

15 Gender and patriarchy

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Australia is a patriarchal society; that is, it has a system of institutionalised male dominance in which women are generally excluded from powerful positions in important institutions. This does not mean that women are completely powerless, but that an inequality of power exists between men and women which advantages men. This imbalance is not the result of 'natural' differences between the sexes, but of socially constructed institutions and structures reinforced by sexist ideologies that pervade the culture. Women's powerlessness is *political* because it reflects constructed power relations that are open to change.

Women's political powerlessness manifests itself as dependence on men, which is revealed in the different access men and women have to economic resources and in their different burdens in the sphere of work. Women's economic dependence on men reinforces their powerlessness in other areas of life. These bases of dependence must be challenged if patriarchal structures are to change. This is what feminism has tried, in various forms, to do.

Feminism is often perceived as a single monolithic entity which either taints, indoctrinates or liberates people. Many women deny that they are feminists because of the term's radical connotations. Yet they believe women should have the right to control their own bodies, to receive equal pay and equal opportunity in the paid workforce, to share domestic tasks equally and to be free from gender stereotyping. Although there is disagreement over what the word feminism means, all feminists agree that it is about understanding and ending female subordination, that power is based on gender differences, and that men's power over women is illegitimate. The disagreements are over the extent and manifestations, as well as the causes and solutions, of female subordination. The three best known *theoretical* approaches to feminism are liberal, Marxist and radical.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is primarily concerned with liberty, justice and equality

for individuals, and it believes women suffer from discrimination because of their sex. While society judges men on their individual merits and abilities, women are judged on the merits they are presumed to have as female. Liberals advocate that all individuals should be treated equally before the law without regard to personal characteristics like sex. Liberal feminists argue that the state has not conceded women the same civil, legal and political rights as men, and that legal and customary constraints have blocked women's entrance to and success in the public world. Their focus is on securing equality for women *with* men by granting them the same access, rights and opportunities, not on a wholesale change of society (see Eisenstein, 1986).

Liberal feminists concentrate on two main problems. First, that the denial of equal rights to women in the public world, including education and employment, has led to demands for laws to be 'sex-blind'. The aim is for formal equality before the law, including equal rights within marriage, and an end to sex-biased laws such as protective labour legislation. Second, liberal feminists argue the law must promote substantive equality between the sexes by combating attitudes and customs that sustain discrimination. Outlawing sexual harassment and discriminatory practices in employment and equal access to services such as credit fall into this category. Liberal feminists also often advocate gender-specific legislation to provide real equality of opportunity and to overcome disadvantages that afflict women. Pregnancy leave and affirmative action programs are part of this strategy.

Liberal feminists see women's subordination as a series of small-scale deprivations and assume that the state, as a neutral arbiter, is the proper legitimate authority to enforce gender justice. They argue that discrimination can be remedied by the political system in societies like Australia. It is difficult for a liberal democratic state, which champions civil rights and individual liberties, to deny rights for women couched in these terms. If full legal equality is guaranteed and women still do not succeed, then this is because they either cannot compete with men, or because they 'freely' choose not to do so. Individual women, not social structures, are presented as personally at fault. If, once competition is fair, few women achieve eminent positions in society, then so be it! Liberal feminists do not worry about the losers, since they believe each person succeeds according to his or her own abilities (Jaggard, 1983).

Marxist and radical feminists criticise this focus on individuals, arguing that liberal feminism fails to deal with the systematic nature of gender inequality. Marxist feminists locate women's subordination in the structure of capitalism. Radicals see the main problem in the overarching structure of patriarchy, which taints all aspects of society. Since the liberal comparison is with what men do, liberal feminism is criticised for not getting beyond male standards of equality. Because liberals want women

to meet male standards, they reinforce the masculine value system and male ways of organising. Women who become successful in the male power structures become quasi-men. The result, according to radicals, is simply a new form of patriarchal domination in which some women are co-opted.

