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STILL INVISIBLE: THE MYTH OF
THE WOMAN-FRIENDLY STATE

submitted for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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STILL INVISIBLE:
THE MYTH OF THE WOMAN-FRIENDLY STATE

CAROLE FORD
B.A. (HONS) Deakin University
T.I.T.C.

Thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts, Deakin University
February 2001
I certify that the thesis entitled: Still Invisible: The Myth of the Woman-Friendly State

submitted for the degree of:  Doctor of Philosophy

is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been submitted for an award, including a higher degree, to any other university or institution.

Full Name .................. Carole Ford.............................................
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Signed ..............................................................

Date ........22/8/2001...........................................................
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABS        Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACTU       Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEU        Australian Education Union
AIRC       Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ALP        Australian Labor party
AMA        Australian Medical Association
ANF        Australian Nursing Federation
ANTA       Australian national Training Authority
BCA        Business Council of Australia
CAPA       Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
CCT        Compulsory Competitive Tendering
COTA       Council of the Ageing
CRU's      Community Residential Units
CS         Caesarian section
CSAC       Curriculum in Schools Advisory Committee
DEET       Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEETYA     Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DOE        Department of Education
EBA        Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment
EMA        Education Maintenance Allowance
EO         Equal Opportunity
EORC's     Equal Opportunity Resource Centres
EOU        Equal Opportunity Unit
HECS       Higher Education Contributory Scheme
KTAV       Kindergarten Teachers Association of Victoria
LAP        Learning Assessment Project
MACWAG     Ministerial Advisory Committee of Women and Girls
NHMRC      National health and Medical Research Council
NWCC       National Women’s Consultative Council
PTR's      Pupil-teacher ratios
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<td>Schools of the Future</td>
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<td>STAR</td>
<td>Students at Risk Program</td>
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<td>SWAN</td>
<td>Southern Women's Action Network</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<td>VAHEC</td>
<td>Victorian Association of Health and Extended Care</td>
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<td>VECCI</td>
<td>Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
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<td>Women's Electoral Lobby</td>
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<td>WHIRCCA</td>
<td>Women's Health, Information, Resources and Crisis Centres Association</td>
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ABSTRACT

STILL INVISIBLE
THE MYTH OF THE WOMAN-FRIENDLY STATE:
THE IMPACT OF STATE POLICY ON THE WELFARE OF WOMEN
IN THE PAST TWO DECADES

Australian women faced the last two decades of the twentieth century, optimistic in their capacity to contribute positively to social change in the restructuring state. Encouraged by the relative euphoria of the late 1970s and early 1980s, women had a fleeting glimpse of the possibilities of woman-friendly legislation and feminist inspired government policy. What eventuated was the dismantling of supportive welfare structures, under the guise of economic rationalist state action, which undermined and eventually halted women's economic and social advancement. This research project examines the impact of government policy on the welfare of Victorian women, through a feminist analysis of state and federal decision-making, framed in the context of case studies in the areas of employment, education and health. The promotion of 'gender-neutral' policy, by generally conservative bureaucracies, effectively exposes the mythical woman-friendly state. The implications do not auger well for Victorian women in the new millennium.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although I accept responsibility for the content of this project, it would never have eventuated without the nurturance, support, debate, encouragement and criticism of many friends and colleagues over the past few years. I appreciate their generosity of time and ideas.

I wish to acknowledge the input of Anita Harris in the formative stage, with her perceptive comments on structure and organisation, and regret that circumstances precluded her continuing supervision. I hope she is pleased with the final product.

To the staff in the off-campus library department at Deakin University, Geelong: my gratitude for their efficiency and undoubted investigative skills in response to some very obtuse requests.

Words are inadequate to describe the absolute support and commitment of my supervisor Renate Klein. Her confidence in my ability to complete such an enormous task never floundered - even when mine did. I appreciate her expertise and knowledge, but most of all her friendship.

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Thank you to the many people who contributed so co-operatively to the completion of this thesis.
CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

Too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1952: Address to United Nations)

At the beginning of the twenty-first century these words by Eleanor Roosevelt, US government official, writer, humanitarian and wife of a former president, reflect women’s position in western democracies almost half a century ago. In the intervening period, there have been many advancements for women, not just in the United States, but in Australia also. Australian women had been among the first to gain suffrage at the beginning of the twentieth century, and had embraced what many had hoped was an era of new opportunity. Change was slow, hampered by two global wars, interrupted by a world-wide depression, and constrained by maledominated institutions, including those responsible for state political and economic policy-making.

In Australia a period of more substantial change [1973 to 1975] resulted from the ‘reforming’ Labor government, in response to ‘an active women’s movement’, and it was during this period that equal pay was ‘granted’¹ and funding for a range of feminist initiated community services was introduced (Curthoys, 1994:16). The impetus for change diminished somewhat with a return to a Coalition government, but by the end of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985, the then recently elected Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke expressed his government’s commitment to a National Agenda for Women (Office of the Status of Women, 1989:1). The objectives of the National Agenda for Women, as adopted by the Government in 1988 state:

The Government is committed to ensuring that its policies and programs operate to improve the status of women by providing economic security and independence, freedom from discrimination and equality of opportunity in all spheres of activity. It is committed to ensuring that

---

¹ Discussion in Chapter 4 argues the effectiveness of this legislation.
women's needs are taken fully into account in the development and administration of Government policies and programs.
Office of the Status of Women (1992:1)

In retrospect, this pronouncement is innately paternal and decidedly liberal, but it contained the promise of advancement for women, a window of opportunity for greater recognition of women as decision-makers and equal participants in the public sphere. Following some positive social change of the 1970s and 1980s, the government was advocating a continued pursuit of issues pertaining to women, through an increasingly woman-friendly state. Opportunistic, realistic, feminist, sustainable? These are some of the viewpoints I sought to research by analysing the impact of the economic rationalist state on the welfare of women in Victoria during the past two decades.

The documents associated with the National Agenda for Women specifically refer to a diversity of women but, as Sevgi Kilic argues, Australian feminist theory and agendas for social change have been dominated by 'Anglo middle-class women' with 'privileged access' to discourse: Kilic asks, 'Who is an Australian woman?' (1997:30). There is no woman, only a diversity of women. In this thesis, I am mindful of the inherent dangers of 'universalising' the experiences, status and lives of Victorian 'women'; similarities and differences may include socio-economic status, age; family structure; sexuality; (dis)ability; religion; and cultural background, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women. To this extent, I have attempted to focus on issues which impact, albeit differently, on many women, as policies generally are written and directed at women as a gender group. To consider each policy and its impact on specific groups of women is beyond the scope of this research, and frequently there is some commonality in many state policies which impacts adversely on all women, even if in different ways.

The origins of this research were personal, and arose initially from an 'imagined' post-graduate proposal. In Women's Studies the potential to pursue trans-disciplinary topics encourages the sociological imagination, and provides a challenge to 'render the invisible visible, the silent noisy, the motionless active'
(Gordon, 1986: 21). In mainstream discussion of economic rationalism [see Chapter 2], description and analysis has been - with only a few exceptions - quite consistently presented under a gender-neutral mantle, by both its supporters and detractors. My concern was not only to develop theoretical understandings from a feminist perspective, but also identify and describe this economic system in a practical sense - what does it mean to the lives of women? Additionally, my objective was a wider perception than merely women as paid workers, or students, or carers or any of their other myriad roles - I was interested in the sum total of legislation and state policy, to examine and analyse the interconnectedness of what is frequently presented as discrete facets of state political intervention.

