge. We tend to do the same to criminals, Aborigines and handicapped people. The label which is considered the most important by the established order is the one which will drown out all other attributes.

Another way of thinking of others in the wrong manner is to regard them as token. Yet there are feminist organisations that

reserve one place on their boards or executives for an Aboriginal woman and one for a 'migrant' woman. While all the other women on such boards and executives are elected for their skills, experience, expertise or name, women from other backgrounds, Aboriginal or immigrant, often continue to be chosen to 'represent' their group or minority, not deploy their expertise. Their role, from the start, is defined differently from that of other members and at times is not even geared for full participation. Such invitations are at times also transparently insincere and patent afterthoughts.

At a much-hyped 'Women and Politics' conference in Adelaide to mark votes for women in South Australia in 1994, Aboriginal women demonstrated outside to protest against their exclusion from the gathering. I asked Anglo-Celtic participants whether they had met any NESB women at the conference. 'Now that I think of it,' was one reply, 'there were very few.'

It seems that the 1990s are closing more doors than they are opening, despite the 'celebration of difference' and the postmodern optimism that we will all learn to live with ambiguity, ambivalence and multiplicity (Flax, 1990). The delegates at the Adelaide conference were all there by invitation only, not a particularly democratic framework for a feminist conference! Conferences of the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research in Melbourne, and the 1995 Global Cultural Diversity Conference, are just some of the gatherings supposed to represent multiculturalism which are also invitation-only. Are the organisers afraid that something might go wrong if delegates are not hand-picked? Or do they think members of ethnic minorities might speak up—or even dominate the discussion?

In 1990, the Office of Multicultural Affairs released a document on multiculturalism which claimed correctly that the release of the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia in July 1989 constituted 'the most comprehensive and forward-looking statement of multicultural policy ever endorsed by an Australian Government, Commonwealth or State' (Office of Multicultural . . . , 1990, p.3). The agenda upholds 'the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, including the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth', and declares that: 'To accommodate the diverse nature of Australian society, the Commonwealth has begun a process of adaptation and change to reform its institutions and structures' (Office of Multicultural . . . , 1990, p.5). This is a far cry from the days when migrants were expected to adapt to Australian institutions.

Nevertheless, there is an ongoing tension between ESB and NESB women that has remained largely unresolved. The cultural

(ideological), rather than policy, version of multiculturalism preaches tolerance of people who are different. Such tolerance, as Harris (1995) argues, must not become an end in itself, 'for this is potentially cultural imperialism of the "noble savage" variety'. It would help, however, if there were public examples of female solidarity. For instance, when ANESBWA was recently attacked for receiving government funding, Debbie Georgopolous, its national coordinator, responded: 'It reminds me of comments people might have made back in the '60s. I thought we were beyond that' (Machon, 1995). Anglo-Australian women's organisations might do well to speak out in support of migrant women when such comments are being bandied about.

Broadly speaking, however, there are commonalities among all Australian women. The most fundamental one is that we all live in the same country, share the same rules and laws and are subject to the same dominant order. For political action to be at its most effective, the initiators must find ways to create a sense of broad membership and unified purpose, (Yates, 1990), a point that has been made all too infrequently in Australia. I believe it is vital to arrive at a politics of inclusion, and that this can be done without a tinge of assimilationism and without employing the 'master discourse' with which white feminism has come to be charged (Ang, 1995).

ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THE BLACK WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Aboriginal people, as Australia's persistent underclass, were invisible, disenfranchised in every way, and perceived by white Australia as irrelevant (Sykes, 1989). Government policy for most of the 1950s was aimed at assimilation. Cultural specificity, i.e. Aboriginality and ethnic background, was presented as a thing of the past (Grimshaw et al. 1994). Aboriginal families endured immense grief and suffering as children (some of them extremely young) were separated from their parents, allegedly to 'help' them assimilate into white society. 'A baby placed with white parents would obviously be more quickly assimilated than one placed with black parents. So ran official thinking, but more importantly, so also ran the feelings of the majority of honest and conscientious white citizens' (Read, n.d.).

The supposed benefits of assimilationist policies were slow to materialise and appear to have hinged on special conditions and circumstances. Until 1967, when a referendum transferred respon-

sibility for Aboriginal affairs from the States to the federal government, regulations concerning Aboriginal people varied widely from one state to the next in both theory and practice. For instance, in 1953 the Northern Territory gave full citizenship rights to Aborigines not in state care. In 1962 Aborigines in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory were assured⁴ of the right to vote in federal elections, provided they were enrolled. Enrolment, however, was not compulsory and for a variety of reasons this 'new' right was of no immediate benefit to Aboriginal people.

In 1967 most Aboriginal people lived on—and were often effectively confined to—reserves and missions. Children died in droves, often from common childhood diseases (Kalokerinos, 1974). When the first Aboriginal medical centre opened in Redfern, Sydney, in 1975, the volunteer doctors found themselves treating illnesses suffered by almost no other group in Australia—or certainly not to the same extent. If one bears in mind that this centre opened in the inner city, rather than the outback with its lack of health facilities, Sykes' and Johnson's report takes on Dickensian dimensions:

For many of the doctors, it was a shattering eye-opener. Patients included a 22-year-old girl suffering from scurvy, desperately malnourished children with chronic osteomyelitis, punctured eardrums due to untreated infections, worm infestations, TB, impetigo. Said (Prof.) Fred Hollows, 'In the first week we opened, I saw things I thought had died out with the Depression.'

Among adult patients, the most common ailments, apart from an incredible number of amputations—more readily performed on Aborigines with damaged limbs, because poor hygiene, living conditions and nutrition imperil the success of less drastic treatment—were kidney infections, due in part to untreated childhood impetigo, and nephritis, which is linked to high blood pressure. (Many Aborigines have strokes in their thirties and forties). (Sykes and Johnson 1975)

Ten years later, in another suburb of Sydney, 19 per cent of the Aborigines surveyed had diabetes, 57 per cent had some kind of infectious disease, 25 per cent skin sepsis and 20 per cent a high level of stress (Sykes, 1989, p.204).

As recently as 1993, social-indicator statistics on Australia's Aboriginal population were woefully out of tune with those of the rest of Australian society; as Table 5.2 shows.

Aboriginal women fared worse than Aboriginal men, for they often faced sexual abuse as well as neglect and could never be certain they would be allowed to keep their children. We now have detailed documentary evidence for NSW for 1883 to 1969

TABLE 5.2 SOCIAL INDICATORS, ABORIGINES VS OTHER AUSTRALIANS, 1993

	Aborigines	Other Australians
Own their own business	3%	15%
Employed	1 in 3	2 in 3
Receiving Jobsearch allowance	6 times national rate (about 1 in 3)	about 1 in 18
Income	half of Australian average	
Preschool experience	less than 50%	more than 90%
School participation to age 15	85%	almost 100%
School participation age 16–17	30%	75%
Formal training/education	7%	40%
Formal training/education age 20–24	4%	20%
Never attended school	11%	–
Any postschooling qualification	10%	31%
Ratio of econ. inactive/active	4.2:1	1.4:1
Juveniles in custody, males	21 times white male rate	
Juveniles in custody, females	31 times white female rate	
Life expectancy, males*	48.1–49.2 years	70.9 years
Life expectancy, females*	55.2–57.3 years	77.7 years

NOTES: *The life expectancy data come from an August 1984 report titled *Aboriginal Health Organisation* also cit. Sykes, 1989, p.211. Although life expectancy is slowly increasing these figures were chosen to indicate that at the time of the women's movement there were at least 22 years difference in life expectancy between white and black women.

SOURCE: Commonwealth of Australia, 1993; based on *Budget Related Paper No.7; Social Justice for Indigenous Australians 1991–92*, AGPS, Canberra, 1991

(Edwards and Read, 1989) showing the extent of the permanent removal of Aboriginal children from their parents. Edwards and Read estimate that there may be as many as 100 000 Aboriginal adults in Australia today who do not know of their origins and cannot remember their families. (cf also Huggins and Blake, 1992).

Gender also plays a role in the rate of incarceration. The control of reserves and missions has been replaced in all too many cases by that of prisons, and sadly Aboriginal women are even more over-represented in the prison population than Aboriginal men. Nearly 50 per cent of all women in custody are Aboriginal, and the rates are especially high in Western Australia and Queensland (McDonald, 1990). Yet Aboriginal women account for only 1.5 per cent of all women in Australia. Moreover, their recidivism rate is 60 per cent, significantly higher than for the rest of the prison population.

The numbers of Aborigines in prison have steadily increased over the years, rising by 25 per cent between 1987 and 1991 alone

TABLE 5.3 POLICE CUSTODY RATES BY STATE, 1988*

	Aust.	NT	WA	SA	Qld	ACT	Tas.	Vic.	NSW
Total custody rate	1.83	14.15	3.85	2.39	2.37	1.97	1.35	1.23	1.03
<i>Aboriginal</i>	35.39	47.76	77.30	48.77	28.40	19.67	6.40	15.60	13.12
Non-Aboriginal	1.31	4.29	1.80	1.87	1.70	1.85	1.23	1.17	0.87
Rate-ratios, Aborig. to non-Aborig. (overrepresentation)	27	11	43	26	17	11	5	13	15

NOTE: *Rates per 1000 population (1986 census) as of August 1988.

SOURCE: McDonald, 1990

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1993). Thus, despite the changes of the 1950s and 1960s aimed at 'integrating' Aborigines into Australian society, more of them than ever are in state custody. These incarceration rates are all the more alarming when one considers that, according to the National Police Custody Survey (McDonald 1990), Aborigines are nationally *underrepresented* in the commission of all major crimes, including homicide, theft, robbery, fraud, and sexual, driving and drug offences; the only exception is assault. Yet they are 27 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Aborigines (McDonald, 1990), usually for offences such as disorderliness and drunkenness. Aborigines, it seems, are confined as if they were dangerous beasts, yet statistics suggest that even the law breakers among them are far less dangerous than their white counterparts.

PERCEPTIONS OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Aboriginal women have been viewed through so many different filters by white males, white females, black males, professionals and do-gooders, social welfare agents and police, farmers and city people that it is surprising they have been able to maintain their integrity. In a 1961 conference on Aboriginal Studies held in Canberra, women were discussed under the rubric 'Special Problems'. From a white male perspective, women per se were not an important category, and this neglect also permeated anthropology as it developed in Australia. In the 1930s, the Aboriginal activist Pearl Gibbs exclaimed: 'We are no savages, sinners or criminals. We need no anthropologists, clergy or police!' Unfortunately her statement went unheeded. Diane Bell writes:

Australian anthropology bears very much the stamp of British anthropology as a result of the appointment of individual professors and their theoretical interests. The founder and first Professor of

Anthropology in Sydney, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, was a student of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim and the English ethnologist W.H.R. Rivers. For these men, women's self-evaluations were not central to an understanding of society. Durkheimian dualism (the sacred-profane dichotomy), with its view of women as the profane, existing only to highlight the importance of men in the moral order, has permeated Australian anthropology. In such a scheme women have no religion, only magic. This had been a hard yoke to throw off. (Bell, 1993, p. 236)

It has also been hard to throw off because Aboriginal women have been 'invisible' (Burgmann, 1984, p.21, Scutt, 1990) and seen as unworthy of attention (Larbalestier, 1977, p.43). This view was well-entrenched in the population in general and scholarship tended to confirm, rather than challenge, it.

This is not the place to examine, even in outline, the complex set of differences and self-perceptions of Aboriginal women within the various sociohistorical spaces of their existence. However, in terms of their own self-identification and understanding it is at least necessary to acknowledge how little non-Aborigines know about this. Discussion of Aboriginal women by white women has ranged over a host of subjects. Localism in Aboriginal organisation rarely makes global statements meaningful, but for the purpose of generating some visibility for Aboriginal women, and in relation to political claims from the 1970s onwards, it was important to ask what indigenous gender boundaries and female roles were and are. Pat O'Shane argued that Aboriginal women in traditional societies 'still enjoyed a greater degree of economic, social and political power than did women in western society' (O'Shane, 1976, p.32). Studies of traditional Aboriginal societies suggest that women provided between 60 per cent and 90 per cent of the food (Peterson, 1974, p.22).

The male bureaucracy in Canberra never considered inquiring into the importance of women in Aboriginal culture. This pervasive blindness, coupled with a long history of condoning and structurally underpinning the abuse of Aboriginal women and men by white Australia, has laid the bureaucracy open to considerable criticism in recent times. For instance, as Sawyer notes, the male bureaucracy 'falsely assumed that women's separateness was a sign of their marginality in Aboriginal affairs and many negotiations took place with Aboriginal men, in some cases leading almost to the destruction of sacred sites for women' (Sawyer, 1990a, p.128). Hamilton rightly concludes (1975, p.169) that 'white observers have substantially misunderstood the position of Aboriginal women in traditional society because they have attempted to use a Western model of

male–female relationships which is inapplicable’. In response to such comments, the National Women’s Advisory Council remarked:

It is not generally recognised that Aboriginal women can be traditional landowners. We have been advised that in some instances Aboriginal women have not been consulted when land claims are being considered. We are most concerned that their views and rights are taken into account when land claims are being assessed to ensure that their traditional status is respected. (National Women’s . . . , 1980, p.26)

It is also remarkable how long it has taken the male bureaucracy to accord Aboriginal women any significance at all. In 1995 sealed evidence on secret ‘women’s business’ (which was being used to back protesters’ claims that Hindmarsh Island in South Australia should not be opened to development) was accidentally delivered to the office of federal Liberal MP Ian McLachlan. When it was disclosed that a member of his staff had photocopied the file, he was forced to resign. I would personally not be surprised if our male politicians believed that women could not possess ‘secret’ or privileged knowledge. Jopson saw in the incident initially a major gap between black and white culture (Jopson, 1995, p.9).

Some feminists have long recognised that Aboriginal women may not occupy the same status and power positions as western women and that ethnocentric assessments of their role were thus intrinsically erroneous. Grimshaw et al. respond:

In New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, women played more crucial roles in land rights negotiations, often dominating the work at the grassroots level . . . Their initiative has been evident in the numerous health, welfare and legal services set up by and for Aboriginal communities . . . Women’s authority has enabled them to take a leading role in the movement against alcohol in the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal women’s confidence in the power of women and their organisational independence have in turn inspired white women interested in attaining autonomy. (Grimshaw et al., 1994, p.307)

Another view places Aboriginal women in the context of rural/urban Aboriginal communities. It has been found repeatedly that they are generally better educated than Aboriginal men. A Brisbane survey in 1974 found, for instance, that of those Aborigines in full employment, 46 per cent of the women surveyed held white-collar jobs compared with only 7 per cent of the men, and that Aboriginal women often regarded themselves as the head of their family (Commission . . . , 1974, pp.53, 51).

The latter point is noteworthy. Bryson argued some years ago that the entire social welfare system was gendered and that one of

the most glaring examples of this was the cohabitation rule. Women cannot receive welfare benefits if a male partner cohabits with them. Apart from its unsavoury implications of surveillance of the bedroom, such a rule has marked social consequences (Bryson, 1988). If it is more financially beneficial for unemployed fathers to live separately than to stay with their families, they will probably do so—and thus the policy will succeed in splitting up nuclear families.

Black American women and Aboriginal women have this much in common: white welfare policies have actively assisted in destroying the black family. In the US, the link is easily made. Ten years after President Ronald Reagan introduced stringent rules that permitted only sole female heads of household with children under 16 to receive welfare benefits, about 50 per cent of all black households contained no adult males (Dewart, 1988). By paying welfare to women alone, the policy made men redundant. Similarly, the Australian Council of Social Services noted in 1976 that welfare policy left Aboriginal men 'without any real function' (Australian Council . . . , 1976, p.61).

Some Aboriginal women obviously saw the position of their men in a similar light:

In Aboriginal history, men lost their important role. It was taken away from them when they were put on the reserve. They lost that role of respect. When they couldn't practise the culture, his role, his rights as a man were taken away. The breadwinner role was taken away. (cit. Davis, 1992, p.38)

The gendered picture persists in the field of mental health (Reser, 1991). With the exception of neurosis, the incidence of all major psychiatric disorders is lower among Aboriginal women than among Aboriginal men.

How must a woman feel whose partner cannot legitimise his life and earn basic respect and dignity? How must she feel for and about her children growing up into a vicious cycle of hopelessness? Unfortunately these are not isolated instances. Whole communities may be affected (Schultz 1977, Gosman 1993). Wilcannia, a largely Aboriginal town 200 km north-east of Broken Hill, was recently dubbed Australia's Soweto (Gosman, 1993). It is a sad example of the disintegration of an entire community.

Although children are no longer taken away from Aboriginal families, disjunctures and ruptures continue. Aborigines die far too young, often leaving spouses and dependent children behind.

Table 5.4 shows how important the extended family must become for Aborigines. As more children in all age groups have

TABLE 5.4 LOSS OF PARENT(S) BY DEATH IN ABORIGINAL FAMILIES*

Age of offspring	0-15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45+
One parent dead (M/F)	8	28	49	85	100
Mother only dead	4	12	18	34	44
Both parents dead	1	4	9	18	72

NOTE: *All figures are percentages. Figures are derived from a study conducted in 1986 on the far north coast of NSW (cit. Gray et al., 1991, p.114). There were 533 people in the group studied. By the age of 29, 28 respondents (or 59 per cent in this age group) still had both parents.

lost their father than have lost their mother, the main burden of raising children falls on women, be it within the context of a nuclear or an extended family. Women thus not only hold the family together psychologically, but physically as well. The large proportion of children without a mother compared to the general population is also noteworthy. In this study group 21 per cent of children under the age of 24 had lost their mother. Nationally, Aboriginal female mortality rates are far higher than those of non-Aborigines. (Thomson and Honari, 1988; Siggers and Gray, 1991, pp.102-3). Yet between 1982 and 1987 spending on Aboriginal health and housing decreased while spending on education and employment increased.