Marxist feminism

Marxist feminists argue that gender inequality stems from the economic inequalities of capitalism and that men's domination over women results from capital's domination over labour. They believe it is impossible for anyone to secure equal opportunity, especially for women, in a class society where the wealth produced by the powerless ends up in the hands of the powerful. Genuine equality requires economic freedom and independence for all. Marxist feminists argue that if women are to be liberated, the wage labour system of capitalism must be replaced by a socialist system in which no one is economically dependent. So economic independence is the key to women's liberation (see Barrett, 1980).

According to Marxist feminists, when capitalism drove a wedge between the workplace and the home, men became the wage earners in the productive public sphere and women remained predominantly exploited in the private sphere as unpaid domestic labourers. Women also became a reserve army of labour, entering the bottom levels of the workforce when the economy demanded it. So women are doubly exploited: as unpaid domestic workers and as wage labourers.

Marxists argue women's sex-specific oppression results from the sexual division of labour that assigns them to domestic work. Women's economic dependence on a male partner means that they are materially subordinate to a man. However, Marxists argue that capitalism benefits most from unpaid domestic labour, because capitalists would have to pay higher wages to their male employees if the latter had to buy services such as cooking, cleaning, washing and emotional support.

Once women enter wage labour, according to Marxists, there is no longer economic conflict between the sexes. As wage labourers, they are exploited in the same way as men. Sex-specific oppression, Marxists argue, results not from unequal economic relations between the sexes, but from the unequal class relations embodied in capitalism. Capitalism uses sexist ideology because it benefits from women's subordination. Sexist ideology segregates the labour market, justifies paying women less, ensures domestic work is performed by unpaid women, and promotes women as sex objects in ways which profit capitalists in the advertising and entertainment industries. Women's continued oppression as women is explained as functional to the capitalist system.

Radical feminists raise several problems with this account. Because its central category of class is 'sex blind', they argue, its analysis of relations between the sexes remains inadequate. Marxists say little about women's oppression as women by men and do not explain why particular sexes fill particular places in the class structure. Why do men dominate powerful positions in society? Why do women persistently earn less? Why are capitalists mainly men, and why is it men who get out of domestic labour?

Radical feminism

Radical feminists, who first and foremost celebrate the positive aspects of women's biology and sexuality, argue that a patriarchal system characterised by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition, with men as the beneficiaries, is what oppresses women. Patriarchy does not result from class or legal inequality, but is historically the first and most pervasive form of oppression. It has existed in virtually every society, is the hardest to eradicate, and causes most suffering to its victims. Patriarchy uses sexual difference hierarchically to structure every aspect of life. It is the most fundamental determinant of a woman's social position, experiences, values and physical and psychological well-being (see Dworin, 1981; MacKinnon, 1987).

Radical feminists see sexuality as the basis of women's oppression and the key to understanding their personal and political position. Depriving people of autonomy over their bodies denies them their humanity. Prostitution, pornography, sexual harassment, rape, woman bashing and reproductive technology are all instances of men's control of women's sexuality for their own power and pleasure. Many radicals regard heterosexuality as the main pillar supporting patriarchal society, because it ties women in sexual relationships to men. By focusing on women's bodies, radicals have increasingly brought sexuality, childbearing and childbearing onto the political agenda.

Radicals believe neither formal rights guaranteed by a liberal state nor a classless society will end women's oppression as women. Male culture promotes male interests through male-controlled institutions such as the government, the military, religion, the economy and the family, everywhere presenting itself as the dominant culture. Female culture based on emotional expression, gentleness, sensitivity, flexibility and closeness to nature is obscured and devalued. Radical feminists argue that legal, political, social and cultural institutions of patriarchy must be completely overturned, because they are the instruments of men's power.

The radical feminist analysis of patriarchy, as the all-encompassing cause of every single problem faced by women, is too blunt. We need a more sophisticated analysis to account for disparities between women and men,

and among women of different races, classes, religions and cultures. Radicals do not give these adequate weight alongside gender. If patriarchal power is so pervasive, how can cultural and structural changes in women's lives be explained? Radical feminists have also failed adequately to explain *why* men dominate women, but have concentrated on *how* patriarchy oppresses women.