This thesis is 'living' and 'lived' history. Since I commenced researching in 1997, there has been a change of government at the state level, and the federal government has been the site for comprehensive change in industrial relations, social security and the taxation system, to name a few. I have participated in this change as an observer, as well as a player, and frequently the roles overlapped. A crucial task confronting a researcher of contemporary issues is when to actually stop the collection of research data. Even as I write, there are continuing changes - of legislation, of policy, of electoral response - and it is extraordinarily difficult to draw a line across the page and defer any new events for future research.

This research is shaped by feminist perspectives and concerns which is reflected in its structure and organisation: an intermingling of contemporary literature, theorising, critical analysis and examples, presented through a number of inter-related themes. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 explains the origins of the research and how it evolved into a thesis proposal. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the decisions made regarding methodology, and some indication of the

---


3 As a player, I am actively involved with a range of community groups, including Southern Women's Action Network; a Women's Community Audit Group; Association of Women Educators; Mornington Peninsula Council Economic Development Advisory Group, Women in the Workforce Network, Board of Management, Peninsula Community Health Service; and the Mornington Peninsula Residents and Ratepayers Association.
basis for direction and shape of this work as it progressed. The contextual understanding of basic concepts and the boundaries of research are also clearly defined.

Contemporary interpretations of welfare and the welfare state are the dominant theme for Chapter 3, and I argue for a broad, comprehensive aspect of 'welfare'. This is not a critique of the social security system, with its connotations of state philanthropy. Rather, it pursues issues related to the welfare of women, and how this is influenced by a range of state interventionist strategies. A discussion of the economic rationalist/free market state identifies the pervasive influence of language in the debate, particularly as welfare policy is consistently presented as gender-neutral. Feminist theory extends the discourse to reveal the limitations of social policy based on economic models, and questions the validity of crisis theory implemented to justify budgetary constraints. Functional state policy advocates a return to family values and the nuclear family, traditionally the site for women's invisibility in the private sphere of unpaid caring. The impact of family responsibility limits the possibilities for women's economic independence and security under free state structures probably even more substantially than within the welfare state, in a resurgence of right-wing ideology.

The next three chapters take the discussion from a broad consideration of women's welfare to focus on three specific areas of women's relationship with the state and the state's policy structures - employment, education and health. While women's paid employment is central to the economic status of women, the sexual division of labour so evident in the Australian workplace is a structural impediment to their equal participation. Chapter 4 indicates some of the more comprehensive industrial relations legislation of the past two decades, to demonstrate the hidden bias in the actions of the interventionist state. This is illustrated through a number of case studies: the fluctuations in the gender pay gap; the transition towards enterprise bargaining; the implementation of 'flexibility' and how it is interpreted in the workplace; the invisibility of women's unemployment; and the limitations of the male
model of superannuation when it is applied to the work force experience of women. In the face of economic restructuring, labour market structures and state decision making reinforce women's marginal status in paid employment.

Just as women are participating in greater numbers in paid employment, their increased presence in all areas of education is undeniable, although their exclusion from the decision making structures persists. Women still exist at the periphery of educational debate, despite their connection to the system as consumers, providers and primary carers. State policy, designed to advance the position of girls and women in education, has proved extremely fragile in the face of crisis theory and economic rationalist discourse. Through the use of a case study approach, Chapter 5 illustrates how effectively policy disengages and discounts the rights of girls and women in education, and demonstrates how 'the system' perpetuates gender disadvantage.

Viewing the reform in the health sector through a similar feminist lens reveals a system which discounts the needs and circumstances of women. As Chapter 6 argues, the reality of health care provision is that it reflects and perpetuates gender relations. Restructuring, based on economic principles, has encouraged a resurgence of policy, defined as gender neutral, but exposed as discriminatory and biased. The health concerns of women are inadequately catered for through the prevailing male medical model, which ignores the centrality of women's relationships to health services. As with the education system, women are connected to health care as consumers, providers and primary care givers, but are peripheral to the policy making process. The development of case studies in this chapter portrays the state's complicity in disadvantaging women in their dealings with the system. Specific critical analysis is related to the interventionary practices in childbirth and maternal health and the possible connection between early discharge from hospital after childbirth and post-natal depression; the inadequate, increasingly privatised aged care system; the disempowering impact of the breast cancer 'industry'; and the strengthening of gendered roles within the health care work force. It examines the use of 'crisis' theory to justify the introduction of casemix (hospital) funding and exposes the bias evident in federal intervention in the private health insurance
industry. I would argue that what links all of these cases is the promotion of supposedly gender-neutral policy and practices which are inherently gendered, to the detriment of women’s well-being.

In reviewing the research in Chapter 7, I repeat the initial question - how effectively can women initiate, promote and accomplish change using the male constructed institutions, including the state? The challenge is to decode and decipher how even women’s ‘problems’ and inequality are both defined by male structures, in their language and on their terms. To rephrase the question from a feminist perspective - how does the state contribute to or ameliorate the gender disadvantage for women through policy? - initiates an entirely different response. It also problematises strategies for women which focus on advancing their interests as a social class, through participation in existing patriarchal structures, including political parties and trade unions. In 1999, Steve Bracks and his Labor Party colleagues defied predictions and gained government in Victoria. Included in their platform was a substantial redirection of policy to embrace an inclusive ideology, an issue for reflection one year on. And if women have indeed been the focus, how effective and sustainable are any gains that have been made? Or, might it still be true as Eleanor Roosevelt suggested half a century ago (see above), women are being ‘shunted aside’? How mythical is the woman-friendly state?
CHAPTER 2: OF MOTIVATION AND METHOD.

Every law, existing or proposed, affects women more or less, and there is nothing unseemly in a woman forming opinions about the laws, and at proper times, giving proper expression to them.

Kate Sheppard
(1897, quoted in WEL: 1993)

There are no such things as women’s issues! All issues are women’s issues . . . the difference that we bring is that we are going to bring the full, loud, clear determined voice of women into deciding how these issues are going to be addressed.

Aileen Clarke Hernandez
(Address to the National Conference, National Organization of Women, Los Angeles: 1971)

When we push against the barriers, get involved in ‘their’ issues, then there’s resistance . . . The attitude of the men, in say, the Economic Policy Division is “It’s an economic issue, what’s it got to do with you?” And we say, “Of course it matters to us”.

Anonymous worker
(1994, Office of the Status of Women)

2.1: INTRODUCTION

These three statements span a century and yet there is a certain resonance to their message. In Australia, as in most western capitalist democracies, there has been positive change in the status and position of women over the last hundred years. Yet lamentably, despite profound optimism, women are still confronted by structures which challenge their right to a public voice on, and participation in, most issues. The concept of separate issues which are the province of women, and usually related to the private domestic sphere, persists, and is paralleled by the continued exclusion of women from the public world, particularly that of politics and economics. This brings into question how effectively the barriers which preclude the recognition of women’s right to full participation in public life - and their autonomy - have been dismantled.
Assumptions about women’s location in the domestic sphere might imply an insurmountable rigidity to the gender relationships which result from the public/private dichotomy, and insinuate the inevitability of such distinctions - a view which may be directly challenged by increasing evidence of women’s advancement in the public world. On the face of it, amongst other things, women at the beginning of the twenty-first century have voting rights, freedom to pursue educational and employment opportunities, access to improved health and welfare provisions, and, through legislative change, some redress against discriminatory practices. However, despite liberal rhetoric, women remain marginalised, or subsumed under a mantle of gender-neutrality which effectively reduces their voices to a whisper. This is compounded by the persistent ideology of man-as-the-norm, which remains intact, and perpetuates the implication that ‘women’s rights and needs’ in the main are the same as men’s. In this thesis I aim to provide a feminist understanding of the impact of the state’s economic restructuring on the provision of services for women, and how seemingly neutral-gender legislation has reinforced women’s marginality and silence.