Statistically, Aborigines remain the most ill-equipped and ill-served group in Australia, creating a blight on the landscape and the national conscience so ugly that Prime Minister Paul Keating apologised at the 1995 UN Social Development Summit for the 'unconscionable standards' (Ellingsen and Wright, 1995). Thankfully, there are also hopeful and very positive developments in Aboriginal communities, especially in Australia's far north. There is no doubt that Aboriginal women have played a major role in the survival of their communities (Gale 1983, Ryan 1986).

Aboriginal women and the black movement

Substantial inequities between blacks and whites create very different paradigms and priorities, necessitating different kinds of solutions. For one thing, Aboriginal women's protests are not protests or revolts against, about or despite their men. Rather, they are made with or *on behalf of* their men. Black activism has therefore tended to become *women's* political activism (Williams, 1987).

The consolidation of Aboriginal groups into a single political force became powerfully noticeable within five years of the 1967 referendum (Turner, 1975). Perhaps the most spectacular protest

action by Aboriginal people was the 'tent embassy' which was erected in January 1972 outside Parliament House in Canberra and remained there for seven months, as a peaceful demonstration against the oppression and appalling conditions under which Aborigines lived. Since the land it occupied was Crown land, and Aborigines were exempt from a prohibition on occupying Crown land, there was no legal means to remove the embassy. One participant said: 'It was great, the Embassy. It gave Blacks a solidarity we hadn't experienced before. Blacks from all over. Under the old pass-laws we didn't have opportunities to be visiting people in other reserves and other states. We really didn't know each other' (Sykes, 1989, p.94).

The old maxim 'divide and rule' had worked as well for the Romans as for the British. Only in 1972 were Aborigines able to discover each other and their commonalities. They described it as an overwhelming experience, to which some feminists may certainly be able to relate, as some will also be able to relate to the pain that tinges the discovery of, and the grief that comes from, a shared history of abuse. The protest saw Aboriginal people from many different cultures and speaking different languages come together for the first time as a political force. If anything, the police brutality that ended the embassy strengthened their resolve and showed the world how Australia dealt with its indigenous people. Another eyewitness recalled:

The squads of police were coming around the corner. They were marching, and we could hear their bloody big boots coming down on the road. Like that sound you hear in Nazi war films. We kept on singing. Men were on the inside, near the tent, protecting it. Women stood all the way around them. When we saw the police pause for a few seconds, you could tell they were going to attack us so we sent the children out of the way. And then it was on, I couldn't believe it. TV cameras from all channels blazing, but still they kept coming. They beat down all the women, walked over the top of them after they knocked them down, kicked them out of the way, and began slogging into the blokes. Some of the coppers had things held tightly in their hands to give extra weight, ballast, to their punches. They also had other things they hit us with. Some of our people were given electric shocks. It all happened so fast. We think they had electric pig prodders. (Sykes, 1989, p.96)

One notes that at the moment of danger the women formed a protective circle around the men who stood guarding the tent. This would have been highly unusual, it seems to me, had the protesters been white. Would we not expect the women to be in the middle of the circle? Perhaps this is hinting at profound differences between black and white society. Second, one notices

the extraordinary brutality of police vis-à-vis unarmed people. Australian police have acquired a reputation in their handling of Aborigines which brings to mind South African police practices. The frighteningly large number of Aboriginal deaths in custody, the overbooking and charging of Aboriginal people and the strategies employed against them are suggestive of racial warfare. A report on criminal justice in north-western NSW in the late 1980s found that:

- Aborigines are policed excessively, in a way different from, and at a higher level than, the policing of whites. There are now greater numbers of police who use paramilitary riot control batons, shields and protective gear.
- The police now resort to more draconian legislation, including a charge of riotous assembly and a 'crowd control' charge that has no maximum penalty and which has hardly ever been used before.
- The police response to a disturbance, such as flying in the Tactical Response Group to control a supposed riot, may increase tensions and prolong conflict. The report cites as most disturbing the alleged use of tear gas to control a football crowd at Bourke in 1984. (Cunneen and Robb, 1988; cit. Sykes, 1989, p.139)

It follows that Aboriginal women's motivation for seeking change had little to do with white western feminism (Grimshaw, 1981:88), even though at times the women's movement provided the climate and opportunity for them to act. Aboriginal women have taken to the streets, gone to conferences, acquired qualifications, spoken at gatherings, sat on committees and generally held together their communities, all while they were overworked and exhausted by the ongoing battle to be life rafts for the rest of the community.

Aboriginal women feature prominently in all Aboriginal organisations. In 1985, for example, the national convenor, secretary and chair of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation were all women, as were ten of the twenty members of the National Aboriginal Education Committee. In 1984, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs established an Aboriginal Women's Unit and two years later this was upgraded to an Office of Aboriginal Women. There is also a National Secretariat for Aboriginal and Islander Childcare and an Aboriginal Development Commission as well as a Board of Aboriginal Hostels—all bodies on which women are much more prominent than they are in mainstream bodies. Whether these women hold power of a kind white Australian society would understand is another matter. Davis warns us not to

equate membership or non-membership in certain bodies with community political dominance and argues that a true evaluation of power dynamics cannot be based on mere statistics (Davis, 1992, p.35).

It is also of some significance that the number of Aborigines undertaking and completing tertiary education has considerably increased: from 18 enrolments in 1969 to 3307 in 1989 (Bourke et al., 1991). The first Aboriginal students to obtain doctorates were women, and one of the first three Aboriginal law graduates was also a woman. All of these women have acquired a high profile and have been very active on behalf of their people.

ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THE WHITE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Such contact as there has been between black and white women is most definitely a result of the women's movement. A good deal has been written about this relationship by white as well as black women. Some white feminists were keen to include Aboriginal women in the movement but often they had an agenda the latter found unappealing, and they did not seem to be aware of the racism suffered by Aborigines (Goodall and Huggins, 1992). Most women's groups, however, did not think of including Aboriginal women: 'Suddenly this white women's liberation movement developed and there was no black woman involved in it' was the alienated feeling of quite a number of Aboriginal women (cit. Burgmann, 1984). By 1975, when the Women and Politics conference was held in Canberra, they were no longer regarded as a 'special problem', and demonstrated outside to draw attention to the inadequate representation of their concerns at the conference. Burgmann argues that there is 'a black women's movement—it is just that white women know virtually nothing about it' and, because its demands and priorities are different, believe that it does not exist (Burgmann, 1993, p.37).

The misunderstandings between white and black were based largely on a complicated and unhappy history. White women, after all, were part of a tradition of white settlement that had decimated and cruelly mistreated the indigenous population. White women brought up Aboriginal children who had been stolen from their mothers, used them as domestic servants (Sabbioni, 1993) and supervised their education and training. Such supervision was not always based on good will but often on racism (Huggins and Blake, 1992, p.54), moral condemnation, and the stereotyping of Aborig-

inal women as promiscuous, which in turn increased mutual antagonism (O'Shane, 1976, p.32). White women also mistreated Aboriginal women (cf Ward, 1988) in the sense that they redefined as promiscuity the sexual abuse Aboriginal women had suffered since 1788 (Moorehead, 1968). Friendships between white and black Australian women were extremely rare in colonial times (Tonkinson, 1988, p.34). Good intentions notwithstanding, the approaches of white feminists—to their bemusement—often aroused the hostility of Aboriginal women.

Despite the differences, there is also common political ground. As Burgmann notes (1993, p.37): 'If one assumes the general objectives of the women's movement to be the abolition of oppression in the form of power relationships and role-stereotyping, then black women certainly share these objectives.' There were attempts by women on both sides of the colour barrier to overcome the historical hurdles and initiate conciliation. At the fourth Women and Labour conference in Brisbane in 1984, Aboriginal women held workshops and presented papers. But they continued to express concern that there are 'too few opportunities for us to speak up at our own pace and in our own style' (cf Huggins, 1985, p.4).

Many of the key goals of the women's movement touched a raw nerve with Aboriginal women (see Table 5.5). For instance, with regard to abortion, feminists generally argued that it was up to women to decide what they would do with—and have done to—their own bodies. But for Aboriginal women abortion had unsettling echoes of genocide. If anything, they wanted to see more children given a better chance at life:

If we asked for money to stop black babies being born we would get all we want. But we ask for money to keep black babies alive and we get nothing—abortion is what white women have decided the women's movement is all about. (cit. Burgmann, 1993, p.41)

At the 1975 Women and Politics conference, Aboriginal women demanded: 'Stop forced sterilisation on our black women in Australia, while white women campaign for the right to abortion' (Burgmann, 1993, p.41). Feminist views on contraception also aroused suspicion. For instance, family planning was at times seen as a deliberate attempt to limit the size of the Aboriginal population (Hetzl et al., 1974, p.238). Women in Cunnamulla regarded advice on contraception as 'paternalistic' (Schultz, 1977). With respect to 'sexual freedom', white women sought public approval for saying 'yes' while black women wanted their right to say 'no' affirmed (Sykes, 1975).

'Modern Australia', as Knapman notes (1993, p.125), 'has been

TABLE 5.5 LIFE SITUATION AND DEMANDS TO THE STATE BY
ABORIGINAL AND ANGLO-CELTIC WOMEN

	Aboriginal	Anglo-Celtic
Birth control	Stop sterilisation and state control of Aboriginal women's fertility. We want to have as many children as we like and keep them.	Grant abortion on demand so that women can control their own fertility/their own bodies.
Health	Infant mortality is comparable to that in Third World countries. Maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world. Our life expectancy is twenty years less than that of white women.	Infant mortality is comparable to that in other First World countries. Maternal mortality rates are among the lowest in the world. Our life expectancy is similar to that of women in Europe and North America.
Education	We are better educated than our men. Our men have lost their status and self-respect.	We are almost equal with our men. Our men have too much power and get all the kudos.
Employment	We get jobs more readily than our men.	Men dominate the workforce and women suffer higher unemployment.
Status in community	We are more often community leaders than our men. We are very well represented on committees and in advisory and decision-making bodies of Aboriginal Affairs, and are at times in the majority. White society is built around exclusion of Aboriginal people.	Compared to men we play a marginal role in society. We have to fight to have representation at all and have not achieved any equity to date. We have never had equal representation and have never been in the majority.
Common experience as women	We have no experiences in common with Anglo-Celtic women. White institutions, including women, took our children away and forced us into reserves. Feminism can be divisive because as a small, vulnerable group we have to fight as one people and we cannot afford divisions between Aboriginal men and women.	We are one sisterhood and all women suffer oppression.

SOURCES: O'Shane, 1976; Bell and Ditton, 1980; Burgmann, 1984; Gale, 1985; Daylight and Johnstone 1986; Abbott, 1986; Saunders and Evans, 1992.

built around explicit racial and cultural exclusions, with boundaries constructed against both Aboriginal people at home and foreign “others” from overseas.’ Exclusion means exclusion from power, wealth, influence, status and mobility. It can even mean exclusion from the person’s own culture. Feminism, like any other public activity, is part of the ‘ongoing construction of Australia’ and is performed by and for those who are defined as belonging. It is a process from which migrant and Aboriginal women remain excluded (Curthoys, 1993).

Perhaps a better term than exclusion is invisibility. A group may remain invisible even if, on specific and well-chosen occasions, the ‘directors’ briefly put it in the spotlight. Ang’s (1995) definition of a specific ‘whiteness’ as intrinsic indeed does not require racism in order to define, legitimate or defend itself. If that is so, perhaps there is reason to despair that liberation, which for Aboriginal and some NESB immigrant women must first be a liberation from racism or from their status as outsider ‘other’, will ever be more than a dream.

PART III

HARVESTING

BACKLASHES

In the 1970s reformers and feminists were very optimistic. I am sure most of us would have agreed that there was cause for such optimism. Girls were participating more in higher secondary and tertiary education. Women's record in employment and careers improved. As Encel et al. said in 1974:

The role that women play in employment has a reciprocal relationship with their roles within the family, the education system and public life. It not merely conditions their own attitudes; it conditions the attitude of men. We can see how the increasing economic independence of women, or even the possibility of such independence, has done much to shift marital patterns away from total dependence upon the breadwinning husband towards a more equal partnership between husband and wife; it has helped to change popular attitudes towards the education of girls; and it provides both a training ground and a field of action in which women become involved in social business beyond the immediate confines of the family. (Encel et al., 1974, p.69)

At a personal, individual level, the improvements have indeed been substantial. Women's health, including reproductive health, has improved immeasurably but so has the health of Australians generally. Women's property rights, their rights in marriage, and in the case of abuse in marriage, are recognised in law. Divorce

laws have changed. But what about women's status at the public level?

Women fought especially hard for changes in the public arena. Affirmative action legislation helped reduce hostility to their presence in public life. Seldom has there been such a flood of policy reforms and legislative changes as occurred in the 1970s and 1980s—in Australia and in most western European countries. But in Australia, these reforms were not buttressed by a constitution that enshrines the equality of women before the law. This is a serious drawback and tends to make reforms here look relatively fragile.

Some continue to be optimistic. For instance, Anne Levy, the South Australian Minister for the Status of Women, has said:

There have been important legislative changes [such as] sex discrimination legislation, with South Australia leading the way in 1975; rape-in-marriage legislation, again South Australia leading the way in 1977; recognition of a woman's right to a portion of her husband's superannuation on divorce; the introduction of permanent part-time work into the public service; maternity leave rights (even if still unpaid leave); changes in obtaining restraining orders in cases of domestic violence, and so on.

Social changes have been no less important—the final steps to equal pay in 1972, the establishment of sixteen women's shelters, four women's health centres, the availability of information on contraception and safe abortion, and the establishment of the pregnancy advisory centre.

Women's advisers in government departments have been influential in pushing internally for change, as have other women in the bureaucracy.

Education programs to address sex bias in curriculum materials and sex segregation in training have had at least the same success.

Attention has been given to hazardous chemicals, additives, and a national conservation strategy, and we are moving on gender bias in courts. Domestic violence and child sexual abuse are on the community's agenda as they never have been before. (Levy, 1994, p.4)

Levy adds (p.5): 'Some people don't accept that incremental change can lead to fundamental changes in women's status.' This raises a fundamental point. Are such reforms transformational? Radical feminists, as well as theorists and practitioners of revolution, would say they are not, because they attack symptoms rather than causes. Some political feminists, however, believe that under certain circumstances, incremental reform can indeed be transformational (see Katzenstein and Mueller, 1987). By redefining politics and challenging dominant values and norms, feminists can eventually transform institutions, elites, laws and even the nature of social relationships.

The problem is that social and economic policies are not just different but, in western economies, often diametrically opposed. It is fine and heart-warming to believe that our social thinking moves along a humanitarian trajectory. At the same time, economic dynamics may impose a different reality. Often, hardly has one good piece of legislation been put in place before economic 'reality' undoes it at the level of practice.

RESTRUCTURING IN THE 1980s

The 1980s saw not just social but economic restructuring (McQueen, 1982). In the newly deregulated climate of an Australia preparing to face international competition, the humanitarian zest of the 1970s paled into insignificance. The large-scale political and social projects of the 1970s were not finished, nor are they likely to be. The revolutionaries, radicals, dissenters, utopians and idealists have long been tamed by the rationalist straitjacket of macroeconomics and the passage of time. The belief that one can change the world, or even one's own bit of it, has been dampened by changes well beyond the control of individuals. From the 1980s, the welfare state was in retreat throughout the western world (Graycar, 1983). Australia became less and less self-reliant, accepting increasing unemployment and declining standards of living (Crough and Wheelwright, 1982).

Sexual liberation was stopped in its tracks by the AIDS crisis, which precipitated a backlash not just against gays and lesbians but against promiscuous sex (Altman, 1986). It prompted religious zealots to sound again their moral alarms about the 'Sodom and Gomorrah' that licentious movements had allegedly foisted upon 'decent' society. The anti-abortion campaigns buttressed by the hard-line Pope John Paul II and fundamentalist Islamic leaders have once again stalemated the urgent international debate on global population control.

The 1980s started badly for Australia. Jobs were vanishing fast: 200 000 jobs in the manufacturing and construction industry alone in less than six years. Mass retrenchments of steel workers and coal miners by BHP and its subsidiaries followed. Workers stormed King's Hall in Canberra, demanding government action. Public policy discourse changed noticeably from welfare to economics, flagged by such expressions as 'full cost recovery' and 'low capital cost' (Davis et al., 1988).

For women, the 1980s were difficult years. In 1981, women set up a 'tent embassy' outside Parliament House after Cabinet

decided to hand back responsibility for community health programs to the states. The government's decision to grant public funding to commercial childcare centres (Brennan and O'Donnell, 1986) aroused widespread fear that women who were less than well-off would be deprived of access to childcare. Although family allowances were rising, they were declining in real value. The National Association of Community Based Children's Services fought back, lobbying strongly for universal access to quality childcare. At the UN conference in 1980 to mark the midpoint of the Decade for Women, Australia—together with Israel, the US and Canada—refused to become a signatory to the World Program of Action (for Women) because it included a political statement that indirectly condemned Zionism as racism. This point was entirely irrelevant to the aims of the document and the Program. It introduced aspects of the Middle East conflict which were not only irrelevant to women's equity but were also historically incorrect and deliberately anti-Israel. The Australian delegation was strongly criticised at home for its failure to sign. Indeed, women's protests over this issue were said to be stronger than they have been for any other single issue (cf Sawer, 1990a, p.56). The anger was to some extent understandable. Because the Australian constitution does not specifically accord women equality before the law, Australia badly needed a binding international agreement to back women up in their task of pushing changes through a parliament that was, overall, reluctant to act even on such basic issues as anti-discrimination or equal opportunity legislation.