Since no feminist theory offers an adequate analysis of all aspects of gender and politics, an eclectic approach that takes the contributions of each and combines them into a holistic analysis of gender is more appropriate. That is the task in the rest of this chapter.

Economic dependence

As emphasised by the Marxist feminists, the extent of women's reduced access to economic independence is important in explaining their comparative powerlessness. This in turn has direct consequences for women's independence, opportunities and treatment in other areas of life.

Domestic work

Domestic work has a low public profile and commands little status in Australia. The national accounting system places no value on much of the work done by women. Women who work full-time raising children and caring for families are ignored by this accounting system, despite the lip service paid to children as our most valuable resource (Sawer, 1990: 46).

Traditional allocations of childcare and housework continue in the majority of households. A 1990 survey of Australian households found that women still performed the overwhelming bulk of domestic labour. While some couples reported they 'shared' tasks, 'shared' often meant that both partners participated, rather than that the tasks were performed equitably. So while men may help out, the responsibility for most domestic labour rests with women, even when women are employed full- or part-time.

The issue of who performs domestic work is a political question—it is about power. Men's higher earnings have given them the power to resist this work: the higher the husband's relative economic contribution, the lower his rate of participation in domestic work and the higher the participation of his spouse. Women with greater earning capacity outside the home have been shown to exercise greater power within the home in negotiating the division of domestic labour (Baxter et al., 1990: 59–60).

Paid work

It is often thought that because many women perform paid work and are no longer confined to the home, they are no longer economically dependent. Currently 52.3 per cent of all women over the age of fifteen participate in the paid workforce and comprise 41.8 per cent of that workforce. The participation rate for men aged over fifteen is 74.7 per cent. Despite the highest ever rate of participation by women, career structures and working conditions are still based on the typical male pattern of full-time continuous employment. This pattern disadvantages women by excluding those with responsibilities outside the paid workforce (Sawer, 1990: 52; Women's Bureau, 1991: 12).

Many women assume home responsibilities as a direct result of their inability to earn the same as men. They then try to supplement family income through part-time work, comprising 76.1 per cent of all part-time employees. In September 1991, 40.7 per cent of all women in the workforce were employed part-time (Women's Bureau, 1991: 12). Part-time work is usually located in the secondary labour market where women are disproportionately concentrated. These jobs are characterised by poor pay, low qualifications, limited work autonomy and low levels of unionism. In contrast, primary labour markets are dominated by men and offer more stable employment, greater job security, greater opportunities for career advancement, higher wages and superannuation.

Despite the increase in women entering the paid workforce, occupational segregation remains largely unchanged. Women are still concentrated in a limited number of occupational categories, 55 per cent in two major groupings (clerical and sales). While 20 per cent of female employees work in professional and semi-professional occupations, 27 per cent of these are teachers and 24 per cent are registered nurses (Women's Bureau, 1991: 12).

Official figures, which often record more men than women as unemployed, mask women's inequitable access to job opportunities because they ignore the 'hidden unemployed': that is, people who want to work but who do not fit into official definitions of unemployed. A quarter of people not actively looking for jobs cite 'childcare' as the main reason for not participating in the workforce. Women constitute 75 per cent of the hidden unemployed (Women's Bureau, 1991: 12; Baxter et al., 1990: 68).

So while women's participation in paid work has risen, they still remain disadvantaged. Many factors affect women's entry to and movement within the labour market. Some of these include early sex-role socialisation, educational patterns, technological developments, male trade unionists' resistance to female employees and domestic labour responsibilities (Baxter et al., 1990: 5–6, 69–71).

Poverty

Because of their disadvantaged labour-market position and their enforced dependence on men and the state, women have persistently been a major group among the permanent poor throughout Australia's history (Cass, 1983: 164). This trend has continued at such a pace that the problem is now commonly referred to as the 'feminisation of poverty'.