In this chapter, I will describe the premise for my research project and the events that shaped its formulation. An outline of the aims pursued in this study indicates its significance in the present political and economic climate in Australia. I will also delineate the context in which the research has developed, and how it has been informed by existing theory on economic restructuring, particularly in relation to gender studies. This chapter also includes an explanation of the research design and methodological implications, and an interpretation of how this study fits within the overall structure of feminist research.

2.2: THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

This catch-cry of feminist activism in the 1970s - the personal is political - encompasses very clearly the underlying impetus for this thesis. In her explanation of this statement, Lisa Tuttle refutes the false dichotomy which defines women’s shared problems as ‘personal’ and therefore outside the parameters of public discussion (1986,246). Increasingly, in the 1970s, the omission of women
within the framework of many institutions was being identified, and world wide
women were actively challenging the narrow definition of women's issues, by men,
to those involving home and family. In Australia, this translated into the
establishment of groups like the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) who ensured the
broadening of the public agenda in the parliamentary arena (Curtin &
Sawer,1996 149), and the successful implementation of many positive changes for
women. This euphoric interlude which represented a general trend towards greater
equality included the concept of equal pay, the development of equal opportunity
and affirmative action policy and the introduction of a range of woman-friendly
government services. It encouraged women, including me, to anticipate a continued
strengthening of women's participation and power in a range of previously
patriarchal institutions. The optimism unfortunately was short lived.

It became increasingly evident through the 1980s and 1990s that not
only had the pace of social change slowed, but many achievements which had
contributed to women's improved position and status were being seriously
jeopardised by the direction of government policy at both state and federal levels.
Within my workplace in the education sector, I witnessed the reduction and
elimination of numerous successful programs and initiatives designed to improve the
educational and employment prospects for women and girls, issues which I will
pursue with greater detail in later chapters in this thesis. Elements of the media were
becoming less women friendly and certainly more derogatory of feminist discussion,
and, to give a specific example, the provision of women's health services appeared
under constant threat. However, the growing unease among many feminists during
the 1980s catapulted into outrage with the Liberal Party victory over the Labor
Government in Victoria in October, 1992, when each day every newspaper edition
conveyed some further constraint on, or reduction in, community services. It was
obvious that tough questions were needed to address why the positive advancement
of women had 'backfired', and what factors precipitated this apparent regression.
23: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY...GENDER AND RESEARCH

Increasingly, a diverse range of practitioners concerned with the course of social justice echoed these concerns. For example, the Victorian Women’s Coalition instigated public meetings and demonstrations to highlight the dramatic and wide-ranging reduction in government welfare funding (Lewis, 1993). However, to focus on the drastic actions of only a specific state government would be to ignore a disturbing trend which indicates that in the past two decades there has been general evidence of increasing global public sector restructuring, which has challenged the notion of the welfare state. In many countries in the western world, the implementation of economic rationalist principles has involved the development of budgetary policy which emphasises the individualism of ‘free market’ imperatives and the transfer of welfare functions back to the nuclear family unit. The impact of change in the redistributive objectives of the state, in response to a perceived ‘crisis’ in government expenditure, has been the focus of extensive mainstream theory and research during this period (e.g. Elliott, 1980; Manning, 1985; Whitwell, 1990; Pusey, 1991; Kelsey, 1996). However, as Anne Edwards and Susan Magarey state, the serious implications for women from welfare minimalism has remained relatively unexplored by the ‘predominantly male academics, politicians, policy-makers and business, union and community leaders’ (Edwards & Magarey, 1995).

The stance taken by Carole Pateman (1985.ix) makes problematic previous discussion of social aspects within the public realm, studies which she suggests are effectively limited to only the male half the population. She contends that the obvious omission of women undermines the scientific status of many social science projects. But in our haste to address the position of women and their relationship with the welfare state, Hilary Rose warns that the temptation to ‘add on women’ to existing theory would leave unquestioned current processes of capital accumulation which remain ‘... incapable of grasping theoretically the specific

---

1 Other major projects in Victoria were exploring aspects of social justice and equity, generally, and specifically related to women. These included The Purple Sage Project, the Public First campaign and The Women’s Audit.
position of women within both the domestic and the socialized sectors of welfare” (Rose, 1981: 5021).

It is necessary to acknowledge that because of the implications of unpaid labour, including childbirth and childcare and other demands for community caring, the position of women may be different from, but no less valuable than, that of male members of the community. In her detailed analysis, Marilyn Waring (1988) asked the question of how state economic policies might be reconstituted ‘if women counted’ and the value of their unpaid labour was not routinely excluded from global economics. This is an important concept and one worth elaborating, as the bases for a woman’s entitlement to welfare has the capacity to reinforce her dependency or contribute to her autonomy (Sainsbury, 1996: 4), an understanding that will consistently recur in this research: is it charity or justice? The apparent over-representation of women as recipients of welfare is routinely accepted and reflects a widely held community perception that women’s primary role is domestic and dependent, and generally non-contributory in an economic context (Montague & Stephens, 1985: 3). These assumptions which reflect male-centred opinions and values perpetuate the stereotypes and maintain an androcentric world view so prevalent in contemporary discussions of welfare. Dorothy Broom (1984: xxi) insists that she can identify “... no logical reason why gender differences must lead to injustice; diversity need not imply hierarchy”.

However, almost without exception there is an hierarchical dimension to discussions focusing on the state and its ‘private’ and ‘public’ policies and practices. Allocation of ministerial portfolios gives primacy to economic/budgetary/treasury responsibilities in preference to those which are more ‘people-focused’. Thus it is changes in redistributive policy based on economic factors that are supported by government decision making. Lois Bryson (1992: 13) indicates that “cries for small government by the New Right do not really envisage the removal of government intervention, but rather a redistribution of its efforts”. The apparent bias in this ‘redistribution’ from areas of community welfare to those of capitalist promotion have frequently been illustrated in the past by highlighting the increase in, for example, military spending in times of welfare constraint. In Premier Jeff
Kennett's Victoria of the 1990s the reallocation process purportedly aimed at priming the economy appears even more blatantly skewed with government admission of preferential treatment for private enterprises like Crown Casino (‘Packer’s deal’, Herald/Sun, 23/10/98:7) and the Melbourne Grand Prix (‘Grand price of fun’, Herald/Sun, 21/10/98:3)² continuing alongside reduced funding in other welfare areas (eg. The Grey Sisters, The Age, 26/10/98:3).

To understand the implications of state restructuring and its perceived preferential catering for masculinist interests, it is necessary to clearly define and assess the consequences of all government intervention, including not just a narrow interpretation of social welfare provision, but issues such as tax reform and occupational structures (Bryson,1992:160). The 1998/9 argument related to federal tax reform, which proposed an inclusive GST (goods and services tax) and income tax relief exemplifies the absence - even denial - of gender considerations in a proposal which will potentially have enormous repercussions for women (Smith,1998), and contribute to gender construction based on labour market participation. Further, the Federal Coalition Government, elected in 1996 and returned in 1998, embarked on policies to dismantle many welfare services, while simultaneously implementing aspects of workplace deregulation. As I will detail in the chapter on employment, the gendered implications of workplace and taxation reform should be subjected to rigorous examination, something which has not been readily evident in the work of many social theorists.

2.4: AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research project seeks to develop a feminist interpretation of Australian - and more specifically Victorian - government policy, during the past two decades, through an examination and analysis of its impact on women and women’s services. By providing a feminist interpretation of current shifts in welfare policies I propose to a) develop theory which identifies the inequality such policies perpetuate and b) develop strategies for resistance. In a study more than a decade ago, the

² Actions such as these are frequently termed 'corporate welfare'. See later in this chapter.
question was posed: "To what extent do various state interventions reinforce, challenge or transform some elements of the enduring but changing pattern of women's unequal access to economic security and social autonomy?" (Baldock & Cass, 1983:xii). Almost two decades later this question is still pertinent. For while the circumstances which inform public policy are constantly changing, the consideration of the position of women is constantly ignored. The question of state intervention - and the issues it raises - will be at the core of my study.