The reelection of the Labor Party in 1983 raised hopes again but the record was at first less than impressive. More than twelve years after the second-wave women's movement had started, it was still possible to place its demands 'at the bottom of a traditional list' (Warhurst, 1987, p.193). At the 1983 government Summit, for instance, only two of the 100 participants were women, and none were Aborigines. It was a foretaste of things to come.

It is perhaps too soon to make considered judgments about the 1980s, but to me they seemed dead years, dead intellectually, dead in public debate, throttled by high unemployment and ever-higher barriers to tertiary education and training. Recession, restructuring, and share market crashes sent the corporate sector into turmoil and created many human casualties. Unemployment hovered uncomfortably around 10 per cent and little relief was in sight. A brief respite in the late 1980s proved illusory: unemployment was up again in the early 1990s.

Today economic news dominates the print and electronic media, with political and social news a distant second and third. Since the

vast majority of Australians do not trade in shares, gold or foreign exchange, one wonders why this is the case. One reason for the shift in public debate to matters purely economic is related to the new, global economic order. The 1980s hurled Australian society into a headlong clash between the necessity to compete internationally for export markets and an ever-eroding social justice agenda. As Western notes (1983, p.345): the interconnectedness of the globalised economy 'makes the task of effective planning increasingly difficult because small, perhaps random, changes in one institution will immediately have ramifications for all others. Under these conditions tried and true methods for producing change may well be ineffective.'

Another reason that is given at times is essentially misleading. US President Ronald Reagan, a staunch defender of the free market, is said to have remarked: 'The tide lifts every boat.' He meant that all Americans were affected by changes in the economy. My questions are: 'What happens to those who do not own a boat?' and 'What happens to a nation's conscience if it is lulled into watching the waves instead of looking at the shore?'

The 1987 Budget withdrew many supports from women, including the community employment program, the widow's pension, and the Supporting Parent Benefit for women with children 16 or over (under pressure from feminist groups the government retreated from a plan to make the cut-off age 10), and—to be phased out gradually—the special widow's pension B, which provided a pension for widows over the age of 45. Means testing was also introduced for the Family Allowance. Sawyer argued that this was 'a major symbolic defeat for the Australian women's movement' (Sawyer, 1990a, p.99) because the allowance went directly to the primary carer, i.e., typically the woman. The Office of the Status of Women had found that this payment was important to 90 per cent of mothers, and that for 40 per cent it was their only independent source of income (Office of the Status . . . , 1985). In addition, the 1987 Budget introduced up-front payments for university students as well as preferential treatment for school leavers over mature-age students (Sawyer, 1990a, p.96). Education began to take its cues from industry and this forced a retreat from concerns with access, equality of opportunity, and the needs of the socially and educationally disadvantaged.

There is no doubt that the 1980s have been a decade of increasing inequality in most areas (Sharp, 1991: xiv, xv). This is as true for Australia as it is for the rest of the western world (Westergaard, 1995). It appears that an overriding concern with economics diminishes awareness of inequalities and injustice. The overall reduction in demand for labour has resulted in rising

unemployment which, in Aboriginal communities, ranges from 40 per cent to 90 or 100 per cent. NESB immigrant unemployment has also increased. Disconcertingly, studies continue to report disadvantage, discrimination and appalling working conditions for migrant women (Lin and Pearse 1990). A 1994 study by the Centre for Population and Urban Research at Monash University has shown that specific NESB groups have unemployment rates of 50 to 80 per cent and experience higher rates of long-term unemployment than Australian born. A newspaper article concluded that Australia is at risk of creating a jobless underclass (Riley, 1994). Migrant women are among the lowest income earners and have a particularly high incidence of work-related illnesses (Women in Industry . . . , 1991).

In 1987, Raskall was able to say that there were over 30 000 millionaires in Australia. In the same paragraph he also pointed out that two million people live under the poverty line and that 'the comfortable myth of a community with relatively equal wealth is exploded' (Raskall, 1987). Poverty, especially of children, has increased. There are now more children in poverty than a decade ago, despite Prime Minister Bob Hawke's pledge that 'no Australian child will live in poverty' in the 1990s. The Social Security Review of 1986 showed that the proportion of people in the lowest socioeconomic stratum (i.e., the 'very poor') had increased by 50 per cent (Cass, 1987, p.6). From World War II to the late 1960s, unemployment rarely exceeded 2 per cent. In the 1980s and 1990s such conditions seem unbelievable.

Youth unemployment has been increasing steadily and there seems no immediate hope for it to come down. Indeed, a 1995 report by the Policy and Development Branch of the NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education concluded that young men aged between 15 and 24 have 'failed to obtain any advantage from the employment growth that occurred between 1983 and 1990' (Russell, 1995b, p.1). For young women the outlook is no better. Since 1988, as many as 18 000 full-time clerical positions have been lost. For both men and women in this age group unemployment rates are consistently higher than for those in other age groups. Worse, the report states that unemployment rates remain substantially unchanged even during periods of economic growth. These conditions have been attributed in part to the trend towards multi-skilling and the increasing use of new technologies, which eliminate jobs rather than creating them (ibid).

In equal opportunity, too, there were backward steps. In the 1980s, increasing gender equality on one level was offset by

increasing inequality on another (Saunders et al., 1989). Macroeconomic decisions tend to be inconsiderate of society as a whole and disjointed from social affairs in particular. This can produce curiously contradictory policies. For example, in the 1980s the government on the one hand passed equal opportunity legislation and on the other promoted the 'user pays' principle as a general principle in government departments and agencies.

The user pays principle—that services should be funded by those who use them—is a capitalist principle *par excellence*. It is inimical to the welfare state and egalitarianism (Sharp, 1991). The welfare state is based on the principle that certain individuals or groups are entitled to receive services free of charge or at a reduced rate. The appearance in 1983 of Graycar's *Retreat from the Welfare State* was telling. Broom mused a year later that it was . . . 'difficult . . . to sustain the assertion of full equality between the sexes in the face of evidence about the relative poverty of women' (Broom, 1984, p.xv).

In Australia, as almost everywhere else, the much-vaunted equal opportunity measures of the 1970s and 1980s were, after all, based on the recognition that inequalities existed. Equal opportunity is not designed to eradicate inequality, but perhaps not everyone realised that at the time. What may have appeared as a set of radical demands in the 1970s now looks restrained indeed, precisely because the demands often failed to reduce structured inequalities. Equal opportunity measures have shown themselves to be flawed, incomplete or failing. The long and short of it is that little was asked for and less was received. There are no fundamental questions involved, just degrees of refusal and acceptance. Those charged with defending the minute territory won are ultimately worn down, not least by having to devote so much of their energies to monitoring political and fiscal events in order to safeguard against erosion of the tiny edifice of equal opportunity. Alternatively, having learned the language of economic rationalism so well as a precondition for operating effectively within that ideological position, some feminists may well be unaware how much they themselves have become part of this thinking in the meantime.

It is questionable whether one could reasonably have expected anything else, given the persistence of structural inequalities. Women are still not equal in the 1990s. Nor have other minority groups shifted markedly from their positions of disadvantage.

'Restructuring' is an innocuous word for the obnoxious reality of substantial job losses from the 1970s to the 1980s. In the 1970s alone, the manufacturing sector lost between a quarter and a third of its jobs. Between June 1971 and June 1977, the textile industry

shed 18 000 jobs (32.9 per cent) and the clothing and footwear industry 32 000 jobs (28.7 per cent; *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 1977, p.17). Some of these jobs were lost when companies collapsed, others when manufacturers shifted production to South-East Asia, where labour was cheaper (Power, 1980, p.507). Meanwhile, those Australians lucky enough to have full-time jobs have been asked to work harder (Tracy and Lever-Tracy, 1991). Under the guise of 'efficiency', labour has been made cheaper as fewer people produce a greater output. As in the US and Europe, industry has exchanged labour-intensive production for capital-intensive management. By the 1990s, corporations had become 'lean and mean', having restructured to face the challenges of international competition on an alleged 'level playing field'. Women, migrants and the young have been the main casualties. One of the only sectors now employing more women is the public sector, reflecting an expansion not only of services but of the bureaucracy itself.

In the private sector, women have borne the brunt of change in two ways. First, their unemployment rates are consistently higher than those of males, even without considering married women who are not registered as unemployed (Cass, 1981, p.19). Second, they are disproportionately represented in unattractive, lowly paid and vulnerable part-time and casual jobs (see Probert, 1994). It goes without saying that job insecurity and casual employment create a docile workforce and weaken union power.

This is also part of the heritage for the 1990s: a demure and apolitical generation born in the 1960s and early 1970s. They somehow struggled through the 1980s with diminished opportunities, lacking any unifying spirit of interests and social concerns. The outspoken, highly politicised generation who were students in the 1960s and 1970s were succeeded by a generation on the retreat—docile conformists without a political agenda and anxious and confused about their shrinking career prospects. It was as if the flower-power children of the 1970s had left nothing new to say and do. The 1980s generation failed to put its stamp on the decade swamped, as it was, by the propaganda of economic rationalism (Pusey, 1992). To a large extent one cannot blame them. It sometimes seemed that the older generation was conspiring to prevent them repeating the rebelliousness of the 1970s.

The next generation seems to have entirely different concerns. Sobered by the constrained labour market, by AIDS and by the concern for the environment, they tend to be well-informed and interested in broad social arguments. We have yet to see whether the 1990s generation will make a difference.

THE ENEMIES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Terms such as justice, equality and freedom are historically determined and context dependent. In modern western democracies social justice has often been a fulcrum for destabilising or questioning dominant hierarchies of power and money. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, along with the rise of market economics, we find a return of anti-female and anti-social attitudes which are defended by reference not to personal prejudice but to economic rationalism. There is mounting evidence that the champions of economic marketing have had enough of talk of equality and social justice, of claims that inequality can or should be minimised by social policy. In *The Bell Curve* (1994) Herrnstein and Murray argue that the ideology of equality has trivialised moral dialogue in the US. The book, while it has outraged many, is also old ground rehashed (cf Wyndham, 1994). The authors rekindle racist and socially polluting dialogue by arguing that social standing is related to intelligence and that intelligence is lowest in blacks. Biological determinism and social Darwinism again rear their heads. One is meant to conclude (once again) that since its determinants are hereditary, social inequality is a 'natural' expression of innate difference.

There is another argument, presented by Revelman (1983), that justice is upheld only when the level of contribution (and taxation) is taken into account:

We must have also the re-emergence of male power if we are to be sure of maintaining human rights and justice by democratic means. The males provide 75% of the work force. They produce 80% of the goods and services. They have 100% of the military responsibility. And they have less than 49% of the vote . . .

Let us hope that some day somebody will think of something that will turn some of those footling females into mere women, whose opinions on public affairs will be worth quoting. The votes of these huge numbers of irresponsible females, who are devoid of public and economic responsibility, and lacking in intelligent political appraisal, form the last deep murky pools in which scheming political parties can dredge for mercenary votes, with promises baiting traps fashioned out of the bones of red herrings. (p.284).

In the 1990s Revelman's arguments are irrelevant because none of the figures are true anymore, but it is worth noting that he makes the right to a public voice (vote/opinions) dependent on a public role—an argument that was used in the *ancien régime* before the French Revolution destroyed this concept.

In Australia, the privately funded think-tank, the Centre for Independent Studies, published in 1991 a booklet by David Green

titled *Equalising People. Why Social Justice Threatens Liberty*. Surely the history of liberatory movements has shown that liberty is unthinkable without first addressing justice. But, according to Green (p.28) equality 'corrupts' democracy because, in market terms, inequality is useful. He puts the cart before the horse: equality does not corrupt democracy but it certainly corrupts capitalism.

The free market, built on competition, differing needs and structured inequality, cannot tolerate equality and, by extension, social justice. But democracy does not depend on capitalism, and vice versa. On the contrary, it can be argued that the basic assumptions underpinning capitalism are inimical to the main tenets of democratic virtue.

Democracy, as we understand it in the late twentieth century, guarantees equality of all citizens before the law, irrespective of their background. Such equality is predicated on the provision of security for all citizens (Maddox, 1995). In the narrowest sense this requirement is fulfilled by a police force to protect against internal threats and an army to protect against external ones. But security also refers to the protection of citizens' human rights: their entitlement to food, shelter and a way of earning a living. The provision of income security has been of great importance in social democracies (Shaver, 1989). Some have argued that this is a kind of cargo cult—allowing people to vote themselves rich (Minogue, 1992, p.8). Regrettably, conservative opponents of broad social-justice agendas seem perpetually unaware that such programs in the west have seldom done more than repair the worst of the ravages and injustices that the economic system created in the first place.

Social policies, including women's policies, help to clean up the debris that restructuring and competitive free markets generate. If these are absent or limited, capitalist economies develop strong underclasses and a massive underfelt of poverty upon which the carpet of wealth is rolled out. Although in Australia the tendency has been towards sympathy for the 'underdog', the social safety net has been steadily deteriorating, particularly for women. For instance, the pensionable age for women has been increased from age 60 to 65 for all those born after 1949 and widows pensions have been eroded or abolished. Worse, superannuation schemes are gradually shifting a general flat rate pension entitlement towards payments that are not just different in amount but dependent on participation in the paid workforce. Income dependent claims for old age entitlements structurally cement inequalities and will severely disadvantage women who engaged in unpaid work. These schemes are economically 'rational' but they are contrary to social justice.

ATTITUDES, IMAGES AND BELIEFS:
MORE OR THE SAME ENEMIES?

Assessing the impact of a movement is difficult enough. It is harder to assess climates of opinion. We are used to seeking hard-and-fast empirical evidence for claims and assumptions. Of course, such evidence is socially produced and by no means value free. It is frequently claimed that we are very different and think very differently now than we did in the 1960s (Nile, 1994). No doubt there is evidence of substantial change. But what has changed for women? Have public attitudes and beliefs provided them with the blanket to feel secure, well, legitimised and free?

There are several ways of assessing public opinion. One is to interview women and ask them whether they feel any better or freer now than twenty years ago, a procedure that is notoriously unreliable. Another is to conduct opinion polls and surveys of public attitudes. A third way is to study the contemporary mainstream media. Even the briefest look at these suggests that changes may not have been as profound as one might have wished, and that in some cases their existence is tenuous in the extreme.

In the 1990s women are no longer expected to be solely housewives and mothers. They have more freedom of movement than ever before, and better career and educational opportunities. They can—indeed must—vote, and have much easier access to credit. Sexual harassment laws protect them from unwanted advances in the workplace. Attitudes to women in competitive sports also appear to have changed (Mitchell and Dyer, 1985), both in terms of increased participation and in terms of increased—though not yet equal—media coverage of women's sporting events. Within the home, there is a trend for young couples to share domestic chores, including child-rearing responsibilities, although when paid and unpaid work are viewed together, the scales remain tipped very much in favour of men (Bittman 1991). Women no longer have to put up with domestic violence. There are refuges available to give sanctuary to them in such crises. Disturbingly, however, in the national domestic violence surveys in the late 1980s, up to 20 per cent of respondents (men and women alike) said that under certain circumstances it was all right for a husband to beat his wife. One would hope that the subsequent national domestic violence awareness campaign has sharply reduced the number of people who hold this attitude. Divorce is no longer stigmatised and is less traumatic than previously.

How women are *thought of*, as distinct from what they might be allowed to *do*, is a different matter. Attitudes expressed in the

media may not be representative but at least they are on record. Overall, women are no longer portrayed solely as 'girls', 'mums' or pin-ups, nor are women's issues relegated to knitting patterns and recipes in newspaper back pages. The media are well aware that women form a sizeable and influential part of their audience. There are more women journalists than ever and they in turn have helped to boost the visibility of women in the media and improve public attitudes to women. This has not happened without resistance. The International Women's Year in 1975 produced an avalanche of savage or cynical responses by male journalists. *The Age* headed an article: '\$2 million for the Sheilas: Surprisingly, It's Not a Joke'; the *Sydney Sunday Telegraph* described 1975 as 'The Year of the Bird', and the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* titled a story on a women's conference: 'Mum's the Word as the Big Yak-Yak Begins' (cit. Sawer, 1990a, p.18). When Elizabeth Reid was appointed first adviser on women's affairs to the Whitlam government, the Melbourne *Herald* (21 August 1973) had a field day with 'Miz Liz':

Would the sisterhood please stand still for a moment and stop wobbling under their T-shirts? I have just been talking to the M stroke S who represents your interests in the capital . . . Miz Liz—in flared jeans, tank-top and no bra—was speaking in her office in the new prime ministerial suite in Parliament House.

It is rather unlikely, however, that the newspapers would repeat this sort of thing in the 1990s. One may venture to claim that the public would be intolerant of such lack of professionalism. Yet this does not necessarily mean that prejudice against women has disappeared. The language is more controlled today but, reading between the lines, biased images persist that may have just as much impact on the reader as the clumsy gutter tone.

One sees articles on such 'nice girls' as Ros (Kelly), Joany (!) (Kirner) and Bronwyn (Bishop)—all elected members of Parliament. A recent article in a local paper (*Armidale Express*) entitled 'Pat strikes back' referred to the Chancellor of the University of New England, Dr Pat O'Shane! Bronwyn Bishop's hairdo and Joan Kirner's polkadot dress have had more media exposure than all the comments on all male politicians' appearance put together in the entire post World War II period. Referring to elected politicians by their first name suggests that these are really mums or girls who also dabble a little in politics.

Earlier feminist analyses of the media hold remarkably true today. Edgar and McPhee (1974) found that women were consistently portrayed as inferior to men. Others have shown that such

images overflow into women's self-perception (Sampson, 1973). Little has changed, although the language has become more cautious and the negative commentary is couched in different ways.