Several factors are responsible for the feminisation of poverty. The most important is the continuing division of labour between men and women in the home and in the paid workforce. The assumption that households comprise a male breadwinner and a dependent female spouse still pervades much public policy, giving men greater access to public funds via tax rebates and the like (Sharp & Broomhill, 1990: 51). In recent years, large increases have occurred in the number of sole parent families, 96 per cent of which are headed by women. This, along with increased levels of unemployment, has resulted in a substantial rise in the number of women who rely on social-security payments (Sheen, 1987: 16-19).

Legislative changes

The liberal feminist strategy to remove formal barriers to sex discrimination has been important in realising basic feminist reforms in the public sphere. However, even after two decades of equal pay, seven years of anti-discrimination legislation and the more recent introduction of affirmative action, gender inequalities remain a fundamental feature of work-force participation, with direct consequences for women's power and independence. While these initiatives have been important acknowledgements that discrimination against women must be eliminated, they have not had as far-reaching an impact as had been hoped by women's groups.

The 1969 equal pay decision provided equal pay for women who did exactly the same work as men. Only 18 per cent of women benefited from it because of labour market segregation. In 1972 the decision was extended to include 'equal pay for work of equal value', meaning that women in different occupations from men were still entitled to receive the same rate of pay as men when performing work of equal skill. It was not until the equal pay case of 1974 that the Arbitration Commission legalised equal minimum award wages (Schofield, 1988: 28, 41). However, since women's jobs have never been systematically re-evaluated, the 1972 decision has never been fully implemented. Women still consistently earn less than men. Currently women's full-time earnings are 84.5 per cent of men's. If part-time workers and overtime rates are included, the figure falls to 66.5 per cent (Women's Bureau, 1991: 12). The reason is not that male jobs are more skilled, but that men define skills.

The *Sex Discrimination Act (1984)* makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of sex, marital status and pregnancy, and it demands that selection and recruitment procedures be non-discriminatory. Since it is complaint-based legislation, a discriminatory practice must be identifiable before the victim may seek redress. Mounting a complaint can involve considerable financial and psychological costs, and often it is women's behaviour that is scrutinised. Critics claim this legislation cannot deal with systematic discrimination resulting from deeply entrenched practices (Schofield, 1988: 64-5).

The *Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act (1986)* is an important contribution to improving the status of women. It requires all private-sector employers with a staff of 100 or more and all higher education institutions to undertake an analysis of employment policies relating to women within their organisation. The Act does not set quotas on the employment of women, but requires institutions to set objectives and forward estimates aimed at promoting women's opportunities within the firm. This legislation puts the onus on the institution, rather than the individual, to take action towards eliminating discrimination.

The existing penalty for non-compliance, which has been likened to being flogged with a feather, involves naming the offending employer in parliament. The legislation has not ended gender segregation within the labour market. The concentration of women in part-time work also makes it difficult for this legislation to improve employment opportunities for women. A major hurdle is to reconcile the conflict faced by women who want both to participate in the workforce and to share in the raising of a family. Currently, access to good-quality childcare is not available or not affordable for many who need it (Sawer, 1990: 53).

The economic inequalities resulting from the manner in which work is organised and the way rewards are distributed persist despite these initiatives. It seems that legal attempts to remove discriminatory barriers cannot overcome the patriarchal interests. The influence of patriarchal ideology spills over into many other arenas that have an impact on women's and men's lives.

Sexism, violence and sexuality

Sexist ideologies

Community attitudes often condone and foster sexism. Sexism as an ideology promotes beliefs of inherent male supremacy, generally referring only to male characteristics, behaviours and achievements in positive terms. While power and privilege are seen as the proper rewards for male superiority, women are depicted as weaker than and inferior to men, and therefore as submissive, devalued and degraded. Since interpersonal rela-

...ween men and women cannot exist in isolation from their social and cultural context, sexism helps promote inequality and violence against women (CASA House, 1990: 14).

Violence

Male violence, according to radical feminists, is an important issue which both manifests and perpetuates inequalities. It takes many forms, some of which are seen as acceptable in Australian culture. For example, sexist and violent practices, attitudes and language are regularly paraded as entertainment in the media and at sporting events (CASA House, 1990: 14-16).