The history of women's relationship with the state is lengthy, and the contentious nature of this relationship has been central to feminist political discourse (see Chapter 7). Frequently state policies, including welfare provisions, are represented as gender-neutral, although the activism of women, including 'femocrats', and their intervention in social and political processes has problematised this issue. Despite the rhetoric of gender-neutrality, what is of particular concern in the current situation is whether in the last two decades the state has been re-emphasising a conservative political ideology and economic philosophy predicated on unequal gender relations. The general right-wing/liberal move to promote the patriarchal family and the traditional dichotomy between private and public seem particularly appealing to governments intent on reducing expenditure.

Political parties advocating a strengthening of 'family values' through a wide-ranging 'pro-family' agenda, contribute to a disintegration of feminist gains on social justice issues. By recognising an anti-feminist bias I do not suggest a conspiracy in the politics of contemporary governments, but in my thesis I do intend to explore whether government decisions constitute a systemic response to feminist achievements. The question is whether state support for the corporate sector, through an increasing reliance on the 'market economy' is by definition antagonistic to the implementation of egalitarian social programs. As I have indicated, the dismantling of some social welfare programs in the name of perceived economic efficiency appears to have gained widespread credibility. How, why and by whom?

In attempting to draw together the strands of evidence to construct a cohesive argument about state provision for women in an era of economic
restructuring, it is necessary to recognise that welfare policy entails much more than quantitative data related to budget allocations. Simplistic accounts of diminished expenditure, while pertinent, render invisible the gender (and class and ethnic) transformations which result from the decisions of governments, and as a consequence ignore changes to the socio-economic status of women (Sassoon, 1987). It appears that welfare legislation is increasingly embedded in the value judgements and ideological responses of economic conservatism, and I will endeavour to demonstrate the gender inequities inherent in such an approach. Political scientist Lyn Kathlene (1990:244) argues that “Most political studies, and consequently most political studies of gender impact rely heavily on quantitative methodologies. These methods are excellent tools for revealing many types of macro-level trends but usually do not explore the reasons for the trends . . .”. In this research project I will be looking for trends, but I want to pursue further the reasons for these trends.

2.5: IMPLEMENTING FEMINIST RESEARCH

The methodological basis of this study is feminist research methodology, which I define as a perspective rather than a method: a perspective which aims to keep women, in all their diversity, at the centre of the research (Reinharz, 1992). A feminist discourse necessarily challenges the mainstream assumptions, providing an alternative to the economic model for the development of welfare provision. Questioning the imperatives on which welfare decisions are based is intrinsic to a women-centred alternative model. Such a model makes factual information about the economy problematic, as ‘facts’ are not constant but are constructed by the perspective we adopt and the questions we ask (Lather, 1991:105).

This approach highlights an important element of feminist research, an element which acknowledges the undeniable subjectivity of most research. Shulamit Reinharz details how frequently personal experience is considered a valuable asset for feminist research - ‘starting from one’s own experience’ clearly identifies ‘the researcher’s standpoint’ - which is in conflict with the stated
objectivity of mainstream research and queries the traditional ‘ways of knowing’ (1992:258). In their discussion of the development and diversity of women’s studies, Cheris Kramerae and Dale Spender trace the construction of knowledge through academic research which privileges the male experience and presents knowledge gained from traditional research methods as ‘objective, impartial and neutrally obtained’. As they comment:

Confronted with the massive bias - a singularly inappropriate term for the wholesale exclusion of women, from the knowledge on and about humanity - feminists insisted the meanings made in the name of objectivity simply were not good enough.

Kramerae & Spender (1992:5).

A researcher’s perspective permeates all levels of the research project, from the selection of a topic and the formulation of hypotheses, through the collection of data, and eventuating in an interpretation of what has been ‘discovered’. As a feminist I acknowledge that any project is influenced by background experiences and political context which a researcher brings to the process, and suggest that assertions of absolute objectivity perpetuate an unsubstantiated myth. Sociologists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna emphasis how the ‘act of interpretation’ is present throughout the entire process and that it involves an ‘intentional social activity’. Further they refute “. . . the assumption that maintaining separation between politics and knowledge, or theory and practice, is a necessary condition for scholarly activity . . .” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:169).

Many feminist projects are designed to reflect the reality of women’s lives through a transdisciplinary approach (Reinharz, 1992:250), a notion which is taken up in my study, as it crosses the boundaries of history, politics, economics and sociology to develop its discursive theory. The specific methods which are implemented in the pursuit of feminist knowledge cover a diverse range, but are typically qualitative in design and provide flexibility in structure (Kathlene, 1990:241). There is no one feminist method or ‘recipe’ for constructing a study which values and validates the position of women, as Shulamit Reinharz so competently demonstrates in her summation of feminist research methods. Her
concluding remarks which maintain that feminist research voices "... are rooted in and draw on many mainstream and critical theoretical traditions..." (1992) and simultaneously provide for variety and creativity in developing an appropriate research model have particular relevance to my study.

2.6: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The scope of this research thesis is designed to consider the implications of welfare policy for women, at both [Victorian] state and [Australian] federal level over approximately the last two decades. The methods I employ are discussed extensively by Shulamit Reinharz in her review of the content analysis approach. She suggests (1992: 147) that "... studying cultural products through the lens of feminist theory exposes a pervasive patriarchal and even misogynistic culture ..." and I believe this particular method is ideally suited to my aims and objectives. The cultural texts which provide a focus for closer analysis in this thesis derive from a number of sources, and because of the contemporary and flexible nature of this study, the inclusion of further material was thought important. Examples of texts for study include government/opposition policy statements and press releases; legislative documents; government budgets; media reports, articles and editorials, printed materials from special interest groups, including 'think tanks'; and personal correspondence.

This research method concurs with what British sociologist Liz Stanley (1991:5) discusses as issues related to interpretations of such written accounts. She notes that this method is frequently perceived as 'descriptive'. However, she asserts that this form of analysis is theoretical argument, designed to present 'a case' which negotiates a feminist interpretation of mainstream versions of 'social reality'. The use of an 'archival' strategy, which is embraced by content analysis, is an exploratory tool to ask questions about 'what happened' and consequently provide a basis for explanatory theory - the how and why (Yin,1984:17) - and a record of what can be identified as 'living history'.
Jane Haggis describes how women's historical experiences are obscured by powerful, but subtle processes (1987:20). This often results from the application of masculine perspectives which define what is valued - and therefore recorded - and thus contributes to women's invisibility in the public sphere. Cultural texts and their representations of women do more than just reflect gender norms: they contribute to shaping normative assumptions (Reinharz, 1992:151). It is therefore vitally important to bring into focus, and question, the gender-neutrality of the documents which I choose for analysis, and clearly detail how women are 'obliterated' from social view (Holter, 1984:9). In a research training module, Peter Spratt concedes that almost 'anything' can be the subject of content analysis, although he prefers the term 'textual analysis' for this form of interpretative method. Further he asserts that the researcher's interpretive skills must be highly developed to ensure that any evaluation may be validated against dissenting views (Spratt, 1995). In choosing this method I intend to demonstrate the covert bias of mainstream views in the areas of my thesis.

The responsibility for selection of appropriate texts for critical study involves subjective decision making, as the quantity and range of material available was certainly extensive. When I first considered this study, I anticipated a broad view of all areas of the welfare state, but as I proceeded, it became apparent that this would be a task far exceeding the scope of a PhD thesis. With some regret I decided to focus on what I perceived as areas of legislation which intrinsically define women's relationship to the welfare state and determine their ability to function as independent citizens. Three areas - employment, education and health - will be subject to intensive analysis and provide the focal point for a more general evaluation of the gender-political nature of state legislative action. Additionally, the criteria which informed my selection of these three areas will be discussed more fully in the relevant chapters, including some comment on how they interact in determining the socio-economic position of women.