There does not seem to have been a major transformation in the way women are represented in the mass media since [the 1970s]. Women's pages are still to be found in splendid isolation in newspapers, women's magazines still purvey a cocktail of images of the super-housewife and the desirable vamp, while rock video on television has produced a new way of objectifying the female form for mass audiences . . . In a patriarchal society like Australia, women continue to be found splayed over car bonnets selling both the commodity and themselves as a commodity. (Rowe, 1991, p.307)

There have been changes for the better in the last two decades, but Rowe is right in arguing that the media images of women have often become more subtle rather than different.

One takes some comfort in knowing that image makers are after all only that: creators of images that one may believe, follow or discard. If attitudes in everyday life have in fact shifted substantially, one might feel relatively safe in ignoring such gender sideswipes. Unfortunately, everyday life is not yet gender fair. As Ken Dempsey's study *A Man's Town* (1990) illustrates, the feminist movement has had little if any impact on the dominant culture of rural Australia. Based on seventeen years of interviews and first-hand observation, *A Man's Town* portrays a world in which sexism is entrenched deeply at all levels of society. Bias against women has never left rural towns; now sexist views have made a major comeback in the cities (see Faludi, 1992).

Proponents of sociobiology such as Wilson (1975) strenuously argued for the genetic or hormonal basis of sex differences and sought to confirm that the social order faithfully reflected biologically predetermined traits. The idea that we are what we are as a result of our genes and hormones is a position that not only feminists find objectionable (Sahlins, 1977). Sociobiology developed at the height of the women's movement. 'The *raison d'être* of all these theories,' explains Rogers (1982, p.87), 'is to maintain the present inferior position of women in society.' Sociobiology proclaims the existence of genes for aggression, territoriality and intelligence. As in the west these qualities tend to be ascribed to males, sociobiology appeared to confirm the 'naturalness' of patriarchy, condone violence, sanction sexism, and justify the continued domination of one group by another (cf Kaplan and Rogers, 1994). One notes here that the American civil rights movement was countered by allegedly 'objective' proof that whites on average have higher IQs than blacks (e.g. Eysenck 1971). Similarly, studies on

sex role differences abounded in the mid-1970s, just as women were mobilising to claim their own civil rights.

Sociobiologists' views are usually given wide media coverage in Australia and internationally. The burden of their social argument is persuasively simple, even if, to most scientists, its basis is problematic if not pseudoscientific: men and women are different because of genetic differences that cannot be changed.

An article in *The Weekend Australian* in October 1994 headed 'Sex Makes a Difference' was accompanied by a cartoon showing a female executive in high heels and a tight skirt trying (in vain) to scale a steep rock face. This is not too far removed from D.H. Lawrence's vitriolic comment that women are hens and should not attempt to be cocks. Attempting to explain why there are so few women in top positions, the article gave this example:

The fact is that, while women can make fine musicians, the attributes needed to reach the first rank of performers . . . are more characteristic of men than of women: physical strength, competitiveness, ambition, large movement psychomotor co-ordination, and a commanding presence needed to lead. (McIntyre, 1994)

This is tendentious, value-loaded writing. Who decides what is 'commanding presence'? Who determines who has 'ambition'? Except for physical strength, there is no evidence that any of these qualities are 'more characteristic of men' unless one chooses to believe that there are specific genes for ambition, competitiveness and perhaps even for 'commanding presence'. Such well-worn arguments are based purely on conjecture from the starting-point of current social practice. They conflate cause and effect, belief and fact, sociology and biology. Not only do they justify violence, aggression and selfish ambition, they also make claims about women's work potential, thereby implicitly defending gender segregation and limited access for women to senior jobs. Such arguments put the cart before the horse, as if social evidence sufficed to prove biological claims. Yet such arguments persist in both the mass media and more sophisticated publications. This is not entirely surprising: the social order can be maintained all the more easily if one shows that it is based on 'rational' beliefs by insisting on 'observable, describable patterns of difference, even imagined patterns of difference, between the category men and the category women' (Baker and Davies, 1989, p.73).

THE REVOLT AGAINST BEHAVING FAIRLY

The backlash has been played out on several stages simultaneously. Here is not the place to dwell unduly on men's responses to

women's liberation movements elsewhere in the western world. Suffice it to say that they have ranged from physical gender warfare and abuse (such as the increase of pack rapes in Italy) to reasoned responses which nevertheless attempt to undermine women's platforms for change. One is the men's movement, one wing of which is actually supportive of, or at least complementary to, the women's movement, in that it agrees that men's roles need to change along with those of women. Some men's groups have lobbied against violence against women. However, another wing of the men's movement has pursued a strengthened machismo which not only defies feminism but is explicitly anti-woman. In Australia, such groups have made relatively few inroads so far, but they have gained ground in the US and in western Europe.

Of greater importance in Australia are the single-issue fights and the attacks on the icons of feminist activism. For example, one part of the backlash is focused on equal opportunity and affirmative action. In Australia, this has been kept in check, but mostly because affirmative action has either not worked or, more usually, not been applied. Generally, free marketeers in Australia are opposed to equal opportunity and affirmative action, citing in misleading ways US examples which purport to show that the principle cannot work (Moens and Ratnapala, 1992). It has also been claimed, chiefly by the National Party, that such measures constitute a 'threat' to the Australian family (Sawer, 1990a, p.219, 225).

In the private sector, the little that has been done in Australia has met with profound resistance. In 1980, Ziller wrote the *Affirmative Action Handbook* to guide NSW employers through the principles of affirmative action and in 1984 the federal green paper on affirmative action was released (Department of the Prime . . . , 1984). Years of uproar followed. The Festival of Light rejected the principle. Babette Francis called it 'a political fraud' (Francis, 1987a,b). There were claims that affirmative action blatantly favoured women over men and that 'for every woman who benefits from affirmative action against a man, another woman is penalized, namely, the wife of the man passed over' (Levin, 1984, p.11).

More serious writers of the New Right condemned affirmative action as a 'new discrimination' (Moens, 1985) which allegedly was interested in equal representation irrespective of and even in opposition to merit. Moens claimed that the new legislation was a disguised program of job quotas which aimed to dictate who should be employed (*ibid.*). Although all this is far from the truth and says more about the lack of impartial attitudes than of the legislation, the results have been disastrous. Persons who are believed to have obtained a position only because of their minority status are unlikely

to face a friendly staff or gain the respect due to them—which further confirms suspicions of their lack of merit. Such views can be most offensive, particularly since they are invariably untrue. Rather than helping to create an impartial climate, they perpetuate a sense of the illegitimacy of all those outside the Anglo-white, male, middle-class ‘club’.

In the US and in Canada, affirmative action has become one of the most controversial labour issues of the 1990s. In California, it may soon be rejected altogether, with the vocal support of the state Republican Party (Clark, 1995: 15).

The inequality issue aside, public discourse has also suffered another setback, misleadingly placed under the banner of ‘freedom of speech’. The issue is ‘political correctness’. Australia has borrowed the term from the US and given it a parochial tint that has made the arguments even more unpalatable. The term ‘political correctness’ reflects a perception that people are being coerced into a ‘correct’ way of thinking and speaking—that they are being subjected to a form of ‘thought policing’ in the name of equality and social justice. A ‘politically correct’ person, for instance, would most strongly object to the statement ‘All blacks are inferior.’ In Canada, a Society of Academic Freedom and Scholarship has been formed to combat what its president calls ‘velvet totalitarianism’ (Armitage, 1995). This society, for instance, does not merely condemn some of the trivial or ludicrous excesses that have occurred in the politically correct camps in the US and in Canada but the principle of modifying one’s desire to offend or humiliate. Freedom of speech is an absolute value and needs to be safeguarded because only in a context of complete freedom of speech is the airing of controversial views possible and this, as the opponents see it, is a precondition for reaching a new consensus on controversial topics. However, in practice, there are substantial problems with these objections. They explicitly assume that a specific minority group has conspired to set and enforce on the majority its particular ideological agenda. This in itself is ironical and contradictory. The protest movements of the past several decades have argued that they are sick and tired of having the majority dictate to them and shut them out of debates and benefits. They argue that notions of ‘political correctness’ demote the long struggle for equity and civil rights to a series of mere expressions of ‘agency’ (general human rights).

All too often, claims for ‘freedom of speech’ are no more than a thinly disguised wish by racists and sexists to be allowed to say (again) without retribution what they ‘really’ feel about certain minority groups and about women. It has long been a principle of

civil rights and mature democracies that 'freedom' ends where another person's lack of freedom begins. In absolute terms we are 'free' to assault someone but the law provides for the punishment of those who have taken the liberty to do so. The groups that dismiss progressive policies and legislation as 'political correctness' have become pernicious and dangerous, not because of their disagreement with current trends in law but in the kind of discourse they employ. It has been noted that the rise of the far right in western Europe was accompanied by a usurping of the language of the old left (Taguieff, 1990). Talk about freedom, rights, justice and ethnic self-determination have flown shamefully easily into agendas that are grossly discriminatory and punitive to entire sections of society, and potentially as destructive as those of fascism have been.

The most distressing element in the backlash against social justice is that it is presented as if the liberation of women were a *fait accompli*, as if women now dominated public debate, had the best incomes, positions, and housing, and had freedom to move in every direction. They have nothing of the sort. The current status of women proves the opponents of equality and social justice wrong at every turn. What we are seeing, then, is not so much a backlash as an attempt to intercept a process that *might* lead to success. Such is the response to the modern, *not* postmodern (Bauman, 1991) politics of inequality which threatens privileged practices of the distribution of wealth, at least in income and other consumable values in society.

SOCIAL INDICATORS TODAY

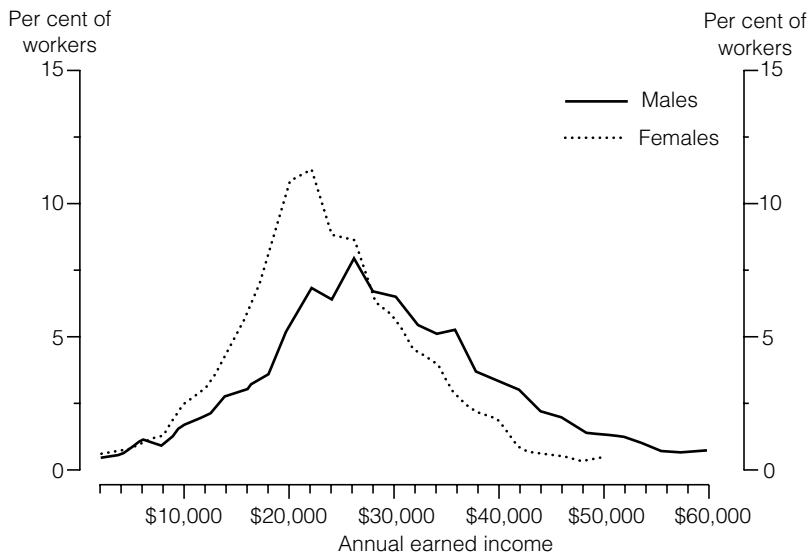
Backlashes are one thing, but how do women live now? Social indicators cannot tell us what people think but they are useful as measures of actual performance and outcomes and therefore indispensable for any comparative work or critique. We need to know where we stand. This chapter looks at the situation in the 1990s in terms of work, education and marriage and the family, in the belief that changes in these broad areas will reflect structural changes.

W O R K

Women today do not earn incomes comparable to those of men and *in practice* often do not even have the same rights (cf Dempsey, 1992) or the same value. *Social Indicators* of 1992 compares men and women in full-time work. The income curve of women is skewed towards the lower end of the scale and peaks well below the average income.

Figure 7.1 hides more than it tells. Income is a complicated measure, as is overall wealth. As Connell notes (1991, p.142), 'men have a spectacular income advantage over women'. He calculates that women's average income is only 45 per cent that of men (*ibid*). This, he writes (in 1991!),

FIGURE 7.1 FULL-YEAR, FULL-TIME WORKERS: PROPORTION OF WORKERS AT EACH LEVEL OF INCOME,^a 1989-90



NOTE: a Income class of \$2,000.

SOURCE: Survey of Income and Housing Costs and Amenities, *Social Indicators*, 1992, p.250.

is due to a devastating combination of lower labour-force participation, higher rates of part-time work, higher rates of dependency on pensions, less saleable training, lower levels of unionisation, higher rates of unemployment, less access to wealth and massive employer discrimination, cumulating over time. (Connell, 1991, pp.142-3)

According to Sawyer (1990a, p.91), 'Women have generally less access to over-award payments, and child-rearing responsibilities specifically have an enormous impact on earnings'. This is coupled with a deterioration of income over time. While men's incomes tend to increase with age, women's fall with age: on average a 40-year-old man earns 20 per cent more than he did at 25, but a woman aged 40 earns about 10 per cent less than she did at 25 (*ibid*). That is, if a man and a woman start on the same salary at 25, by the time they are 40 the man is earning on average 30 per cent more than the woman. Women's full-time weekly earnings increased from 79.0 per cent of average male pay in 1988 to 82 per cent in 1995. Considering that in 1942 the Women's Employment Act set Commonwealth awards for women at 75 per cent of male award rates, this is not exactly a great or rapid step forward. At a rate similar to the 1992-94 rate of 'closing the gap', Henry argued that it would take another 168 years for women to achieve

TABLE 7.1 WOMEN'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND THE GENDER PAY GAP, 1994

Occupational group	Women's share in labour market (%)	Women's earnings relative to men's (%)
General managers	17.7	58.5*
Specialised managers	17.7	88.8
Sales/services managers	28.2	78.4
Business professionals	32.2	61.3*
Typists	98.7	76.7
Clerks	76.8	80.3
Sales assistants	68.8	70.6*
Police	11.0	91.6
Trades	9.6	73.7
Plant/machine operators	15.6	66.8*
Road/rail drivers	6.4	82.8
Cleaners	63.9	77.5

NOTE: * Indicates exclusively private enterprise

SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994 (see also Henry, 1995 for comment)

equal pay (1995, p.1). One might add that the gender gap in total wealth is not only larger but may take much longer to close.

In 1995, the ACTU flagged its commitment to mount several test cases on gender equity in the Industrial Relations Commission. Perhaps it will have more success than the ALP has had. The Party's 1973 platform statement explicitly stated:

As the largest single employer of labour, the Australian Government has the duty to advance the cause of all employees by establishing new and improved standards of employment for its own employees. It has a special duty to grant its own employees such benefits as equal pay for the sexes, maternity leave on full pay and other reforms approved by the International Labour Organisation. (cit. Sawer, 1990a, p.35)

Playing role-model to the private sector is a noble aim but experience has shown that it is as futile as expecting a ballet performance to change stockbrokers' market behaviour the next day. One is an extravaganza, the other supposedly 'the real world'. Government expectations that the private sector will voluntarily spend more money than it is legally bound to were naive in the 1970s and are just as naive in the 1990s.

As Table 7.1 shows, women in some sectors of the labour market earn less than two-thirds of the male wage. Generally, the more equitable an organisation's pay scales, the larger its public sector component.

We know from census data that clerical and retail sales work have been feminised, but this has taken place so gradually over the last 70 years that there is no discernible connection between women's dominance in these fields and the women's movement. Substantial change has occurred in the distribution of part-time and full-time work, with a sharp rise in the use of part-time labour and the transformation of permanent full-time work into contract/short-term work. In 1966, only 10 per cent of all workers were engaged in part-time work. In 1988, the figure was more than 20 per cent, most of them women. While in 1984 36 per cent of all employed women worked part-time, in 1994 this accounted for 42 per cent (Townsend and Madden, 1994). The issue of part-time work is thus of tremendous importance to women (Barlow, 1991). Service industries—where women workers, most of them part-time, are clustered—are the most labour-intensive industries, accounting for 77 per cent of employment in Australia. Similar trends have been observed in western European countries.

In principle, the development and expansion of the part-time labour market need not be undesirable. There are some benefits for employees, especially for parents (male or female), students, home carers and others who need to supplement or earn an income but need to devote considerable time on other (unpaid) chores; or for those (relatively few) who work not from necessity but by choice. The negative aspects of part-time work lie in the conditions that usually accompany it. Leave loading, holiday pay, health benefits and superannuation contributions, promotional opportunities, and job-related training are generally denied part-time workers, particularly as most part-time work is casual (SA Survey of Part-Time Work, Australian Bureau of Statistics 1987; Westergaard 1995). A significant minority of part-time workers are not covered by an industrial award, which raises concerns about their future should they fall ill or be forced to retire.

In 1994, full-time employment rose by 2.2 per cent but part-time employment grew by 7.9 per cent (or 180 000 jobs Australia wide). It is a little exaggerated to claim, as the *Sydney Morning Herald* did, that women are the 'winners as jobs boom' (Riley, 1995). Women have indeed 'scooped up' the majority of new jobs during 1994, but one needs to stress that these are in the part-time sector, with all the drawbacks described above. Is it to be regarded as a 'win' that more and more women are drawn into the least palatable and most vulnerable jobs?

Full-time work for women inevitably raises the issue of reproduction and childcare. In Australia, maternity leave is not always available in practice and, except in the public service, it is also

generally unpaid leave (unlike in most European countries). Australia has one of the poorest records in this regard of all OECD countries: only Switzerland and Turkey also lack paid maternity leave provisions (Office of the Status . . . 1988a, p. 168).

The Australian government announced in 1995 that it would introduce paid maternity leave, shifting the burden of payment to the private sector. No doubt, however, such benefits will not apply to part-time workers—and may well have detrimental effects on the full-time employment of women. We no longer live in an age of full employment. Oversupply of labour is growing rather than declining. The current job market favours employers and makes hiring full-time employees, with their attendant high overhead costs, rather unattractive. Child-rearing continues to be perceived as a woman's personal responsibility. Very few companies indeed consider both parents as responsible and therefore few offer parental leave. The current state of affairs is undesirable for employers as well as for women. It is a disincentive for female job applicants if a company lacks provisions for paid maternity leave, and if such applicants incur potential additional expense, it is uncompetitive to hire them.