Rape, sexual assault, wife bashing, sexual harassment in the workplace and child sexual abuse all constitute male violence against women. The common perception of this violence is that it is individually motivated and perpetrated by a few psychologically unstable men against a few women. However, explanations of male violence in terms of psychological abnormalities ignore its routinised social nature (Walby, 1990: 128-32). Male violence is a form of power and control over women.

With the expansion of services for the victims of violence and the increased research into the extent and causes of sexual assault since the late 1970s, it has become clear that male violence is widespread. The routinised sexism and violence in Australian culture partly explains the high incidence and acceptance of violence against women. For example, one in five Australians consider it acceptable for a husband to use physical force against his wife under some circumstances (CASA House, 1990: 16).

Ninety-eight per cent of sexual-assault offenders are men and 93 per cent of adult sexual-assault victims are female. Over 75 per cent of female sexual-assault victims know their offenders, who come from all social classes, income levels, races and age groups (CASA House, 1990: 12-13). New South Wales data suggest that one in four women will be raped, and one in three will experience attempted rape. One in every seven married women will be raped by her husband. Before the age of twenty-one, one in three women will have experienced some degree of physical force by a male trying to have sexual contact with her. Rape is not a bizarre event but is part of everyday life (Department of Health, 1988: 43).

It is impossible to locate a single cause for all these forms of violence. Radical feminists implicate the state, first because the welfare state does not grant a woman full economic independence from a violent man, and second because the state usually intervenes only in extreme cases. Often after violence has occurred, there is inadequate protection for women who must rely on the very men who are violent towards them (Walby,

1990: 135-6, 142-3). Because unequal resources between men and women have been institutionalised, one report concluded, 'each and everyone of us is encountering the social, emotional, medical, political, legal and economic conditions which creates and sustains sexual violence' (CASA House, 1990: 16). The feminist movement has actively fought male violence through reform of legal procedures, and practical support in the form of refuges, rape crisis centres, specialised counselling and assistance to women suffering from violence.

Representations of sexuality

The feminist movement against male violence has also challenged media stereotypes about women and focused on the issue of pornography. Pornography perpetuates inequalities between the sexes by depicting male sexuality as forceful, dominant and violent, whereas women are portrayed as enjoying domination, humiliation, abuse and mutilation. This makes pornography a form of hate propaganda that demeans women. Images of women depicted in pornography dehumanise women into objects of sexual access, for men (Brownmiller, 1976: 394-6). This has a major impact on interpersonal relationships between men and women.

Women, politics and power

The fundamental explanation for women's subordinate position in Australian society is their economic dependence on men. This position is reinforced by violence, sexist ideology and propaganda. Together these factors ensure that women enter the public world at such a disadvantage that they occupy few positions of power.

Only 3 per cent of Australian university professors are women. Less than 5 per cent of judges are women. There is no female board member in any of the top private companies, including BHP, BTR-Nylex, Elders-IXL, Westpac, National Australia Bank, CRA, Coles/Myer and Cadbury PLC. Women's appointment to senior- and middle-management positions is still considered so extraordinary that it makes front page news, as did the appointment of Carol Austin to Director of Public Affairs for BHP in January 1989. Women comprise only 11 per cent of trade union officials (Connolly, 1990: 13; see also chapter 18).

The parties

The Liberal Party's response to women's demands has been mixed. It has had a strong commitment to women's rights, and it supports the removal of discriminatory barriers facing women. However, there remains a gap between promises and performance, as demonstrated by its reluctance

to act effectively over the equal pay issue and its opposition to affirmative action legislation. The emergence of several women's rights groups, including the Liberal Feminist Network, has led to demands for internal party and policy reform. However, the party's more recent policy stance, for example in advocating cuts to welfare and community services and a strengthening of the 'family' so the work is left to unpaid women, is decidedly anti-women. Clearly there are tensions between the feminist goals of the liberals and the pro-family trends of the conservatives who expound motherhood roles for women and market roles for men (Sawer & Simms, 1984: 143-52).