Analysing primary documents "... provides significant opportunities ... to identify the plurality of values and discourse which underpin the Australian welfare state ..." (McMahon et al., 1996:xvi), and this task will be central to my
study. However, analysis will not be restricted to primary documentation as I believe the ‘absence of women’ will be evident not only in the formulation and presentation of state documents, but also in the preliminary and ensuing public discussion. Analysing a diverse range of cultural texts should provide a more in depth understanding of how existing discourse so effectively marginalises and excludes women. A feminist study using content analysis, as with any other method, should avoid the limitations imposed by ‘victimologies’ which portray women only as victims, and deny their agency in implementing social change (Harding, 1987:5). Developing theory which explains sexual politics and the state’s role in perpetuating unequal gender relations empowers women to actively seek to ‘transform and reconstitute’ state structures and identify ‘mechanisms for change’ (Franzway & Court, 1989:32).¹

2.7: A ‘RESTRUCTURING’ AUSTRALIA?

Most Western countries responded [to problems of national economies and governments] by moving towards deregulation of markets and finance, and redirection of resources from the public to the private sector. As one important dimension of this process, they attempted - often unsuccessfully - to reduce the size and cost of the state, and in particular its welfare functions. The term that best seemed to capture the character of these processes is ‘restructuring’.

Edwards & Magarey,
(1995:1)

Preliminary investigation suggests that governments, including those at both the state and federal level, have broadly and positively embraced the ideology of ‘economic rationalism’ or ‘economic restructuring’. Since the early 1980s, successive governments in Australia have loudly acclaimed the need for economic reform based, in my view, on questionable evidence, an argument I will expand in Chapter 3. As I have already stated, the implementation of structural change has a gender dimension, and it seems opportune to ensure that any evaluation fully acknowledges the perceived differentiated nature of its impact. I contend that adopting a feminist approach to my research will not only demonstrate the validity of this perception, but

¹ Aspects of ‘transformation’ and ‘reconstitution’ will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 7.
simultaneously challenge the totality of new right rhetoric on restructuring. This may also give some insight into the reason why these principles of economic rationalism have been so readily embraced by many strands of political thought, despite a growing unease about the direction of change they promote.

In a public oration in 1996, Australian Hugh Stretton was extremely critical of the primacy given to economic factors in developing legislation - for what he refers to as the ‘poor laws of 1834 and 1996’ - and the value judgements on which they are prefaced (1996:9). While he acknowledges the importance of public policy which affords economic factors due consideration, he is damning in his condemnation of the community dislocation which is evolving.

Some of the people who design or support our incompetent economic policies believe in them . . . I suspect rising numbers don’t. Cynical business people welcome any old excuse for weakening government to allow various kinds of plunder, and for weakening labor to allow bigger profit shares. Cynical politicians have decided that tax-cutting is the only game, and any excuse for it will do.

Hugh Stretton (1996:22)

Accepting the importance of economic factors in the implementation of public policy does not summarily vindicate the efficiency of market-based strategies in achieving their objectives. Further, the evaluation that does exist tends to reflect short-term gains, without consideration of future disadvantage to social cohesion (Hula, 1988:16). As citizens in a democracy, we have the right to expect that decisions which relate to significant values inherent in our community are based on thoroughly evaluated, egalitarian principles which promote ‘human dignity, distributive justice and social cohesion’ (Boston & Dalziel, 1992:ix), and, I would argue, recognise the state’s complicity in compounding gender inequities.
CHAPTER 3: THE WELFARE STATE - THE WELFARE OF WOMEN?

3.1: INTRODUCTION

This study is based on the premise that, in a modern democracy, the state has a level of responsibility for the organisation of economic policy and the provision, either directly or indirectly, for the welfare of its citizens. The exact nature and extent of a government’s responsibility, and therefore its political intervention through social and economic policies, is highly contentious, and the site for on-going discourse for many theorists. To comprehend the stance adopted in this thesis, it is necessary to define and describe what is implied by ‘the welfare state’ in mainstream discussions, and demonstrate how presumptions about ‘the state’s responsibility’ direct these discussions. Initially, in this chapter, I will develop understanding of the breadth of contemporary welfare provisions in Australia and to outline, with a general overview, why adjustment to government redistributive practices has such profound implications for the status - and well-being - of women within the community. A number of issues introduced here will be addressed more specifically, in relation to women’s employment, education and health, in later sections of this study.

The impetus for restraint in welfare provisions has been stimulated by suggestions of a ‘crisis’ in the financial position of contemporary governments, which, some analysts would have us believe, can only be resolved through the introduction of drastic economic measures. To directly challenge state retrenchment, I aim to refute the myth of a ‘black hole’ in government assets and to demonstrate how principles of economic rationalism have hijacked state restructuring and directed the policy of successive governments at both state and federal levels. In this way, reduced funding, restrictive policy, removal of services and a myriad of other ‘cost-cutting’ directives are blamed on the ineptitude of the preceding government and apologetically excused as essential, without any attempt to provide an alternative perspective that could direct state action.
Additionally, this chapter will provide some understanding of the pervasive manner in which mainstream theory not only ignores gender, but presents state policy and decision making as gender neutral. The relevance of an 'absence of women' is central to any feminist study of the welfare state, and a major objective of this chapter is to establish how and why gender is rendered invisible in theory. The inference that the position of women is adequately informed through welfare considerations of the family is analysed, and normative assumptions which conflate family values with equity for women are critically discussed through a feminist lens.

Further, this chapter considers how the development of social policy based on economic principles has contributed to a re-emphasis on inequitable gender relations, which perpetuates the stereotypical dichotomies of public and private spheres and paid and unpaid labour. The promotion of a 'breadwinner model' as a basis for welfare policy ignores the prevailing segregated division of labour so steeped in the Australian - and other western countries - work structure, and denies women access to economic independence. The maintenance of women's 'welfare dependency' through government policy is critically considered to demonstrate how mainstream ideology effectively stifles women's voices and marginalises their citizenship rights.

Feminist attempts to address some of these concerns through the bureaucracy have resulted in the development of women's budgets, equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation, and the appointment of a number of women to decision-making positions within state institutions. It is not the intention of this study to assess how effectively these actions have contributed to change, but it is important to trace responses by successive governments since the 1970s to the gains women have made, and the resilience of these advances to the constraints of the economic rationalist state. The evaluation of some initiatives which advance women's interests is becoming increasingly difficult as the state - at all three levels of the government hierarchy (local, state and federal) - continues to 'mainstream' women's policy issues. This precipitates the question of whether 'mainstreaming' is a euphemism for
‘dismantling’, an aspect which will be considered generally in the concluding section of this chapter, and examined in more specific detail in ensuing sections of the study.

3.2 WHAT IS THE WELFARE STATE?

An over-riding problem in any discussion of the ‘welfare state’ is to develop understanding of what this contentious term actually means. In Australia, as in other countries world-wide, the term ‘welfare state’ has been absorbed into common usage and is used in a myriad of circumstances to define and describe a range of beliefs and perceptions, which is dependent on the values of the speaker. What becomes particularly clear in perusing the literature on the welfare state is that its definition persists as a contested area.

For example, Anne Edwards and Susan Magarey, Australian feminist sociologists (1995:10), outline the effect of government restructuring through consideration of welfare in a limited sense - the state’s direct control of cash transfers and regulation of the labour market and employment processes. Their discussion acknowledges the restrictions of such an approach, while suggesting this is a common interpretation within Australian discourse and particularly pertinent to their study. These aspects certainly have relevance to my study, but centring on issues of social security and ‘the safety net’ diverts attention from the social and personal services for which the state has increasingly assumed some responsibility, a diversion of which Brian Munday (1989:1) is generally critical and one which this chapter aims to address.