The proportion of women in paid work has increased markedly since the 1960s and 1970s. Women's participation rate in the workforce was 36 per cent in 1966, rising to 46 per cent in 1985 and to 52 per cent in 1992 (ABS, 1992). By 1993 women constituted 42 per cent of the Australian workforce. In general, this is construed as a positive development. It is true that since the 1970s career prospects have opened up for women, especially in the professions, which were previously reserved for men or male dominated. One much-publicised issue here is that of women in management. Publications such as Leonie Still's *Where to From Here? The Managerial Woman in Transition* (1993) have shown that all is not well. Betting on more 'women in management' is like playing a sluggish share market, but without the occasional 'bull runs' to make the wait worthwhile. Private-sector surveys such as Still's study of the top 1000 companies in Australia over eight years to 1992 show that the response to the women's movement, even to the moderate and professional pressure groups of liberal feminism, has been anything but favourable.

Among the explanations for the sharp decline in numbers of women in upper management is that corporate culture has remained unchanged. Others actually blame the women's movement, saying women in management have at times assimilated the corporate culture to such a degree that they have come to 'feel sorry' for

TABLE 7.2 PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, 1984-92

	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	1984	1992	1984	1992
Supervisors*	58.3	71.0	31.8	35.4
		+12.7%		+3.6%
Junior managers	24.6	13.7 (-10.9)	35.3	20.6 (-15.3)
Middle management	14.6	14.0 (-0.6)	21.6	33.9 (+12.3)
Upper management**	2.5	1.3 (-1.2)	11.3	10.1 (-1.2)
		-12.7%		-4.2%
<i>Total losses/gains</i>		<i>0.0</i>		<i>-0.6%</i>

NOTES: * Note that supervisors are at the bottom rung of the managerial ladder and usually are not on the path towards promotion to management. Here women have made substantial gains. In the training positions for middle and upper management and in upper-managerial positions themselves, the number of women has declined by 12.7%.

** Although positions in upper management have been pruned overall, the starting point for women was much lower and this has led to the virtual disappearance of women in upper management. Note also the profound difference between numbers of women and men in middle management.

SOURCE: Still, 1993, p.25 (see also newspaper comments cit. Moodie, 1993, p.9)

the male managers. Harari interviewed some female managers and recorded this account:

'They have been brought up by mother and married into a generation which on the whole is not into women in the workplace in a serious way . . . And in the past 10 years the women's movement has moved so rapidly that I think these men really feel quite out of kilter. The women's movement has swung the pendulum too far. And I think sometimes because of that some older men don't know how to react.' When it comes to workplace equality, (XX) says many male managers know they have to be politically correct. The problem is that they don't know how to be. And she worries that the women's movement, in its struggle for equality, has made many older men believe women are against them.

'I think all the complaining (about equality) has worsened the situation. If anything, I think men are getting more defensive than ever towards women in management just because of these types of studies. They (men) always get told there is no equality and all that does is get their backs up.' (Harari, 1993, p.9).

This passage is very nearly a classic of the 1980s corporate double-think and a mix of poor logic, lack of knowledge and profound naivety. The interview was conducted in 1993. The interviewee claimed that the women's movement had run—and run too fast—for 10 years. Actually, by 1993 24 years had passed and this, in statistical terms, makes it an *entire generation*. Even if one counted only ten years, can this be called 'rapid'? Were these

'older managers' not young at the time when the women's movement began? Second, the interviewee portrays the male corporate management as inflexible, indecisive, lacking in knowledge and resolve. Perhaps Australian management is as poor as that, and some international survey findings to that effect are correct. At the very least, such qualities must be regarded as extremely worrying within an economic context that claims to need flexibility, foresight, multi-skilling, resolve and openness to change for that competitive edge.

Women's participation in management overall (public and private sectors) has risen by 2.8 per cent in the last eight years (1986-94), an increase of 0.34 per cent per year. In the same period the number of women in the workforce has actually doubled. At this rate of progress, managerial equality between the sexes will not be achieved until the end of the next century (cit. Carruthers, 1994b). This is the reality of 'progress', and it is not confined to management alone. Moodie called this a 'Glass Distinction' (Moodie, 1993, p.9), suggesting that the 'glass ceiling' has remained firmly in place. Alternatively, the position may well reflect a new border dispute, namely over where that ceiling is to be in future. It is not impossible that many more men in corporate life have come to the conclusion that they do not want to work with women. Westergaard (1995) has argued that much of what parades as a doctrine of equal opportunity is in fact a call for an asymmetrically arranged social mobility: to make room for more upward mobility than for downward mobility, and this has indeed become a trend for the professional classes. As such, men have benefited more, he argues, in an aggregate growth of upward mobility without corresponding downward mobility: 'Equal opportunity, however, remains almost as far from achievement as several decades before' (p.89).

Another problem is that Australia has no bill of rights and no constitutional guarantee of equality of the sexes before the law. Instead, it now has a confusing and fragmented set of acts at both state and federal levels. New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Queensland each have an Anti-Discrimination Act, the ACT has a Discrimination Act, and the other states have Equal Opportunity Acts. Although the state and federal acts contain similar provisions, they are not identical. Federally, there are the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984, the Affirmative Action Act of 1986 and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissions Act of the same year. In all, about fifteen sets of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation were passed in the 1980s, not counting amendments. This array of acts, and specifically the federal

Sex Discrimination Act, was drafted in response to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The latter act prohibits discrimination against women (section 14, 2) in circumstances that 'are the same or are not materially different' (section 5, 2).

Moens and Ratnapala point out (1992, p.52) that the Sex Discrimination Act lends no direct 'support to comparable-worth advocacy as it is essentially concerned with barriers to entry rather than unequal compensation'. Another interpretation is that the act is about less favourable treatment for women, which includes lower wages. The influence of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission is another important variable in the framework of legislative changes (Bennett, 1988). Even though it is bound by the Sex Discrimination Act in all matters pertaining to employment, its power of interpretation amounts to legislative rather than mere executive power. Thus it can determine against certain interpretations of the Sex Discrimination Act and can, by implication, leave untouched or bypass the very core of discrimination against women in the workplace (Byrnes, 1987; Burton, 1988, 1991). The entire concept of equal opportunity is assailable and remains vulnerable, thanks to the assortment of acts and legislative measures sprinkled through federal and state laws like an afterthought. We have already seen that it is a concept that continues to be resisted in private enterprise.

Moreover, equal opportunity has limited applicability. As a principle it works best in the context of white-collar work, where jobs are clearly defined and similarly structured. Ironically, the (male-dominated) Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, set up in 1986, did not only view matters relating to the Sex Discrimination Act as its lowest priority, but was widely regarded as being 'totally out of sympathy' with the act and as deliberating accordingly. A sexual harassment decision in 1988, for example, deemed it acceptable and normal that employers made sexual advances to women; the decision was later overturned (Sawer, 1990a, p.214).

Furthermore, attacks on the Public Services Board (now Public Service Commission) with its Equal Opportunity Bureau and compliance monitoring function, weakened equal opportunity as a principle in the public sector as much as it removed funding for it. Equal opportunity will continue to be a weak instrument until Australia has a bill of rights or a constitution which enshrines equality before the law as a fundamental principle. At the moment, equal opportunity seems subject to the whims of politics and

politicians, requiring its defenders to campaign strenuously just to limit its erosion.

In 1987 Australia adopted a two-tier system of wage-fixing, setting minimum pay rates but also introducing enterprise bargaining, which further weakened women's wage position (Sawer, 1990a, pp. 91, 205, Horin, 1988). An OECD study of 13 countries showed a strong correlation between centralised institutional labour-market controls, such as central wage-fixing systems, and a large component of public service employment (Rubery, 1992). Clearly, the central wage bargaining system as a whole is far more important and effective than specific policies targeting wage inequalities. Australia, like the European Union, has policies for implementing wage equality. The problem, here as in the UK, is that these are applied in a context of deregulation and fragmentation of the bargaining systems.

In deregulated markets, the proportion of low wage earners, clustering in women's jobs, increases. The stronger the centralised wage-fixing system, the higher the wages of women. Weiler draws the conclusion for the European Union that its attempts to alter inequities will remain ineffectual unless it addresses general wage-fixing systems (Weiler, 1994). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies in Australia. When women's equal-pay claims were dealt with through the centralised wage-fixing system rather than via equal-pay legislation, the results here have been much better than in other OECD countries. Since the 1970s, however, Australia has sadly slipped in the income-equality stakes and now ranks lowest among OECD countries. Enterprise bargaining in the 1990s threatens to wipe out women's gains entirely—along with the ideal of equality in the workplace itself.

As an aside, enterprise bargaining contracts between employers and unions are also part of the *liberal* pluralist tradition, not of the radical tradition. Australia is unique, however, in its alliances in certain work practices. For instance, unions have generally supported enterprise bargaining, while liberal feminist groups, including WEL, have strongly objected to enterprise bargaining.

The two main political parties do not appear to differ substantially on this issue. Kitney has argued in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1994) that the ALP used to regard 'decentralisation' and 'enterprise bargaining' (like 'privatisation') as words of war but that this is no longer the case. Labor now claims that enterprise bargaining can secure higher wages for employees and offer employers improved productivity and thus competitiveness. These claims are being made even though European countries have found that enterprise bargaining and decentralisation of the wage-fixing system do *not*

produce better wages overall but in fact increase wage differentials and inequities substantially over time.

Effective bargaining requires considerable skill and expert knowledge (CCH, 1993), discouraging those with the least money and power, chiefly women, from even attempting the bargaining route. Over time, they will undoubtedly find their wages lowered in real terms and few, if any, concessions to their gender in their work contracts. A 1993 report by the Economic Planning Advisory Council admits that enterprise bargaining 'threatens to produce a more unequally paid, and more unevenly represented, workforce' (Brown and Zappala, 1993, p.82). Caruso has pointed out that enterprise bargaining can disadvantage women in myriad ways. At some Australian universities, she argues, proposals for assessing performance now include measures that would signal 'a return to pre-industrial revolution days' and a piece-work approach to employment (Caruso, 1995, p.15). An (as yet unpublished) study of enterprise bargaining in the private sector by researchers from the University of Queensland lends substantial weight to these conclusions. They found that enterprise bargaining held no positive benefits for women and might even erode those benefits achieved to date. As said in Chapter 2, only 1.3 per cent of companies in the study added maternity leave in their enterprise deals, 2.6 per cent added paternity leave, 3.9 per cent had some arrangement 'to advance women' and none targeted childcare (Boreham et al., 1995).

Women are not well represented at the upper end of the income and wealth scales. Indeed, over the last two decades, there has been an increasing feminisation of poverty (Baldock and Cass, 1988). Current trends do not make one very hopeful of changes for the better in the immediate future, although there is a notable exception: the small business sector. Small business is attracting women at a fast rate, both as managers and as owner/operators. In 1994, approximately one-third of owners and managers of small business were women (Employment and Skills . . . , 1994) and a 1995 research report has forecast that women will overtake men in the owning and managing of small businesses in the near future (Burton and Ryall, 1995). So far it appears that women managers and owners of small businesses are overall more successful than their male counterparts. The survival rate of women-run businesses is higher, partly because debts and overhead costs are generally held lower. However, the growth rate of the business tends to be slower than those run by men (Employment and Skills . . . , 1994). Even in this area of women's relative independence there are problems, as Canadian, UK and Australian studies confirm (Still, 1990;

Belcourt et al., 1991; *Employment and Skills . . .*, 1994). The major issue is that women in business are not taken seriously and hence banks, suppliers, customers and even staff tend to be treated differently to their male counterparts in all respects (Burton and Ryall, 1995).

**Rural women and primary
industries—a paradigm of
independence?**

Rural women are a special case and in recent years have generated a great deal of interest (e.g. James, 1989; Franklin et al., 1994; Alston, 1995). They are an interesting category because most are self-employed. Farming women may well depend on their husbands, but the dependency tends to be mutual. Workforce participation by women in the rural sector has also sharply increased. In 1966 only 11 per cent of graziers were women. Ten years later, they suddenly featured as a third in this occupational grouping (32 per cent). For farmers the picture is similar: from 12 per cent in 1966 to 32 per cent in 1976, together with an increase of female rural workers from 23 per cent to 30 per cent. While the overall on-farm employment has continued to decrease, the number of women in on-farm employment has increased. In the twenty years from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, 21 per cent of men left the rural sector while women's participation grew by 80 per cent, changing the gender composition of on-farm employment from 1:10 female/male to a ratio of 1:3 (Australian Bureau . . ., Labour Force).

The context in which these developments have taken place can be summarised as structural changes which, for individual families, often had very negative consequences. The need for labour cuts and the adoption of new farming methods has forced thousands of farming families off their properties each year since the 1960s (Lawrence, 1991). Added to this is a growing trend to corporatisation of farming and grazing (agribusiness), often under centralised city-based or overseas control. Land flight resulting from this trend, and also from poor economic circumstances, droughts, failing crops and so on, has aided the decline of rural populations and with it the number of farms and the number of individual owners. If this process continues, a majority of farmers will be driven out of production by foreign companies and turned into labourers on their own land, a process which, incidentally, has been suffered by indigenous people all over the world and by the citizens of many developing nations.

One might well ask, then, why women have become so conspicuous in the rural sector at this time. Farm and grazing work has been considered male work for a long time. It is rough, requires long hours, knowledge of machinery, handling of stock, the ability to repair, maintain and sell equipment and stock, and is an occupational area known to be physically and financially risky and to be increasingly jeopardised. In most respects, farm work is male identified (Dempsey, 1992).

In a sense, this question is wrong and one should not be too misled by the statistics. There may not have been overwhelming changes at all. Declaring wives as directors, for example, can save taxes. Second, economic survival has become difficult especially for middle-sized farms. Loss of jackeroos and jillaroos for lack of funds now requires many farm owners to do all the work themselves. In some cases of financially non-self-sustaining farms, women may have had little choice but to run the farm while men sought work elsewhere, although often women seek employment outside and leave the men to run the farm. Finally, women on farms may now well regard themselves as farmers rather than as farmers' wives. Their changed attitude to their role is reflected in census answers.

There is, however, a noticeable group of women who have moved to the country in the last two decades. One subgroup is believed to have done so to avoid high city housing costs (Salt, 1992), another in pursuit of self-employment.

This new visibility is matched by women's sudden appearance in agricultural colleges. In 1965, according to Martin, there was not one woman enrolled at any of the eleven agricultural colleges throughout Australia. Only eight years later, 31 per cent of all agricultural students were women, matching exactly the percentage active in the rural economy (Martin, 1987, p.113). National conferences on women in rural Australia began to be held: one in 1981 was titled 'Women in agriculture—expanding our spheres of influence'. By 1985 the vice-president of the Victorian Farmers and Graziers Association was a woman, and in 1986, the Victorian Rural Women's Network was founded. In 1995, Australia's peak farming organisation, the National Farmers Federation, appointed—for the first time in its history—a woman to the position of executive director (Passey, 1995).

The rural sector and the small business sector (rural and urban) highlight the rise in self-employment among women. My interpretation of this (international) phenomenon is that employment independence has enabled women to dispense with a male-dominated occupational structure and its promotion system based on peer-group assessment. Some of the most entrepreneurial women

have recognised that their chances of success at the level at which they wished to be successful were minimal in conventional settings and institutions. With all the confidence in the world, these women predicted, not entirely inaccurately, that hostility to equality would consume their energies in unproductive damage-control and watchful diplomacy.

The multitude of catchwords for this phenomenon—from ‘glass ceiling’ to ‘sticky ladder’, hide more than they reveal. None of them conveys the squalid nature of prejudice, the damage inflicted on creativity, the undermining effect on one’s ambition and self-esteem. Admittedly, only a few have shed the shackles, but of those few many have succeeded in living one of the dreams of the women’s movement: liberation from negativity, liberation from having false limits imposed on their performance, liberation from the necessity of role-playing not for success but for survival. They are their own bosses and their pay cheques will only be as good as they are. In Europe, women have become dominant in some industries and very successful in their own ventures (*Women of Europe*, 1988). There are an increasing number of examples of Australian women entrepreneurs and some of them are rural women (see Barrowclough et al., 1993).

EDUCATION

Education is an area of a nation’s life which is supposed to reflect its future intentions. Here affirmative action programs (the word is chosen advisedly because programs did exist to specifically address inequities) seem to have done their work in high schools across Australia.

Young women are staying on longer at school and have even begun to outdo young men. They top the result rankings in the NSW Higher School Certificate and have challenged former male domination in all honours lists across the board. They continue to appear in ever-increasing numbers at universities and are overall more likely to complete courses successfully (Scott, 1995). One is tempted to join in the cheers of those who feel that the programs have been working and gender equity has been achieved. Distressingly, such conclusions are, if anything, premature. A closer look at the raw statistics suggests a rather different picture. As Table 7.3 shows, women’s participation in higher education has increased. This is a function not only of population expansion but of true net gains.

Much has been made of retention rates but to an extent this is misguided. Such rates are partly a function of the labour market and

TABLE 7.3 CHANGES IN THE EDUCATION OF FEMALES, 1983–93

Educational indicators	Units	1983	1993
Retention rate to year 12*	rate	43.9 (37.5)	81.4 (71.9)
Higher education*	'000	161.3 (187.3)	307.6 (268.0)
PhD or higher degree student participation**	'000	1.9 (5.2)	6.2 (10.2)
Completed highest school level*	%	41.3 (52.7)	53.3 (62.0)
Completed post-school qualif.*,**	%	29.7 (41.5)	37.1 (48.0)
Completed degree or higher*, **	%	5.0 (9.0)	8.0 (11.0)

NOTES: * Figures in brackets indicate comparative data for males

** 1983 data were not available. The data supplied are derived from 1984

SOURCE: Abbreviated from Townsend and Madden 1994, pp.14–15, 32–33, 66–67, 108–109

job opportunities—or the lack of them. Specific policies have been implemented to increase overall school attendance irrespective of gender in order to keep students out of a labour market which had little need of them. Whereas in the 1960s the majority of students left school before intermediate level, today the majority stay on. The abolition of unemployment benefits for 16- to 17-year-olds in conjunction with the installation of student allowances for the same age group (under the Hawke Labor government) jolted the retention rate for Years 11 and 12 to 60 per cent by 1989 and to nearly 77 per cent by 1993 (see Table 7.3). Overall, 11.5 per cent of females and 12.1 per cent of males completed the highest level of schooling in 1985, and this rose in 1991 to 13.6 per cent for females and 13.2 per cent for males (*Social Indicators*, 1992, p.147).