Of all Liberal Party candidates at the 1990 federal election, women comprised 15 per cent. However, only 17 per cent of women were successful, a rate well below that of men, because women candidates are more likely to be selected for unwinnable seats. The Liberal Party has few women MPs. Women's representation on executive committees remains low even though around half the Liberal Party's membership is female (Bean & McAllister, 1990: 80-1; Sawer & Simms, 1984: 133).

Particularly because of its trade union origins, the ALP has traditionally been a male-dominated party. The National Committee of Inquiry set up in 1977 to examine reasons for the electoral defeat of the ALP pointed out that this was a major reason for the party's poor support from female voters and for the exclusion of women from political office. In 1981 the party endorsed a wide-ranging policy of affirmative action to increase the proportion of women's representation at all levels to that of their party membership—around one-third (Sawer & Simms, 1984: 116, 133, 142-3). In the 1990 federal election, the success rate of ALP women candidates was 37 per cent. While this was higher than the coalition parties, women Labor candidates are still selected disproportionately for safe coalition seats (Bean & McAllister, 1990: 80-1).

The feminist lobby within the ALP has increasingly highlighted the concerns of women, which were given a high profile in the 1983 election. Labor's substantive women's policy platform—*The ALP and Women: Towards Equality*—considered issues such as equal opportunity, childcare, refugees and reproductive freedom. But feminists have become increasingly disillusioned with the performance of the Hawke-Keating governments (Simms & Stone, 1990: 284-8).

In the 1984 federal elections, Labor gave less emphasis to women's social issues. Rather, the focus on women was almost entirely economic, focusing on taxation and social security. By the 1987 elections, women's issues had been completely redefined and were couched in terms of the impact that general social and economic policies would have on women. Despite some notable legislative changes (see above) women's issues have been effectively co-opted into the mainstream agenda and have largely disappeared (Simms & Stone, 1990: 285-8).

Women in parliament

Since the 1980s women have had a higher profile in parliamentary politics. After major leadership and financial crises, the Labor Governments in Victoria and Western Australia chose Joan Kirner and Carmen Lawrence as their respective Premiers. Janine Haines, followed briefly by Janet Powell, led the Democrats from 1986 until 1991. Women have more successfully contested the Senate than the House of Representatives (Bean & McAllister, 1990: 80-1).

After the 1980 elections, women made up only about 2.5 per cent of MPs, whereas after the 1983 elections, their representation doubled to almost 5 per cent (Simms & Stone, 1990: 285). By April 1992 women comprised 13 per cent of all federal parliamentarians. Across all federal and state parliaments, they comprised 14 per cent of all MPs. Of all female MPs, 57 per cent are ALP, 26 per cent are Liberal, 7 per cent are independents, 5 per cent are Democrats and 4 per cent National (Office of the Status of Women, 1992).

Women's representation in cabinets remains low. As of June 1991, Ros Kelly was the only woman in the federal government's cabinet of seventeen. The shadow cabinet contained no women. Women hold five out of sixteen cabinet positions in Western Australia, four out of eighteen in Victoria, two out of twenty in New South Wales. The worst records are in Queensland, where women occupy only one of eighteen places, and the Northern Territory, with none out of nine ministers women.

The women's movement

In the late 1960s, cries of 'oppression' and 'liberation' characterised the women's liberation movement in Australia. Feminist groups organised as non-hierarchical collectives, forming action groups around specific issues, and consciousness-raising groups centred on women's oppression. While Marxist influences were evident early in the movement, the radical feminist analysis of women's oppression as most basic and common to all women gained precedence, providing a thorough critique of the many processes of male domination (Curtchys, 1992: 433-42).

The Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), formed out of a Victorian women's liberation group in 1972, is a liberal feminist organisation. By demanding equality and justice for women and developing public policy goals, it put women's issues onto the wider political agenda and fostered the entry of feminists into the federal bureaucracy. WEL has been active in parliamentary politics since 1972, when it sent out questionnaires to candidates and supported candidates whose policies were close to those of the women's movement. With its constitution, committees and spokes-

...ons, WEL organisation reflects orthodox political structures (Curtuhoys, 1992: 433; Sawyer & Simms, 1984: 173-4).