In defining the welfare state as an ‘umbrella’ term, Adam Jamrozik, a researcher in social welfare and policy (1991:54), uses a common contextual description which addresses the role of the state in economic regulation as well as describing the complexity of state provision of basic services. This definition reflects

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1 The ‘breadwinner’ model refers to the family as an economic unit of adult male provider/adult female carer/dependent children.
a wider consideration, not just of labour market structures, but the direct consequences of prevailing inequities which provide differential access to health, education, childcare, housing and the judicial system. Mainstream representations of public expenditure and social welfare, according to Sara Dowse (1988:205), conveniently ignore the circumstances in which these resources are effectively directed into support for the private sector also - a form of 'corporate welfare' - which includes the redistribution of public money to areas such as private education and the provision of essential infrastructure for grand prix car racing (as happened in Melbourne).

Some of the critical voices in the discussion about the welfare state are provoked by an opinion that state intervention and redistribution focuses only on the rights of the disadvantaged and that all government adjustments in the distribution of materials and resources represent institutionalised charity. Michael Wearing and Rosemary Berrean (1994:xv) suggest that the direction of state intervention is a political question, in which proponents argue the scope and extent of state responsibility according to individual persuasion. This is particularly evident in much of the media attention which consistently describes the use and abuse of 'the system' involved in state welfare provision. Such an approach, which anchors welfare provision by the state in Australia's historical charity model of pre-federation years, is destined to reproduce elements of benevolence for the needy, rather than the rights of citizens to a minimal level of existence. As well as being socially divisive, this compounds the fragility of legislation which is dependent upon the goodwill and political direction of successive governments, a view iterated by David Cappo and Chris Carlile (1993:54).

The notion that governments have a responsibility to maintain the living standards of its citizens to a level acceptable to community beliefs, is quite widely proposed. Ramesh Mishra, a sociologist concerned with policy development (1990:18), accepts that a range of welfare state policies are proffered in the public arena, but identifies the regulation of the market economy to sustain employment, the public provision of essential services and the development of assistance for those identified as in critical need as the basic responsibilities of the state in a capitalist
society. Despite protestations from neo-conservative groups, there is widespread acceptance of an inherent need for government intervention in an inequitable market economy to moderate the worst of its excesses (Castles et al., 1996:8). A similar position is supported by Adam Jamrozik (1988:141) who identifies the political organisation of the welfare state in the promotion of primary provisions, including health, education and childcare, and describes how these provisions enhance the social functioning and physical survival of all citizens. However, the existence of an ever-widening financial abyss between the least and most advantaged Australians certainly makes the efficacy of current redistributive processes extremely problematic. The possibility, and even the appropriateness, of the state creating a more equitable society through existing institutional structures is certainly brought into question.

Intrinsic to the discussion is an understanding of the plurality of institutions which are included in any reference to the welfare state. In Australia, a complex inter-relationship exists among federal, state, local and voluntary agencies, in the development of policy and service provision (Beilharz et al., 1992:13). Such a relationship, and the contested areas of service delivery for which each accepts responsibility, leads to tremendous difficulty in developing national strategies for alleviating poverty and providing universal access to citizens' rights. Additionally, perpetuating community confusion encourages arguments for establishing 'the family' as the main agency for welfare provision, a situation which has a long history in the Australian context (McIntyre, 1985:120). The implications, especially for women, of mainstream acceptance of 'family provision' will be developed in a subsequent section of this chapter; suffice to say at this stage that caring is a gendered activity which provides a pivotal focus for the welfare state (Bryson, 1992:211). Feminist theory, challenging the patriarchal ideology which underlies state dichotomies of public and private sectors, is also critical of a welfare system which uses this distinction to compound and further institutionalise disadvantage for women.

Changes in the functioning of advanced capitalist economies, notably in the post-war years, have resulted in ever-expanding expectations about the function of
the state. The discrepancy in market provision for all community members has provoked increasing reaction from disadvantaged groups for greater state input. In Australia, this impetus resulted in an upsurge of special interest pressure groups whose demands were framed in the new language of the sixties, which referred to concepts like ‘the social system’ and ‘structural inequality’ in the pursuit of what they considered as a socially relevant ‘constructivist’ state. Speaking from a wide range of experiences as a consultant and a researcher in public policy reform, Michael Pusey (1991:164) comments:

It is clear in retrospect that the great surge of new federal programs - in health, education, community development, decentralisation and regional development, and many other areas - that were so expansively launched in the first year of the Whitlam government were driven by a strongly interventionist preoccupation with social needs.

Significantly, despite the euphoric intentions of the 1970s, accusations abound that the degree of social stratification persisted, accompanied by a burgeoning state commitment of resources and funding. At least that appears to be the evaluation of many welfare state critics - but women may interpret this period of change quite differently. In the ensuing sections of this chapter, I will develop an alternative appraisal which problematises the implied ‘failure’ of the welfare system.

3.3: A CRISIS IN THE WELFARE STATE?

Whether it was the extent of government expenditure which caused greater concern, or the pressure of global economics, the late 1970s and early 1980s heralded an era of uncertainty in the maintenance of welfare policy. The questioning of the state’s capacity to support its previous policy decisions was obviously triggered by a number of features which co-incided to undermine capitalist economic growth. Diane Sainsbury (1996:199) suggests that economic stagflation characterised by minimal or zero economic growth, with an attendant recession and escalating public deficits, combined to undermine the buoyancy and confidence of previous decades. Similarly, Claus Offe, reflecting from a socio-political viewpoint (1984:149), has noted the manner in which the recession in the mid-1970s prepared a fertile environment for the resurgence of politically powerful monetarist doctrines. The advocates of free market theory were forcefully critical of state initiatives as
being not only prohibitively costly, but - as they saw it - relatively ineffective in promoting economic stability or growth. These arguments, based on the freedom of choice for the individual, insisted that "... state intervention, rather than supporting the family, the site of morality and cohesive social reproduction, contributed to its [the family's] decline" (in Franzway et al., 1989:74).

The ideological basis of such arguments has instant appeal for the free marketeers, but it is pertinent to this discussion that suggested restraint in public welfare expenditure is not attributable to only one strand of the political spectrum. Admittedly, the Whitlam era resulted in unprecedented welfare gains, and a feminist reading of his period in government may contrast quite markedly with neo-liberal interpretations. But in the ensuing years, national policy of both Liberal and Labor governments has curtailed public expenditure. Discussing the direction of public policy in Australia and New Zealand, Francis Castles (1996:7) notes that the restrictive changes of the 1980s, which precipitated continuing reduction in welfare expenditure, were initiated by Labor governments to whom such policy should have been anathema. Traditionally, Labor governments promoted the modification of the reward structures of capitalism to ensure more equitable distribution, but according to Ramesh Mishra (1990:19) they also succumbed to the assertion that maintaining current welfare objectives was incompatible with sound economic progress.

Adam Jamrozik (1988:161-2) concurs with this observation, and suggests that a market economy is structured on inequality and is therefore realistically incompatible with social policy that advocates equity. He emphasises that conservative governments have portrayed inequality as "... economically necessary, politically expedient, 'scientifically' respectable and morally acceptable" (Jamrozik, 1988:158). The evidence strongly suggests, however, that not only conservative governments are presenting party policy which prioritises market considerations. The adage of 'fixing' the economy first, and then addressing the problems of social policy later, has been gaining momentum as a political imperative over the last two decades. Yet it effectively denies the detrimental effect of curtailed welfare provisions. Discussing the propensity of governments to cut expenditure to solve fiscal crises, Peter Saunders, a researcher in the field of public policy (1994:14)
outlines the tenuous nature of this theory, and queries if reduced spending has proven as essential to economic recovery. It may be an option, but is it the only - or the most acceptable - option that governments have?