By themselves, retention rates are no proof of a better-educated society and they do not indicate that students actually learn more by staying longer. By themselves, they do not even guarantee a better chance of employment since most students now have to compete with others with the same high level of schooling for base-level entry into the labour force. Instead, education to Year 12 has become the new benchmark for just about any white-collar job. Those who do not stay on have predictably little chance in the job market.

One of the greatest tragedies in this development is that it confines young people to an institution which has rarely treated them as adults or trained them for adulthood. How are we to expect schools to produce functioning adults when the school environment is by definition one of dependency and regimentation? Schools generally do not teach life experiences and life skills other than in the most contrived and marginal ways. Increasingly, one motivating force for the stayers is not educational at all, not based on interest or the desire to achieve scholastic excellence, but merely

pragmatic: a lack of work. This is educational inflation at its worst and it may have serious effects in future.

Our discovery of childhood in the twentieth century has become a tool for preventing adulthood. As Philip Ariès' poignant book *Centuries of Childhood* so tellingly points out, in past centuries and even early this century, 15- to 18-year-olds were adults and managed their own affairs. Today, we place contradictory demands on young people. Laws permit voting, driving and marriage at an age when most of those who are supposed to make independent judgments do not have independent households but still sit in classrooms, get school lunches cut by Mum, collect school reports and are reprimanded if they absent themselves.

Alternatively, one may look at the number of young women who gain post-schooling qualifications or a university education. Indisputably, as Table 7.3 shows, the number of females in post-secondary facilities has gone up. The number of women enrolled in PhD degrees has also increased in proportion to the number of men 1:0.3 in 1983 and 1:0.5 in 1993. This has been a very positive development, dampened only by the results of two recent studies. A study of women in science in 1995 reported that the field is dominated by middle-class, Anglo-Celtic women (Smith, 1995). Another study by the Council for Australian Postgraduate Associations (1994) found that women are and will be the big losers in the deregulation of postgraduate courses with its proliferation of fee-paying offers (Powell, 1994).

If one wishes to demonstrate by these facts that women's career prospects have dramatically improved, the picture is far less rosy or unambivalent. First, the educational credentials of a substantial proportion of the population have been upgraded over the last 30 years. The Australian labour market now requires a pool of highly educated, highly qualified people. The time of unskilled labour has almost gone, significantly reducing opportunities at the lower end of the occupational scale. The economy further has a decreasing need of people because of technological advances. Given these circumstances, improved general education cannot reflect upward mobility in status or income. For instance, nurses were once trained on the job, with schooling built into the daily work routine. Now, nurses must have the higher school certificate and complete a university degree. Hence, longer school attendance no longer leads to higher incomes and better jobs than previous generations had (Meredith, 1987).

The high school retention rate for young women is also a reflection of the fact that the apprenticeship system has few openings for women in only a limited number of trades and occupations.

Apart from hairdressing, the choices remain slim. In the late 1980s, over 95 per cent of all apprenticeships on offer went to young men (Junor, 1991, p.174). In 1990, 14.6 per cent of apprentices were women and of these 60.5 per cent were in hairdressing. By 1992, females accounted for just 11 per cent of apprentices (Castles, 1993, p.103). Women form a majority only in office traineeships, otherwise traineeships go disproportionately to men (Women's Bureau, 1991, p.9). The enormous deficit of choices for women in the vast array of skilled work perpetuates a gender-segregated labour market. As educational discrepancies at secondary school level are eradicated, the bias in the labour market is more strongly revealed.

Birrell (1995), commenting on 1994 figures recently, argued that since women outstrip men in tertiary enrolments, everything is 'fine'. Presumably, equal opportunity offices can be closed down now. One reason for the increase is the lack of alternatives for women in trades. Moreover, the increase applies in only four of the ten major faculties/fields of study—including nursing and teaching, in which women have been predominant for several decades. Birrell's (1995) article, 'Women storm into the top professions', severely overstates the case. Overall, women at university outnumber men, but they cluster in traditional areas (Castles, 1993, p.101) rather than 'top' professions. There is also no evidence that they enjoy similar employment opportunities and career structures to men.

In the 1990s, universities are being asked to fund an ever-larger proportion of their costs themselves. The resulting commercialisation and corporatisation have had several serious consequences, one of them pertaining directly to women. This is the matter of fees. In 1987 fees started as a Higher Education Administration Charge (HEC) of \$250 a year for undergraduate courses. In 1989 the name was changed to Tuition Tax and set at \$1800 a year per full-time student, to be adjusted for inflation. Those who have the cash and pay a lump sum in advance obtain a discount; those who need to borrow are charged interest, making clear that the financially better-off a student is, the cheaper the courses become. In 1990, the repayment period was cut, increasing the hardship of those who do not qualify for the means-tested study allowance.

Higher degree courses attract variable rates of fees, depending on course and institution. Overseas students are now a major source of income, paying on average \$15 000–20 000 a year in fees (and some even more) for a Masters or PhD. Between 1981 and 1990, the number of students coming to Australia for study quadrupled (*Social Indicators*, 1992, p.144). These figures appear to signal a major success in the export of education. They may well do so. From an educational point of view, one can only regret the return by stealth

of elitist education. 'Elitist' does not refer here to a scholastic elite but to an economic one. The idea that some people should gain admission to universities because of their financial muscle rather than their intellectual prowess has always been objectionable. Intelligence and wealth are not connected, nor is poverty in any way a predictor of intelligence. TAFE colleges have followed suit. Although their fees are generally lower than university tuition charges, many of the courses are aimed at a particularly vulnerable group of people, namely those who are educationally disadvantaged, unskilled and/or out of work. Chief among those are again women, and often migrant women.

It is easy to see that these fiscal arrangements have repercussions. They result in a shift in student populations and a decline in enrolments of women, particularly those of mature-age status. They lead to invitations for the wealthiest instead of the brightest. They fly in the face of the much-vaunted policies of access and equity. At many TAFE colleges, fees have reduced women's participation by as much as 35 per cent since 1988. Ironically, many of those enrolled are learning employable skills and therefore have a very important role to play in reducing unemployment and hence the expenditure of taxpayers' money on welfare support. For women who hold a JobSearch allowance, fees are reduced by 50 per cent but in many cases this still puts specific courses out of reach (see Junior, 1991, p.187).

This situation extends to women seeking a career in the tertiary sector. By 1986, ten years after the women's movement had passed its peak, 75.8 per cent of women at universities were employed in positions of lecturer or below, of which up to 99.7 per cent (at tutor/level A level) were untenured (Commonwealth . . . , *Tertiary*, 1987, Tables 48/49). It is true that the proportion of women in academic positions has increased. Between 1988 to 1991 it rose by 3.5 points from 27.3 to 30.8 per cent, but the major increases were in the Lecturer A and B scales. Above senior lecturer the proportion has actually *declined* (from 13.8 per cent to 9.8 per cent) (Castles, 1993, p.107).

Contract appointments have not been reduced but increased, and the proportion of staff holding tenure in tertiary institutions decreased from 67 per cent in 1980 to 30 per cent in 1990, betraying a trend that Collins (1994) calls 'the casualisation of research postgraduate employment'. The figures are not gender neutral. For instance, at Macquarie University, the proportion of female research and teaching staff with tenure was just 19.5 per cent in 1988 (cit. Barlow, 1991, p. 76). At some universities the figure is even lower.

Academic tenure, for many staff on contract, has become a distant dream and some may never survive the effects of the 1990s funding cuts, which are currently coupled with a decline in demand for university places of up to 4 per cent (Illing, 1995a). Those on contracts (typically of three years) may or may not have them renewed. Should they survive the rationalisations, they may be able to apply for tenure and will then be placed on probation for three years. This means that some may stay untenured for as long as nine years (contract plus one renewal, plus tenure track probation period). It is less common, but not unusual, for women to have been untenured for as long as twelve to fifteen years, and it is also not unknown for them to have only one-year contractual arrangements. In pockets of individual departments at some institutions, up to 60 per cent of staff are untenured, again most of them women.

The current trend towards fewer tenured positions or even the abolition of tenure is not a favourable development for women, especially not while they remain clustered in the lowest-rung job categories. The so-called Hoare Report to the government admits this much and excuses the gender imbalance by saying that universities 'are understandably preoccupied with ensuring that they have flexibility in their staffing arrangements' (Commonwealth, 1995, p.16). The 'Hoare Report' contains the new guidelines for universities into the 21st century. There are substantial disadvantages in contractual arrangements as distinct from open-ended or tenured appointments. Contract staff cannot plan long-range projects effectively or seek appropriate research funding. The coveted Australian Research Grant, for instance, typically runs for three years and needs to be applied for a year ahead. Staff on contract cannot take on PhD supervision as this usually takes three to four years. They cannot take on government consultancies or overseas work because, again, the time-frame usually militates against this. Even establishing and maintaining valuable community and professional links may be inadvertently discouraged because of doubts as to whether such networks will remain stable (changing university employment usually requires a move to another town or even state). Hence, contract employment hampers many of the work processes on which promotion and competition for jobs are based. It also affects intellectual honesty and outspokenness. It seems ironic to me that structural conditions were not changed first if general open-ended work situations are the goal. The truth is so simple: an emphasis on contract will increase surface (and often poor-quality) activity but decrease substantial research activity at a time when Australia claims to need a more competitive edge in research and

development. There are no incentives in place at the moment to achieve long-term high-quality output in future.

Moreover, the work atmosphere in predominantly untenured groups is usually tense and anxious as well as intellectually docile. Untenured staff are also vulnerable to all manner of abuse. Some may try to increase their chances of contract renewal or tenure by currying favour with influential senior staff members and administrators. Such willingness to collaborate can and has been severely abused by management, thus allowing it to acquire corrupt powers or services. All of these factors have been known about for a long time, yet restructuring has gone on regardless and at a time when women were just beginning to perceive the academy as a legitimate career option. These developments are a legacy of the 1980s, just as is the political and intellectual silence of academia. The full impact of the change of direction in universities on women and certain minority groups will most likely be felt as the 1990s progress.

Recently, there have been expressions of concern that women are being left behind again in other ways. At the 1995 Businesswoman of the Year Award, federal Health Minister Carmen Lawrence was quoted as saying that women barely feature in the development of the so-called 'information superhighway'. Ninety-five per cent of Internet users are men, and women are going to 'be dragged along, once again, by structures and practices that don't include us, don't value us and don't meet our needs' (Kingston, 1995). At about the same time, at an International Women's Day luncheon in Canberra:

[Dale Spender] said the fact that women now dominated in achieving higher education qualifications—proving they had mastered the print medium after a long feminist struggle—appeared to mean that the medium had lost its power.

Women had succeeded in print 'because print is no longer the primary information medium: women only got their foot in the door and set up their presses when the power had flown to electronic media'. She went on: 'It is a cruel irony that women have learned to excel in a system based on writing and reading just when the goalposts are about to be shifted, because the education of the future is going to be computer-based.' (Kingston, 1995)

Whether or not one is entirely convinced by the promise of the 'superhighway' is almost immaterial. What is of great significance is the constant shifting of goalposts, the fact of women seeming to succeed and then finding their moment *receding* almost as if the dream of translating success in education into careers were a mirage.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

The state of families in Australia over the last three decades has been patchy indeed, and some major changes in lifestyles have occurred in this period. It is therefore difficult to generalise the developments. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, definitions of the family are currently being disputed and challenged in federal parliament, a process that began in the Year of the Family in 1994. Such debates are as much a reflection of changed family patterns as they are of some modest attempt to accommodate non-traditional family formations. The simplest and most often used definition is that underwritten and used by the Australian Council of Social Service: A family is a unit of one or two parents with one or more dependent children (Davis, 1991, p.223).

The question of the family has always been central to the Liberal-National Party Coalition platform. In the 1980s and 1990s, leaders such as John Howard and Andrew Peacock presented themselves as concerned for the Australian family. Indeed, their campaigns hinged on the claim that the family was 'under threat' in every way (Davis, 1991, p.222). This platform failed to gain them government, at least until 1996, partly, one suspects, because a reconstructed model from the 1950s was simply out of date in the 1980s and 1990s, and partly because the families conforming to the Coalition ideal were in the minority (only 17 per cent fitted the model John Howard had conjured up) and probably did not feel terribly threatened.

Irrespective of party politics, Australia has always tended to be pro-family and pro-children. At official policy level reproduction has been closely tied to the population debates or, rather, to the 'empty cradle' syndrome. Australian women, so the argument went, were not producing enough children to maintain the nation, let alone make it grow. As the 1904 Royal Commission on the Birth Rate in New South Wales argued: 'The restriction of population growth, whether owing to restraint of natural increase, or discouragement of immigration, is unfavourable to the moral, physical and economic welfare of the people' (Royal Commission, 1904, pp.36, 52-4). Among the first pieces of social welfare policy since Federation was, not surprisingly, a maternity allowance. The Canberra-based Women's Advisory Body Working Party commented in 1977: 'Maternity allowances were introduced in 1912 because it was said the government was unable to regard the rate of natural increase of population in the Commonwealth with other than the deepest concern' (cit. Magarey et al. 1993, p.12). However, the birth rate continued to decline, even more sharply during the

Depression. In 1944 the National Health and Medical Research Council warned that if current trends continued, the decline of birth rates after the 1950s would lead to an absolute decline of the Australian population by the 1980s (cit. Appleyard, 1971, p.7). One needs to note that the crude birth rate was almost twice that of today. With the increasing availability of the pill in the 1970s, the birth rate fell to below that required for zero population growth and has remained at this level ever since. Net reproduction rates in the period 1947–60 actually increased from 1.4 to 1.7. By 1976 Australia's natural increase had fallen below replacement level. In 1990, the net reproduction rate was 0.91, approximately 9 per cent below replacement level (*Social Indicators*, 1992, p.54). Immigration then became a mechanism for building up the population.

Two of the most notable changes from the 1960s to the 1990s are the rise in ex-nuptial births and the increase in the number of women living on their own. The latter is partly explicable by the fact that women live longer than men, and partly by the trend for young women to move out of the parental home before marriage—which is likely to be a direct result of the women's movement. Women in the 1990s are less constrained and have rights to enter into lease agreements, borrow money, buy houses and so on that they did not hold in the 1960s. If freedom is the freedom to move, to have one's own space and to act independently, then the women's movement has certainly made women freer.

Whether one wishes to say the same of women's increasing inclination to bear children outside marriage is another matter. The statistics suggest that many ex-nuptial children are not without a father. The most recent figures show that more than 80 per cent of men who have fathered children do acknowledge their fatherhood (see Table 7.4). Indeed, many couples live together but choose not to marry. Alternatively, a mother and her dependent child or children may share a home with another adult or adults. The variety of possible living arrangements has grown since the 1970s, when experiments in lifestyles and living arrangements resulted in the formation of communes, shared rental accommodation, poly-partnerships and open gay and lesbian couple relationships with or without children.

Marriages do not last as long as they did 30 years ago. After 1975, with the introduction of the no-guilt clause, divorce rates peaked, then more or less stabilised at around 11 divorces per 1000 married women per year, compared with 3 per 1000 married women in 1961 (*Social Indicators*, 1992, p.50).

This supposedly golden past of Australian families had an underside. The Commonwealth Matrimonial Causes Act of 1959,

TABLE 7.4 MARRIAGE, BIRTH AND FAMILY PATTERNS 1983-93

	Unit	1983	1993
Female-headed households with dependent children (of all families)	%	6.6	8.0
Females living alone (of population) *	%	9.5 (6.8)	11.4 (8.9)
Marriage rate of female singles	%	5.01	3.78
Duration of marriage (median)	years	7.7	7.6
Divorce rate	rate	12.2	12.1
Crude birth rate (per 1000 population)	no.	15.8	14.7
Total fertility (per woman)	no.	1.93	1.87
Ex-nuptial births (of total live births)	%	14.7	24.9
Ex-nuptial births (total acknowledged by father)	%	64.5	81.7
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	no.	9.6	6.1
Median age at first confinement (nuptial)	years	25.7	28.3
Under age 20 at confinement (all confinements)	%	6.9	5.1
Over age 40	%	0.8	1.6

SOURCE: Adapted and abbreviated from Townsend and Madden, 1994 pp.14-15, 32-33, 66-67, 108-109

NOTES: * Figures in brackets indicate comparative data for males

which came into effect in February 1961, was the first federal marriage act in Australia, replacing differing state laws. In Victoria, NSW and Tasmania, domestic violence was a reason for divorce only in certain circumstances. There had to be 'habitual cruelty, including repeated assault and cruel beatings' for at least a year immediately preceding the petition for divorce. Only South Australia recognised habitual cruelty as a reason for divorce per se. One wonders how lawgivers thought women would survive 'cruel beatings' for an entire year! Continual drunkenness also did not usually suffice as grounds for divorce, nor did imprisonment of a partner for up to five years. Insanity of a partner required six years of continuous institutionalisation before it constituted grounds for divorce. Attempted murder was seen as sufficient grounds but this had to be proven. In cases of desertion, the partner had to be absent for upwards of two years before the law was willing to step in and grant a divorce. Queensland had almost none of even these extreme provisions (MacKenzie, 1962, pp.397-9). Claims of the erstwhile 'durability' of Australian marriages and families need to be tempered by the recognition that, once a marriage was made, there existed very few ways to get out of it. Durability of marriage was therefore not a measure of individual choice, commitment and matrimonial harmony but often relied on a good deal of coercion.