The women's movement has become a loose coalition between feminist networks in the bureaucracy, political parties, unions and feminist organisations (Sawyer, 1989: 427). A significant feature of Australian feminism has been its reliance on the government and bureaucracies as avenues to achieve feminist reform.

The increase in the number of women's units and women's policy advisers within the bureaucracy is indicative of the effective pressure that the women's movement was able to exert upon governments. The Office of the Status of Women (CASA House), which deals with women's affairs, and the National Women's Consultative Council (NWCC), which consults with women's organisation on government policy, are two examples. The Women's Budget Statement has integrated gender equity into the budgetary process of most government departments, with Treasury the notable exception (Sawyer, 1989: 451-4). Of all federal senior public service positions, 1632 are held by men, compared to 108 held by women. No head of any government department is female (Connolly, 1990: 13). The increasing number of women who enter the public service to promote feminist goals, known in Australia as 'femocrats', has caused much debate within the feminist movement. Some argue that femocrats' goals have been co-opted or diluted by the constraints of the state bureaucracy, and that more radical and effective change could be gained by energies being directed outside these institutions (Curtuhoys, 1992: 426).

Conclusion

Women have made some gains over the last two decades, including increased political representation, anti-discrimination legislation, rising workforce participation and hence increasing economic independence. More women are leaving unsatisfactory or abusive relationships, and there is a greater awareness of women's issues. The liberal feminist strategy of attacking discrimination within the existing political system has helped achieve many of these. Despite all the gains of the feminist movement since the 1970s, inequality of power between the sexes remains a fundamental and structural feature of Australian society.

Analysis of the most powerful Australian institutions shows that women have not been a significant part of the political process. The general absence of women throughout all spheres of public life is a serious loss in human resources, and raises serious questions about the way the political agenda is set and about the validity of political decisions.

The analysis of inequalities in work stressed by Marxist feminists

illustrate why women have not been able to secure a significantly larger slice of the economic cake. Because women earn less they overwhelmingly assume the burden of domestic and childcare responsibilities, and so remain materially dependent on men. Women therefore have interrupted careers, including political careers, and do not have the same opportunity for advancement and development as men. Women's dependence on men continues to affect their personal relationships, experiences and opportunities in life. The radical feminist analysis of the control of women's sexuality by men, and the use of violence and sexist ideologies to control women, explains a fundamental feature of women's inequality. The different feminist positions must be combined to show how patriarchy, class and struggles to transcend them within the liberal state are all of importance in the analysis of women's oppression. Most women in patriarchal societies like Australia's lack sexual, social and political power.

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16 Interest groups

Trevor Matthews

Look at any Australian newspaper and you will find items like this:

- 'National Farmers' Federation organises march on Canberra'
- 'Business Council of Australia calls for welfare cuts'
- 'ACTU negotiates new Accord with the Hawke government'
- 'Immigration Department consults ethnic groups'
- 'New Right group presses Liberals for tax reform'
- 'Green lobby urges vote for Democrats'

These headlines refer to groups attempting to influence or shape government policy. Some of the headlines refer to groups dealing directly with the government. Some to groups that press their claims on the government indirectly—through members of parliament, political parties, the electorate and the courts. All the headlines illustrate political action by what are known as interest groups (or pressure groups). By the term interest group, political scientists mean any organised group that seeks to influence public policy. Although the line is not always easy to draw, an interest group differs from a political party in that it does not strive to take over the reins of government.

The range of Australian interest groups is enormous. The field covers groups as diverse as the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Council of Churches; the Returned Services League and the Right to Life Association; the Business Council of Australia and the Refugee Council of Australia; the Australian Chiropractors' Association and the Australian Mushroom Growers' Association; the Friends of the Earth and the Friends of the ABC.

These groups clearly differ in size, wealth, aims, effectiveness and 'politicisation'. Faced with such a catch-all category as interest group, political scientists have suggested that the field should be subject to systematic subdivision. They have proposed a number of ways to classify interest groups. Their aim has been not merely to classify. It has also