The consequences of the economic downturn, and the state's response, has been the focus of a number of commentators. In appraising public sector management, Brian Head (1980:44) made the observation two decades ago that the 'seemingly inevitable squeeze' on state expenditure was occurring at the very time when an increasing number of households were under financial duress, and in greater need of welfare-related programs. This trend, to pressure the state to pursue balanced budgets, has been maintained quite consistently in the ensuing period. The advocates against deficit budgets historically support stringent government measures to address economic downturns, but economists at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Chorney et al, undated:7) contend that these solutions are based on an unsubstantiated premise - promoted by the corporate sector - about the danger of public debt. In the opinion of these economists [at the Canadian Centre for Public Policy] this perpetuates what they believe is a palpably obvious myth of the state's 'black hole'.

Moira Rayner, the former Equal Opportunity Commissioner in the state of Victoria, explains the existence of that 'myth' in the Australian context. "It has become a ritual for new governments to announce that they are compelled to break their promises because their predecessors had deceived the electorate about the state of the public purse" (Rayner,1997:51). The apparent deceptiveness of such a ploy has more than just ethical repercussions, in which an elected government denies a tacit agreement with the electorate. It creates an environment where all state welfare programs are placed in jeopardy, and restrictive funding guidelines are implemented to justify extensive cutbacks (Flaskas & Hounslow,1980:13). The development of such 'crisis' dialogue is not peculiar to the Australian situation, but it does reflect a continuing attack on the integrity of public welfare and denies the manner in which policy contrition affects some people more adversely than others.
In the opinion of Helga Maria Hernes, based on her extensive experience as a feminist researcher and an advisor on public sector policy development in Europe (1984:35), the identification of a financial crisis in the welfare state results in reduced government expenditure. Nevertheless, her perception that this affects women more particularly because of their location as 'objects' of social policy is just as applicable to most western capitalist countries, including Australia. Anne Showstack Sassoon, a political theorist, extends this argument further to challenge the political nature of welfare decisions which ignore how the socio-economic status of women is subsequently changed (1987:158). She contends that simply discussing the quantity of welfare resources and their distribution, while one important aspect of the debate, ignores the social and political dimensions of the crisis. Simplistic accounts of diminished expenditure render invisible the gender (and class and ethnic) transformations which result from the political decisions of patriarchal governments. New Zealand feminist economist Prue Hyman concurs. She explains how welfare legislation, despite any representations otherwise or assertion of compromise, is increasingly embedded in the value judgements and ideological responses of economic conservatism (Hyman,1994:40).

The dismantling of some social welfare programs, in the name of a perceived economic crisis, has gained widespread credibility, not least through the continuous media attack on 'welfare dependency' as mentioned previously in this chapter. Additionally, however, politicians from most major parties have contributed to a groundswell of opinion, dramatically reported in Australian newspapers, which castigates those who are deemed as welfare dependent (e.g. 'Women and the budget' Herald Sun, 7/1/1997:18). There is an ideological bias in the term 'dependency', with emotional connotations which is gaining acceptance in diverse political circles. We need to consider why we frame the debate in terms of welfare dependence, with all its negative markers, rather than identifying this as an issue of

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2 A number of the economists quoted in this study advocate public spending in times of economic downturn to stimulate the economy.
public assistance. The individualistic basis for framing the debate in terms of dependency illustrates the bias by those who control the language.¹

A propensity to apportion blame to welfare recipients has become increasingly acceptable. Gertrude Himmelfarb, writing for the conservative Republican Party in the USA (1995), includes a number of placatingly positive comments, but then continues with a highly critical description of the present crisis as one of morals rather than welfare. She suggests that the work ethic, based on virtues such as prudence, self-control, temperance and responsibility, is under-mined by the extension of temporary welfare support to create a generational culture of dependency. However, she leaves unquestioned the political decisions that create such a socio-economically barren environment; an environment which fails to value, nurture and provide life opportunities for all members of the community. Such theories mirror the negative naming which has become prevalent in everyday conversation - “the dole bludger”, “the welfare mum”, “the unemployed migrant” - to repeat a few. Ruth Sidel’s concern (1987:88), although specifically related to the USA experience, appears as tellingly important for contemporary Australia. As she puts it:

Since our first poor laws were passed, there has been a wrenching ambivalence about this society’s responsibility to the poor. On one hand, we profess belief that government has a moral obligation to care for poor people; and on the other hand, we despise the poor and assume that adequate financial support will simply encourage their ‘slothful, deceitful ways’.

The problem of focusing on poverty as the basis for ‘welfare’ is that it may precipitate unfair and discriminatory negative naming. However, the incidence of negative labeling and the discriminatory connotations associated with community members in need of government assistance needs to be exposed for what it is - a perpetuation of class divisions which ‘blame the victim’. What must be clearly defined is the divisiveness and futility of this approach, which further isolates those already disadvantaged.

¹ Such an attitude is evident in contemporary discussion for welfare recipients to agree to ‘mutual obligations’ in return for state funded support. There is an inherent disempowerment in the way the term is used and also in the punitive measures which accompany more recent legislation.
3.4 WELFARE STATE RETRENCHMENT

Existing welfare structures are increasingly being challenged by oppositional extremes, with those who advocate a more socially just society in conflict with supporters of the corporate state (Culpitt, 1992:17). Michael Pusey (1991:223) argues that Australia’s welfare state is poorly developed in comparison with most European countries, and that in an era of free market rhetoric it is highly vulnerable. This is compounded by a system in Australia where joint responsibility at the state and federal level permits abrogation of policy implementation, as exemplified by the health funding confrontation at a 1998 Premiers’ Conference, where confusion caused by the overlap of welfare provision was being utilised for political advantage (e.g. ‘Premiers conference’, The Age, 24/3/98:1).

Continuation of quality welfare programs, particularly in a climate of restraint and fiscal crisis, requires the tenacity and commitment of a government prepared to look beyond the platitudes of right-wing think tanks, which appear to be proliferating in Australia. Operating as pseudo-independent advisory bodies, they are organised on - and promote - free market theories of economic development, frequently using funds gleaned from the corporate sector (Pusey, 1991:227). Denouncing the indebtedness to citizens imposed by welfare state obligations, they support policy direction changes which encourage minimal government intervention and a dwindling public sector. The position held by Moira Rayner (1997:215) contends that Australian government debt is not the result of excessive spending on social services, but a direct result of an inappropriately narrow taxation base. This argument, which points to a variety of tax avoidance schemes, is evidenced by Australian Taxation Office data (‘Firms pay no tax’, Herald Sun, 14/1/98: 8; ‘Battling businesses pay no tax’, The Age, 25/3/98: 7) which indicate that half of all companies, including a number of the largest multi-nationals, contributed no tax, and the number of untaxed trusts continues to escalate. There is no suggestion that any of these companies or individuals are acting outside legal guidelines; what is morally reprehensible is that programs designed to provide necessary community services are being abandoned because of their ‘drain’ on the government coffers, while the most advantaged groups receive preferential treatment.
However, despite the questionable foundations for their assertions, there is a growing trend for many people - in politics and economics - as well as the electorate in general to insist that there is indeed a crisis in the welfare state. Based on observations of global world movements, conservative pressure is encouraging incumbent governments to plan balanced budgets with as little anguish to the community as is deemed possible. Concern for escalating public debt and unsatisfactory economic growth has provided an unprecedented opportunity for criticism, at times openly hostile and regressive, of government spending. James Cox, a conservative researcher working at the Centre for Independent Study in Canberra (1992:2) is critical of government provisions which have, as he sees it, encouraged people to accept less individual and collective responsibility for community needs. He maintains that it is preferable “... on both moral and practical grounds, to meet welfare needs as far as possible through private, voluntary action rather than through compulsion”.