One needs to remember, too, that the marriage rate overall today is much higher than before World War II and that life expectancy has risen sharply. Far from being the promiscuous, free-ranging generation they are often portrayed as, today's adult population is much more 'marriage-happy' than it has ever been.

Several disparate reasons may account for the growth in marriage rates. An important one is economic. A house of one's own may cost the equivalent of five to seven full years' salary and is therefore attainable only on two incomes. Although outright home ownership has increased (partly as an indication of an ageing population), mortgaged ownership has declined (Yates and Vipond, 1991, p.240).

Other reasons are harder to pinpoint, but one may concern attitudes to sexuality. In the pre-war era, but also well into the 1950s, women were not generally believed to possess an independent sexuality. Spinsters and maiden aunts were common and quite acceptable. In the women's movement, women not only reclaimed their own bodies but insisted on an independent sexuality, a claim which raised some awkward moral questions, especially for those who were publicly identified as 'single'. Same-sex joint household occupancy fell into disrepute and many single people preferred to be identified as swinging singles rather than stigmatised as homosexual. Acceptability and respectability are still important to many, and one may hypothesise that marriage is a way of attaining it, even though the trend is for people to marry later.

Yet another reason for the growth in marriage rates may be the increasing mobility of Australians, who are more inclined than ever to change city and state to follow a promotion, a more promising job, or any job at all. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the financially beleaguered state of Victoria lost a substantial section of its population, largely to Queensland. Western Australia has also gained population. Such population shifts often tear families apart and fracture fragile family and friendship networks, leaving people displaced, isolated and without much support. Marriage is often perceived as a way of preventing loneliness.

Another factor contributing to the higher marriage rate is re-marriage. As Table 7.4 suggests, the number of female-headed households has steadily risen over the years. Much of that increase is based not on women's voluntary decision to raise children on their own, but on marriage breakdown, often leaving the woman and children in a precarious financial situation. The principal familial recipients of welfare benefits are female-headed households, and 90 per cent of sole-parent families are headed by a woman. Poverty among Australian families has risen dramatically in the last ten to twenty years. Families constituted 28 per cent of Australia's poor

in 1972–73 and 49 per cent in 1985–86. Over the same period, the proportion of children in poverty rose from 7 per cent to 18 per cent. Australia and the US have the highest levels of child poverty among OECD countries (Saunders and Whitford, 1987).

Growing poverty affects not only marriage and divorce patterns, but also government policy. Eligibility for the Family Allowance Supplement has been gradually tightened and is now means tested, yet it is so rarely adjusted for inflation that its value has gone down (Davis, 1991, p.224). Eligibility for the basic Family Allowance is determined by age of offspring (who must be under 16) and by combined annual household income. In 1994, the Dependent Spouse Rebate was replaced by the Home Childcare Allowance, providing for payment of up to \$60 a fortnight regardless of the number of children or of household income. This allowance is not available for women on the JobSearch allowance (previously called unemployment benefit). This is some shift away from the original Dependent Spouse Rebate in the Fraser years when this rebate was payable to the breadwinner, regardless of whether the couple had any children, and was worth almost twice as much as the Family Allowance. The Office of the Status of Women commented that this constituted 'a redistribution from mothers of dependent children in favour of husbands with a dependent wife' (OSW, 1984, p.23; cf Sawyer, 1990a, p. 60).

Overall, if anything, we might well regard the present trend to marriage and the family as heralding a new era of conservatism. Sexual practice goes through fluctuating cycles and sexuality is declining as an 'interest'. The feared Sodom and Gomorrah has not eventuated as a result of more freedom and more flexible relationships. Indeed, a Deakin University survey for the federal Department of Health in 1995 found that the sexual revolution is over (Macken, 1995). Most partners are faithful and nearly half the subjects surveyed had been with the same partner for over ten years. Sexual activity has declined overall, contraception has become irrelevant for many and a return to older methods of contraception has been accompanied by a substantial decline in sales of contraceptive devices and the pill. The main reason is not that AIDS has reinducted fear of sexually transmissible disease, although this has played a role, but that fatigue and stress have reduced interest in sex, particularly among working women.

The last two chapters may be summed up as follows. Overall, Australian women today are more independent and more socially 'enabled' to make independent judgments and choices. They are healthier and better educated, but so are men. Are women therefore freer? In terms of the crudest measures of what people actually do,

as opposed to how they are (health), where they live (housing) and what they can afford (economics), changes have occurred from the 1960s to the 1990s, but not always in the direction that the women's movement might have predicted or intended. Some independence, as in the case of sole parenthood, has brought new complications. Work as one possible source of greater independence has been offset by double burdens of household and outside work. Work conditions themselves have declined overall and the entire area of equal opportunity versus job insecurity rests on quicksand.

The changes are ambiguous and, if anything, there have been too few unequivocal gains for women. Almost all of the findings presented by a Norwegian feminist in 1984 still hold true ten years later in Australia as well as in most other western industrialised nations:

[T]he conditions of men have improved more than those of women . . . For example, husbands do not participate more in household and child care activities when an increasing number of women enter the paid labor force. It is much more difficult for women to obtain paid work than for men, and, when hired, women get lower salaries. Women with education equal to that of men are promoted less often and fired at an early stage when crises occur. Quota systems, demanded as affirmative action to improve women's positions in the educational system, have been used to a greater extent to guarantee less-qualified men educational opportunities within traditionally women's areas. And women have understood that mere 'equal opportunity' rights are unjust—because they favour those groups which already have the greatest resources, and increase the gaps between weak and strong, poor and rich—in plain text, between women and men (Ås, 1984, p.510).

PANACEAS FOR THE FUTURE?

Feminism, says Damousi (1994), 'has been one of the most significant cultural, political and intellectual movements of the 20th century'. She adds that feminism of the 1990s is 'a celebration rather than a negation of women's difference, diversity and plurality'. To the first statement I can give my wholehearted support. From the second, I beg to differ.

Feminism has undoubtedly achieved a great deal. One of its chief practical strengths has been its ability to undermine existing norms. Feminism has not only been inspirational but pragmatically influential in culture, education, health, social policy and politics. Indeed, feminism, as a set of movements in the western world, has gone further than almost any other movement in modern times by infiltrating institutions and forcing change. The 'women's vote', which was once not even measured, is now regarded as key to winning or losing government. WEL is correct in saying that it helped Labor win power in 1972. One of the factors that toppled the Liberal Party from government in 1983 was its unwillingness to act on the Action Plan for Women, chiefly by failing to introduce anti-discrimination legislation (Asher, 1984) which caused a 'fatal loss of women voters' (Sawer, 1990a, p.61). The Liberal Party also failed to win the 'unlosable' election in 1993 because it

failed to secure the women's vote. Women have not only become empowered, they have also proved they have power to act and to change the political leadership.

Beyond that, feminism has effectively argued that its concerns are *not* just 'women's issues'—and therefore not in any way apolitical or socially marginal—but are important for society as a whole, affecting quality of life, distribution of wealth, general safety, general justice, equality before the law, freedom of (self-)expression and self-determination, rights of citizenship and rites of passage. In essence, feminism is about exposing vested interests, breaking social, political and economic habits and inventing an alternative future.

Feminism has always been a mixture of pragmatism and dreaming, of praxis and utopia, of small-scale steps and large projects. Unlike their first-wave predecessors, second-wave feminists have forged an organisational network which has managed to infiltrate government and national institutions and in doing so achieve attitudinal changes of some magnitude, especially among the younger generation. Few people today would doubt that a woman can drive a tram or a truck, or be a company director, or a judge.

Like their counterparts in Scandinavian countries but unlike those almost everywhere else, Australian feminists have opted to collaborate with the state and infiltrate the bureaucracy. Indeed, they have developed this collaboration almost into an art form. The Australian response is unique. For instance, Icelandic and Scandinavian women concentrated their efforts directly onto getting women into parliament. In Australia, rather than seeking to get more women into party politics, feminists at first sought entry into state and federal bureaucracies and came to be known as 'femocrats'. Despite my native European's distrust of bureaucracy and 'the state', experience has convinced me that femocracy deserves to be taken seriously, that it is not a 'sell-out' or a sop to the old guard, but a valiant attempt to gain hold of some of the reins that direct this country (Kaplan, 1994).

Now the time for reflection has come, if only as an auditing exercise to get the books in order and start again with a clean slate. In a formal and structural sense, women's organisations are neither enduring nor politically secure. Until recently, the emphasis has been on maintaining an image of unity among women. Women's formal organisational networks are astoundingly widespread, and beyond specific points of disagreement, any one group would unquestionably support the others. However, the movement has had its setbacks. Many women's organisations could not exist without government funding, and this dependency tends to restrain them from exceeding their social and advocacy role and becoming

a contesting political opposition. Also, the women's movement, for all its clout, has not managed to infiltrate areas of hard-core decision making such as taxation and economic planning—both of which have important effects on women's welfare. Further, overall networking between non-government groups is relatively weak and this, together with funding dependency, is not a promising recipe for influencing, let alone contesting, government policy (Sawer and Groves, 1994). In addition, women's groups are seriously divided on some issues—often on class, racial, sexuality, and career lines. Yolanda Lee, senior vice-president of the National Council of Women in 1995, has noted that working women and mothers who choose to stay at home are not fighting their battles together and that this 'breaks women, it divides them into two' (cit. Carruthers, 1995, p.3). That cleavage has not disappeared, nor have the other, more fundamental differences.

FENCES AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTS

Returning to Damousi's second point that Australian feminists 'celebrate rather than negate difference, diversity and plurality', this is a worthwhile aim but hardly a *fait accompli*. It depends, of course, on whether one means theoretical, postmodernist differences or specific political and everyday ones. Who *actually* celebrates difference, diversity and plurality? The only people I know who hold public displays of a celebratory kind are gay and lesbian groups (Mardi Gras), and Aboriginal and migrant groups (Carnivale). Cultural assertiveness by minorities is indeed a feature of the 1990s, and such 'celebration of difference' can be highly lucrative. Malcolm Fraser's approach to multiculturalism as culture rather than as policy and a commitment to justice has been a major influence on current trends. But how do Australian-born white feminists 'celebrate' difference and plurality, and, even more pertinently, with whom do they celebrate it? I do not have any unequivocal answers to these questions.

Over the years, women of different backgrounds, including Aboriginal women, have learned to fight back. I am convinced that the new assertiveness of minority groups has come neither from multiculturalism nor from postmodernism, but from the vocabulary of the 1970s, tied in as it was with the left-leaning ideology of the labour and women's movements and the politics of equality. Liberation is the key word, measuring 'progress' in terms of a reduction in human misery. The underlying vitality of the women's movement in Australia was maintained by radical demands for a

redistribution of wealth, notwithstanding the great success of liberal feminism with its bangles of equal opportunity, managerialism and careerism—none of which were ever designed to benefit the working class or minorities. Equal opportunity remains weak because ultimately it only works for white-collar workers and public servants. In the Australian Public Service, however, its achievements have been exemplary (*Implementation of . . .*, 1994).

It is good Australian middle-class chest-beating practice to reflect on the past and admit that migrant women were generally not welcome in the women's movement. The question is whether the movement's attitude has shifted from the ignoring of difference, diversity and plurality to their celebration. There is no evidence, anecdotally or systematically, that many or most feminists of Anglo-Celtic Australian families have accepted with *ease* women from different backgrounds, or that they regard the 'others' as equal, let alone feel inclined to celebrate their mutual difference!

Australians' historical tendency to exclude newcomers from different backgrounds is intact today—in the women's movement as elsewhere. The cultural restraint theory, initially proposed by Kirkpatrick (1974), may apply not just to women vis-à-vis men but to women vis-à-vis 'different' women. Here, as in the larger social context, the problem of tokenism is acute. This is true of immigrant women and even more so of Aboriginal women. Tokenism at times turns into inverse racism in those cases when, ironically, the majority listeners are positively inclined towards hearing minority opinion. The problem is that the one is seen as representative and typical of all. Jackie Huggins observes:

You're usually the only Black at various conferences and meetings, and there is a great deal of responsibility and weight on your shoulders because everything you say people are going to take as gospel truth, because you are made out to be the expert and it is not necessarily that way. I don't speak for all Aboriginal people. I think that the white fellas don't see that sometimes; they only see you as an Aboriginal woman out there talking, or writing, 'speaking for' everybody and that's certainly not the case. (cit. Goodall and Huggins, 1992, p.412)

Australians, like few other western peoples excepting the British, have a complex set of rituals of non-verbal cues that indicate, ever so subtly, approval or disapproval, inclusion or exclusion. Australia is a culture of concealment rather than of exuberant self-expression. 'Sensitive' matters are often not discussed but expressed by such subtle cues that there is no mode of discourse available to respond to them. Prejudice, particularly racism, is expressed in such ways.

Not all Australian feminists are afflicted in this fashion. There are outstanding women of courage and open-mindedness who have little patience with petty prejudice. They have plenty of experience themselves of being victimised or put in situations where they cannot defend themselves. The culture of concealment produces sociopolitical and cultural cleavages which could be eradicated if there were more public debate. There is little, if any, and the omission, be it in coming to terms with lesbians, Aboriginal or immigrant women, today weighs heavily on the women's movement. As a consequence, Australian women and feminists are split at least into three ethnic camps: migrant, Aboriginal and Anglo-Celtic. A celebration over the fences is no celebration at all. The goal of citizenship is a framework for bestowing not just equal rights but equal respect. This recedes from view. Tokenism, to quote Clarke, 'serves to divide women among themselves' (Clarke, 1984, p.58).

Of course, as has often been pointed out, ethnicity is not the only dividing fence in the feminism of the 1990s. In 1970, the Spartacists observed:

The present women's liberation movement includes both radical women and men whose orientation is basically liberal and middle class. The focus of many women seems to be mainly the social and personal problems of middle-class, college-educated women . . . The experience of the problems of middle-class women may provide a valid starting point for radicalization, but a movement which adopts a liberal, middle-class approach is doomed to sterility and failure. (Spartacist League . . . , 1970, p.10)

The league's plea for a 'non-exclusionist class-conscious women's liberation organisation' was not realised on the basis of either class or ethnicity. But a politics of inclusion, at least on a class basis, was clearly advocated by some in Australia from the very start of the movement. We are now entering a new phase of feminism, one that should keep us very alert. As feminist research settles into academia almost as if it had always been there, a feminist academic ivory-tower league is emerging, preoccupied with a separate universe of inquiry that is neither shared by nor has much overlap with male/mainstream discourse. This is not to say, however, that it is marginal. This growing elitist group, I suggest, has created an edifice in *parallel* to the male power structure, involving as much gatekeeping, power battling and privilege as the male/mainstream ever did.

Increasingly, this brand of feminist practice is linked neither to social change nor to progressive social responsibility. Nor, need one add, is it any longer capable of generating a truly new vision. Ivory-tower feminists have abandoned the life of 'nomads of the

present' (Melucci, 1989) and settled comfortably into institutions and dominant power structures. If one were to examine their social, educational and ethnic attributes, one might not be surprised to find that they are mainly white, middle-class, part of the dominant culture and educated at the best schools. It is at this level that the real integration of the women's movement has occurred—into an existing classist framework, forging divides in ways which have long been familiar in mainstream culture.

An immediate and crippling effect of this contraction of feminism into ever smaller and tighter circles defined by self-interest and prejudice is a weakening of the centre. Movements may peter out ultimately not because the arguments that gave rise to them have been diluted or outmoded, but because they splinter and lose their unity and the power associated with it.

There are several dangers for institutionalised feminism in the 1990s. Having started out as a challenge to fundamental concepts, it now risks automatically being presumed (and presuming itself) to be progressive. It may even go further and implicitly lay claim to 'truer' knowledge than the mainstream. Claims of this kind are not compatible with a platform of equality. They are also not in the least related to a social democratic agenda. Thornton said in 1984 that a feminist social theory of gender must provide, among other things, a way of understanding (historical) change in gender relations and thus form the basis for a politics directed towards ending women's gender subordination (Thornton, 1984, pp.152–3).

Thornton's comment is more important today than ever because our political practice, which was to be underpinned by theory and vice versa, has been invaded by postmodernism, creating a mood in which explicit political theories have been swamped by relativities and epistemological uncertainties. Ironically, the cancer of the women's movement in part has been the triumph of postmodernist discourse, which turns its back on the very question that started the movement: that of inequality.

The academicisation of feminist thinking has been lamented by a number of writers (cf. Yeatman, 1990). The drawbacks of theorising—namely the difficulty of translating it into everyday reality—were pointed out early in the women's movement, as was the (related) sense of a class-based division within the women's movement.

Any tendency to separate out the theoretical and non-theoretical women moves against the trust we share. No woman wants to shed one group of oppressors to take on another group, particularly when they are their own sex and when they use the direct experience of

women to analyse and digest and develop the classical style of intellectuality which precludes process, but creates followers. Much of this expert knowledge then becomes theory far removed from direct experience . . .

