

# Changing role of women

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



Since the end of world war two, in 1945, Australian society has witnessed many dramatic changes in the rights and freedoms of women. Women, who had been encouraged to take on men's jobs during the war were expected to vacate these positions and return to their traditional vocation in "home making". Throughout the 1950's and early 1960's women were expected to either stay at home or work in underpaid "women's jobs". Women's wages were significantly less in comparison to the wages awarded to men who performed the same task. The Commonwealth Arbitration Court ruled in 1949, that a women's basic wage should be set at 75% of the male rate. This was the practice throughout the 1950's when there was a large growth in the textiles, clothing, footwear and food processing industries depending on the cheap labor that women provided. The view that a woman's place was in the home was reflected in and shaped by the Australian education system. The emphasis of the limited schooling available to girls was in the home sciences . i. e. cooking and sewing. The lack of educational opportunities for women only reinforced sex role stereotyping and gave women little chance to achieve their potential. The introduction of the oral contraceptive pill in 1961 gave women the chance to achieve their potential. It gave them the freedom to choose when and if to bear a child. It provided women with the opportunity to concentrate on furthering their working careers, where available, thus leaving the domestic housewife image behind. It provided women with power over their bodies for the first time; they were in control of their sexual relationships. Thus, by the end of the 1960's, women were actively seeking greater rights and freedoms in society and in the workplace. Demonstrations and protests were a feature of this movement, known as the

woman's liberationist movement (today referred to as feminism). The female liberationists aimed to overturn the notions of female inferiority and male dominance in Australian society. Their dream was to free women from the restraints society placed upon them; to challenge the status quo. Zelda D'Aprano was one Australian woman who formed the Woman's Action Committee in 1969. She chained herself to the doors of the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne demanding equal pay for both sexes. Germaine Greer was also an outspoken liberationist whose book "The Female Eunuch", 1970, challenged the thinking of conservative male dominated society. There was a diverse range of women's liberationist groups formed to campaign for specific issues revolving around three main areas: equal pay, discrimination in the workplace and equality of opportunity in the workplace and society. Specific issues included: - Child Care - Equal pay for women - Family Planning - Divorce - Discrimination in the workforce and from lending institutions The causes, clear arguments and outspoken activism of these groups attracted much media attention and faced resistance from traditional and conservative sections of society. For example church leaders were outraged when women's liberationists called for legalized abortion. Equality in the workplace has been and still is an important issue. In theory, the federal Equal Pay Case of 1969, determined that women receive "the same wage as men for the same work"; but this principal would not apply where the work was essentially or usually performed by women. By 1972, the Liberal government continued the debate, suggesting in Cabinet that wage rates should take into consideration "training, skills and other attributes required for the satisfactory performance of the work". See Source A, which

is a copy of a Cabinet document, dated 24 October 1972, demonstrating this stance of the Liberal government in relation to calls for Equal Pay. By December 1972, the Labor Government had come to power and it promised to implement the Equal Pay for Equal Value principle in female dominated industries; though such a principle has proven difficult to implement. Equal opportunity has been and still is another important issue. In 1972, the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) was founded. WEL sought out politicians views on woman's issues. It has had a major role in lobbying and influencing governments to pass laws friendly to woman in areas such as woman's health and child care. See Source B, a photograph of a demonstration in Sydney in 1979, in which WEL activists are advocating for Medicare funding for abortions. By the beginning of the 1980's, the fruits of the labor of the women's movement could be seen in many of Australia's legal reforms: - The family law act 1975 had established the principle of No Fault Divorce; removing the social stigma associated with woman and divorce. - The anti discrimination act 1977(NSW) which made it illegal to discriminate on terms of gender, marital status or pregnancy - Sex Discrimination Act 1984 a commonwealth act banning discrimination against woman. - The Affirmative action act 1986 that was later replaced in 1999 by the equal opportunity for woman in the workplace act. By the end of the 1990's most woman believed that their struggles for equal rights and freedoms with men in society had been won, but that is not necessarily the case. While women's rights may have been enshrined in law, it is women's freedoms in society that have yet to be fully realized.