In common with other revolutionary movements, the development of an élite in Women's Liberation, with the division of theory and practice, a group who 'knows how to use theory' and a group who 'only' directly experiences, is linked to the worst aspects of class society. (Campbell, 1972, p.10)

I see nothing wrong with the pursuit of rigorous inquiry. Rigorous thinking does not prevent activism. On the contrary, as long as the theory is committed to translating itself into practice it becomes the vehicle and blueprint for action in a dialectical relationship with the action itself. The problem lies rather in the nature of the theory. A theory that rejects or discourages practice and devalues or casts doubt on the validity of concrete references to the world as it is is bound to become disconnected from praxis (Stephens, 1988). Postmodernism, while fruitful in its discussion of diversity, plurality and difference, has bequeathed political liberatory pragmatists several Trojan horses with its entropy and anti-historicism. (cf. Fraser and Nicholson 1988; Curthoys 1993). The problem with 'problematising' texts, discourses and categories is that in the form in which these are currently being discussed (as fragmentations, complex interrelationships and interactions) they acquire relativist features and ultimately apolitical dimensions. 'Women' become merely theoretically constructed and the question can even be raised whether 'woman' exists at all (Riley, 1988). This indeed is a 'postmodern paralysis' (Moore, 1991). In contrast, political action is concretely placed in the real world. In the contemporary world, women are entities and clearly disadvantaged ones. They may well form an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) but they have become such precisely because they had issues in common that they believed needed urgent attention. Women's struggle has certainly been pluralist (Misztal, 1987), but it has been based on a political agenda that is incompatible with the postmodernist claim that there is no 'truth' there—that all is a play of masks.

Further, political action demands moral commitment. One cannot just demand bread: one must say why it is morally wrong and ethically indefensible for some to eat while others go hungry. The entire drive for 'social justice' as understood in western social democracies is an admission that present socioeconomic arrangements are unethical. There are rights and wrongs in political action.

There are also commitment and principles—and in the women's and other liberatory movements the chief principle is justice.

Postmodernism is suspicious of such simple aims and clear moral judgments. However, the logical conclusion of its withdrawal from any binding ethical framework that still lingers from the Enlightenment tradition is that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* becomes no more or less valid or interesting as a text than the *Kama Sutra*, Marx's *Capital* or the Bible. Such relativism plays well into the hands of recent theories and moves *against* social justice, equality, the rights of minorities, participatory democracy and the like (Modleski, 1991). Postmodernism, not accidentally, has enjoyed its heyday at the same time as sociobiology. The fact that 'good' feminists have taken it up may have hidden these flaws for longer than was desirable.

There are core democratic values that most western countries have long cherished. Whether or not these are contested as 'universals' (Yeatman, 1995), they offer an anchor point. Disadvantage and oppression become measurable precisely because they are out of line with the kinds of freedom, equality and citizenship that nations hold dear.

Another drawback in the postmodernist mindset is the highly pessimistic or nihilistic position that all debates on equality are empty and ultimately meaningless because every new inclusion (acceptance/right/achievement) only leads to new and different exclusions and every new step towards an elusive 'justice' entails new injustices. Gains do not always contain losses, or at least losses of the same order, as philosophers of history have long known (Collingwood, 1963). Moreover, for a *political* movement such thinking is deadly, putting out the flame and fragmenting its source.

One is tempted to draw conclusions that might sound well-worn to those familiar with the history of revolutionary and liberatory movements. The Spanish Civil War, for instance, once held to have been a working-class movement against powerful landowners and capitalist entrepreneurs, was in fact, at heart, a protest movement of the strengthening bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie may have sought the aid of the working class to bring its claims to fruition but once it was strong enough to act on its own, the working classes were left behind.

Mutatis mutandis, one may speculate that the women's movement in Australia has similarly been a protest by the upper (well-educated) echelon of middle-class women. Enlisting working-class women in their struggle lent weight to the cause, but did it benefit working-class women? I see no evidence of this. To be sure, vast improvements have been made in the field of health, but the health and health care of *all* Australians, with the general

exception of Aborigines, have improved since the war. Some writers have recently re-emphasised class as a driving force in the Australian women's movement (e.g. Burgmann, 1993; Penson, 1995) and my reading of the Australian women's movement has led me to similar assumptions, albeit tentatively so.

Margaret Power argued in 1975 that although it was 'frequently assumed that significant change has occurred in women's economic and social role in Australia, the changes that have occurred have been over-emphasised and exaggerated' (p.7). Twenty years later, it is still possible to concur. Certainly, a handful of women from working-class backgrounds now fill positions of power or at least seniority, just as is true of men from working-class backgrounds. However, the majority of women often falsely advertised as feminist 'role models' come from relatively privileged backgrounds. Anne Game argued in 1984 that equal employment opportunity largely assisted women who were already in privileged positions vis-à-vis the bulk of women employees. In 1987, Grimes's study of affirmative action at universities came to similar conclusions. A few working-class women have 'broken through', not through a 'glass ceiling' but through class and gender barriers.

For those who now find themselves among the privileged, the achievements of the last decades must appear overwhelming. Given that it involved a minute proportion of women in Australia, the women's movement has been a stunning success. As Leonie Still writes:

This book is thus dedicated to those women who have helped shape the 'golden age' of where we are today. When we consider the lives of our mothers and grandmothers, the 1990s Australian woman is in a most fortunate position. Because of developing opportunities she is the best educated of the three generations; she is the first generation to have experienced a 'career' as opposed to 'going to work' or of being permitted to have a job; she has regular and comfortable income and regular employment; she has wide degrees of freedom to move if current employment does not suit her ambitions; and she is becoming a member of the decision-making and opinion-making groups within Australian society. All of this has been achieved within the space of 30 years. (Still, 1993, p.x)

The middle-class basis of this is unmistakable. Vast numbers of women have neither a 'regular and comfortable' income nor, indeed, a career. As Elaine Thompson put it so well, this is 'singing the siren song of privilege' (Thompson, 1994, p. 235). Women may well be better educated overall, but so are men and the general raising of educational standards is in itself no measure of increased success and status. The Anglocentric view is also reflected in the

global statement of the successes of 'the Australian woman'. This book, I hope, has shown that one can take issue with all of these claims. The success for some Anglo-Celtic, Australian-born and largely middle-class women has indeed been impressive. But for all the others it cannot be described as anything but a meagre harvest. One possible exception applies to culture and the arts.

Art and life have altered remarkably for Australian women artists in the last twenty years. Arguably, women are now more active as professional artists here than in comparable Western countries like the United States, Germany or the United Kingdom, with painters, sculptors, photographers, printmakers and installation artists working in greater numbers than ever before . . . While many women engaging in important cultural work still deliberately eschew the professionalisation of feminine creativity, the challenges posed by the artistic practice of women working in the public domain constitutes the most distinctive transformation in Australian arts practice of the last generation. Quite simply, they have made a different world from their mothers. (Ewington, 1995, p.102)

Tribute must be paid, even if briefly here, to Australia's women artists. If women have achieved frustratingly little in the political domain, they have certainly achieved great visibility in creative arts in any field and in literature. There are regular feminist radio programs such as 'Women Out Loud', previously called 'The Coming Out Show', produced by the ABC Women's Broadcasting Collective. As a flow-on of the International Women's Year, a Women's Film Fund was established, which for some years invested \$100 000 a year in feminist film projects (Sawer, 1990a, p.39). Feminist fine arts, film, video and book festivals have become commonplace. There are also one-off and exceptional art events. For instance, in 1995 Joan Kerr organised nearly 150 exhibitions of women's art around Australia to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of International Women's Year. There is no field of culture in which women are not represented. Women's culture has grown strong and looks as if it will remain a permanent fixture of cultural life. The controversies of change have fuelled a woman-led renaissance in art, fine art, film and literature. My tribute includes, of course, the art produced by Aboriginal women and immigrants, who all together make the sum total of Australian culture (Andreoni 1992; Gunew 1992).

These creative efforts, one notes, are *individual* efforts, not the result of government policies. But then, cultural change is always more acceptable (and can entail commodification as well) than political, economic or social change, particularly when the latter entail an erosion of privileges and redistribution of power and

money. Cultural change, with its inbuilt criticisms and offers of new perceptions, is also highly acceptable and even necessary within capitalist systems. 'Criticism of the system,' Campbell wrote over twenty years ago, 'is almost always co-optable, particularly in capitalist society, which needs new items of exploitation and consumption' (Campbell, 1972, p.9).

Ewington concedes that women in the arts (in any field) suffer from the same discrimination and difficulties of access as women in other professional areas of work (Cox and Laur 1992). Here too, class may play an important role. Here too, it seems, 'the social revolution of feminism remains incomplete' (Ewington, 1995, p.103).

HOBBLLED REFORMS

In all their debates on areas of reform, Australian women have been hampered by structural constraints. Partly, these have to do with federalism: every new rule, every amendment in Australia must be fought for both at federal level and in the individual states. It is a supple system, resilient to attack and resistant to change. Actions that are legal in one state may not be in another. For prostitutes, for instance, rules change at each border. Federalism can become a haven for bigotry under the banner of state 'flexibility' and 'self-determination'. The Tasmanian wrangle over the UN finding that its homosexuality laws were in breach of international human rights illustrates this. It was suggested that all Tasmanians believed a homosexual act between consenting adult partners should be a crime. Any protest was presented as 'outside interference' in state matters. Such anti-democratic voices are fortunately no longer in the ascendant.

Australia's international position and aims further constrain effective reforms. Sharp argues that the government

puts faith in two fundamental premises, both of which are questionable. The first is that, even though in the past the Australian economy has been essentially a supplier of food and raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods, we are somehow able to make a quantum leap and break out of our semiperipheral status to compete with the world's industrial giants, albeit in selective niches in which we can excel. [The second is] that a subservience to international market forces can ever deliver social justice and equity. (Sharp, 1991, p.xviii)

Chapters 6 and 7 outlined recent trends and attitudes that have undermined the possibilities of change and the framework for change. Some of them, such as the reawakening of primitive sexism

and racism in combination with sophisticated argument, technological jargon and plain thuggery are frightening; not because of some disconcerting events, such as the vandalising of a synagogue, in Australia alone but because this is a phenomenon of some magnitude throughout the western world now (Institute . . . , 1994). Unavoidably, one is reminded of the rise of fascism. Once again, a form of eugenics, dressed up as neurogenetic science, has required intervention by the remaining fighters of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Rose, 1995).

Nevertheless, such erosions and tugs of war now happen within a different context. Nile claims, not without justification, that fundamental changes have occurred since the 1960s, signposted by such words as native title, land rights, multiculturalism and even postmodernism (Nile, 1994, pp. viii/ix). The 1970s were inspired and searching times when it was possible to rethink old, familiar assumptions and advocate ways and means towards a greater quality of life and more participation for all Australians. Intellectualism as well as creativity were involved. Both are rarely allowed to assert themselves for too long in modern societies because they create uncertainty. We learned that politics mattered and that people mattered before economics. The 1980s and 1990s replaced thought and creativity by no-think and double-think under the guise of 'rationalism'. The shift from the sociological model of the world to the 'dry' economic model has brought with it a shift in perspective so vast that one wonders how long the hard-won territory can be kept. This shift is demonstrated by the change of spirit from Whitlam's Australian Schools Commission of 1973-75 with its reforms 'targeted principally at social inequalities and the new policy theorised classroom education explicitly as a social process' (Pusey, 1992, p.147) to a Thatcherite commodification of tertiary education and the entire 'user-pays' principle of government services.

The 1980s were a time when some of us despaired and others remodelled themselves into members of the new managerial set. The nascent femocracy broke its links to the grass roots. Managerial times demanded managers and an entirely new language. Sackings were described as 'restructuring' or 'downsizing' and seen as no more than a regrettable side effect of progress to a richer and more competitive Australia. Schools were to run efficiently rather than provide meaningful education (in the wider sense of thinking about the world). We are still in the grip of this language and these processes which elbow aside considerations of inequality. Instrumentalist thinking and corporate synergy are not the best combination for bringing social justice issues to centre stage.

Nevertheless, some processes begun in the 1970s have slowly gathered pace through the 1980s and some have actually found their way out of partisan thinking into bipartisan reality. In the 1960s, 'women' as a category were absent from public documents, from history, from public policy and consciousness. Australia now boasts a cultural infrastructure in which women have become not just very visible, but from which their absence would be unthinkable.

One final point needs to be contested here. The left has vigorously argued that women need to stay close to the labour movement overall. Movement practice has shown, however, at least in European countries, that *autonomy* remains key to the women's movement's success. Women who have stayed close to left political parties and have organised themselves well but independently have usually had greater success than those who practised private autonomy (e.g. consciousness raising, social clubs). But those who gave up their autonomy altogether have forfeited their main strength. The Italian movement, for instance, was well represented and powerful but vanished entirely once it decided to formally constitute itself as a part of the body politic.

Feminism today is greying. In this context, it is relatively easy to lose sight of goals that are bipartisan, non-classist, non-xenophobic, non-homophobic, to forget commonalities and public life, and to play with the hard theoretical questions of socially and historically constructed difference instead of acting on them. If feminism is to be revived, it must be done by the young, the enlightened, the politically astute, and those who are not weakened by rivalry or propped up by cliques. Most importantly, it must be done by those who have seen the divisions, the silences, the gaps and the fractures that have evolved over time or have not yet been bridged.

The women's movement's agenda was established in the 1970s and women have run with it to this day, usually without passing the baton to other runners. The same women who were present in the 1970s are still doing the rounds now. Perhaps the agenda itself needs revision in light of social and economic changes. Some feminists now enjoy the fruits of their labour as part of a middle-aged establishment, and as such they are indeed 'custodians of the established order' (Yeatman, 1993, p.230). Or has the younger generation simply taken for granted the achievements of the women's movement which they inherited in the cradle, unaware of their precariousness and limits?

There are many issues of long-standing concern that remain unresolved and others created in the context of changes in the 1980s and 1990s. A few years ago I told Sara Dowse (1992) that

feminism may have suffered all the same problems of racism, classism, ageism, ablism, and heterosexism that were inherent in Australian society at large. I stand by that statement. But as one of the most decisive social, cultural and intellectual movements of our time, feminism was also first to notice its own shortcomings, contradictions and inadequacies, often well ahead of the society it contested. The rise of civil society to claim rights in the management of the nation has been one of the most profound shifts in modern times, and this gives hope for the future.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 1

- 1 See my forthcoming book *The Grieving of Australia. A Nation Ponders Its Future*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- 2 Census data for the period 1901–1947 show the proportion of women in paid work as: 30.7 per cent (1901), 28.5 per cent (1911), 28.4 per cent (1947). In the same period, women constituted 20.5 per cent of the workforce in 1901, rising to 22.4 per cent by 1947.

CHAPTER 2

- 1 For a theoretical discussion of the new movements see, for instance, Melucci (1988), Pakulski (1991), Kaplan (1992) and Burgmann (1993).

CHAPTER 3

- 1 Among funding sources for women's projects are the National Agenda for Women Grants Program (introduced in 1988), the Women's Research and Employment Initiatives Program (introduced in 1984) and the Rural Women's Access Grants Program.
- 2 For a good bibliography on domestic violence, see Morris, 1993, pp.135–53
- 3 I am still surprised that the photographic material one found in one's letterbox in the early 1970s was not banned on the grounds of obscenity. Such 'evidence' typically depicted dead fetuses whose advanced stage of gestation made it extremely unlikely that they were obtained by abortion. The photos were meant to show that the fetuses were complete human beings that had been butchered. Campaigns of this kind are not worthy of further

debate but at the time they did have sufficient influence to stop further legislative changes in Australia.

- 4 For a brief but useful summary of the literature on female prostitution see Perkins, 1994, especially pp.144–6.

CHAPTER 4

- 1 Sylvia Beach was an important figure in the Paris literary scene. She ran a bookshop on the Left Bank called Shakespeare and Company (also the title of her book of 1959) which was frequented by writers such as Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson. Her major contribution to literature was the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Her relationship with Adrienne Monnier lasted more than 40 years.
- 2 Writers like Turcotte have argued that only lesbianism, and not male gayness, was transformational in character. She argues that 'gay males . . . have always defined themselves as a minority and never questioned, despite their transgression, the dominant choice [i.e. heterosexuality/the sexual and power division of society]. This is why gay culture has always had a fairly wide audience' (Turcotte, 1992, p.xii). How well this assumption stands up, particularly in view of sophisticated queer theories in the 1990s, is a matter for debate, but one that would lead too far away from our subject here.

CHAPTER 5

- 1 Here I disagree with both Spelman (1988) and Ang (1995), who maintain that personal contacts cannot break down differences of power relations. If a feminist aim is to de-hierarchise values and power positions, 'egalitarian' personal contact seems an excellent strategy to me, provided that the aim is not just a theoretical one!
- 2 One possible reason for this finding may be low levels of reporting and high levels of denial. Hence, it may very well be that the similarity in the figures signifies very different things.
- 3 Gill Bottomley (1984) is absolutely correct when she argues that migrants do not retain their ethnicity unchanged and fixed, nor does the host society. Indeed, exposure to the new environment may lead to a third culture, one that has outgrown or partly rejected the original culture and has started to accept some facets and views of the host society. Picking and choosing, rejecting and accepting parts of both cultures leads to a new and different constellation. Usually there are two consequences of this dynamic and dialectical relationship between newcomer and host society. One is that the person changes in attitudes and values to such an extent that identifying her with the original ethnicity is in fact often misleading. The second is the choice of friends. Friendship patterns often become internationalised; ironically, the minority groups are thus the most likely to practise multiculturalism.
- 4 Aboriginal people could not be granted the vote because, theoretically, they held this right already. They in fact had been British subjects since Lord Glenelg decreed them so in 1836. However, this fact tended to be conveniently forgotten and the decree was ineffectual. Many restrictions were placed on Aboriginal people which effectively denied them citizenship rights. To give just a few examples, Aborigines could not give evidence in court, their customs, language and values were not recognised and they were unable to vote. In practice, they were treated and regarded as part of the national fauna. For a select few it was possible from the 1930s onwards to gain so-called 'exemption papers'. In NSW this practice stopped around 1961 but it continued in Queensland, for instance, until the early 1970s. Exemption papers, jokingly called 'dog's licences' by Aboriginal activists, officially bestowed citizenship rights on individuals, be this for specific services (such as serving in the army during the world wars) or upon the recommendation of 'reputable' white Australians. But these citizenship rights were not transferrable to members of the recipient's family.

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