In giving advice to the Federal Government in 1996, the Business Council of Australia urged that the aim of a budget surplus in the future should not be ‘diminished by the widening of the deficit’ (quoted in The Age, 2/7/96:B6). While advocating an extensive decrease in government expenditure on welfare, it also urged that any suggestion of increased costs for business, to achieve government objectives, should be abandoned. A similar argument is presented by Des Moore, the director of the right-wing think tank, Institute of Public Affairs. Commenting in his occasional column in the Melbourne Herald Sun (17/2/97:19) Moore urges that government efforts to reduce the deficit should target welfare spending as there is ‘more fat to be sliced’. He includes in his suggested ‘savings’ the introduction of interest on HECS debt (the Higher Education Contributory Scheme) and the elimination of grants to ‘community’ groups. It would be hard to defend these views against accusations of vested interest and value-laden opinion, no matter how emphatically the speakers may exhort neutrality.

The inherent difficulty with welfare state retrenchment is the inequitable manner in which it impacts on different groups. Recognising the importance of Australia’s economic viability does not discount the need for balance and fairness,
and a realistic reckoning of social costs which may result from budgetary decisions ('Balance in the budget, unbalance in society', The Age 26/8/1996 11). Merely perusing national accounts and monitoring changes in government expenditure is not indicative of the policies that should be implemented, nor the selective understanding of the economy that underlies these decisions (Waring, 1988:3). What is necessary is a more precise critique of what the changes are, why they have been implemented and the persuasive forces which have resulted in their adoption. The universal exclusion of women, as a group, from the theory and practice of economics, in a global economy which discounts and devalues women's work underlines the futility in expecting the welfare of women to be central to state policy decisions (Waring, 1988:212), an issue which will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.

Diane Sainsbury (1996:198) also acknowledges the need to analyse and theorise beyond aggregate measures of total budget policy. As a result of demonstrably gender biased decisions, the position of women and the gains they have made through gender equality reforms is seriously jeopardised. This does not insinuate an orchestrated assault on the advancement women have made - although backlash theory is very provocative and has its supporters - but demonstrates how a vision of neutrality viewed through a masculine lens is so unsatisfactory, a point that will be illustrated throughout this thesis. Transferring responsibility for the continuation of welfare services, decimated by funding constraints, routinely co-opted women's volunteer labour to fulfil an essential economic and ideological function for the state (Ballock, 1988:279). The circumstances which place the burden of 'volunteering' on women is part of the hidden political agenda so natural to conservative welfare state strategies.

What becomes apparent is that in a period of economic downturn the need for maintaining the level of social welfare is intensified. The deleterious effects of unemployment and increased costs compound the urgency of supplementary assistance provided by government intervention. Since the late 1970s, the relative position of the least advantaged Australians has deteriorated ('Rich leave poor further in their wake', The Australian, 2/8/97:8) and yet, as has been the case in New
Zealand, successive governments have continued an emphasis on 'the market' to secure social and economic objectives - with disastrous consequences for the country's social cohesion (O'Brien & Wilkes, 1993:165). There appears to be no clear evidence that state austerity in time of minimal economic growth is the most appropriate response, yet increasingly governments are being admonished to base their monetary policy on the diminution of the public sector.

Ian Henderson, the Director of the Sydney Institute (‘Rich leave poor further in their wake’ The Australian, 2/8/97:8), is concerned about data which indicates a growing polarisation in Australian society. He comments on the valuable contribution of government spending in diminishing gross inequity, a position which Adam Jamrozik, commenting in the early 1990s, overwhelmingly supports. “Whatever the rhetoric emanating from the government or the opposition, social policy followed in Australia has most of the features of selectivity, residualism, and subjugation of social objectives to the demands of a capitalist market economy” (Jamrozik, 1991:188). In this context, the value of accessible, universally available services, as distinct from monetary adjustments, is critically important. But, as the evidence indicates, responsibility for the service provision areas of state welfare is a site of continuing conflict.

3.5: ECONOMIC RATIONALISM: THE ‘MARKET STATE’

Sara Dowse comments (1988:218) that federally, from the mid 1970s, successive governments have shelved social policy development as a priority in favour of measures to control aspects of the employment sector and to restrict the growth of the public sector. This has been supported by powerful voices advocating the implementation of plans for a more balanced partnership of welfare provision, combining the state, the market and the volunteer sectors, in what is referred to as a mixed economy. Arguably, such a relationship could be considered positively, as it has the potential to assimilate the strength of each strand into an effectively functioning system. The practice as it is evolving, however, does not appear to support this mixed provision theory. While the major political parties adopt a presumed antagonistic stance about the adequacy and the extent of the public sector,
they appear to tacitly agree on the need for a reappraisal of the advantages to
government of greater market responsibility (Head, 1908: 44).

In this brief account of the direction and understanding of the welfare state in
Australia I have looked very broadly at issues relevant to the post-war era at both
the national and Victorian state level of government. It is not intended as a definitive
history but rather an overview of what has preceded the formulation and
implementation of principles in what is commonly referred to as the economic
rationalist state. This term, ‘economic rationalism’ is also mentioned in some studies
as ‘economic fundamentalism’ (e.g. Kelsey, 1995), or ‘the economic policy of the
New Right’ (e.g. Eatwell, 1989). While welfare retrenchment has been practised
with enthusiasm by recent governments, it does not encapsulate the political
foundation on which economic rationalism is firmly based. For in this circumstance,
the economic is most definitely political. The impetus to restructure welfare appears
to be compellingly concerned with replacing public provision of welfare with
voluntary provision (Rose, 1981: 499), and where this is impractical, to summon the
forces of the market to intervene. Scant credence is given to the resultant
discrepancy in social well-being, or the fostering of community values like human
dignity, when the primary focus of government is on self-reliance, a fiscal balance
and the pursuit of individualism (Boston & Dalziell, 1992: ix).

State restructuring, based on the principles of economic rationalism is
identified as the new ‘orthodoxy’ by Michael Muetzelfeldt in his assessment of the
social implications of contemporary politics (1992: 187). He describes the intensely
powerful, political impetus, well supported by right wing strategic organisations,
which has enabled the assimilation of economic rationalist principles into mainstream
discourse and explains the manner in which it has ‘provided its own validity’ (ibid:
190). This may seem simplistic, but his observations parallel those of Jane Kelsey in
her definitive study of economic rationalism [she uses the term economic
fundamentalism] and its introduction into New Zealand economic policy in the
1980s. “The mission of New Zealand’s change agents has been to initiate and
entrench the ‘right’ policies, not to secure socially acceptable outcomes”
(Kelsey, 1995: 111), and the opportunity to introduce the appropriate structural adjustments was provided by the economic uncertainty of the 1980s.

Most disconcerting is the insidious manner in which this approach to economic restructuring develops its own momentum, buoyed by the appearance of common sense and protected from dissenting analysis in mainstream theory because of its support by the powerful corporate sector. The acceptance of rationalisation policies in Australia was intensified by the resurgence of what Francis Castles and his colleagues describe as the ‘intellectual right’ (1996:9), but was certainly assisted by prevailing international public policy in the U.S.A., Britain, and most particularly New Zealand. The policies are based on a doctrine which maintains the primacy of economic considerations in the formulation of public policy, and are implemented by what Peter Saunders labels an ‘economic rationalist juggernaut’, similar to Thatcherism [Britain], Reaganomics [U.S.A.] and Rogernomics [New Zealand] (1994: 126). The ‘New Zealand experiment’, introduced to the plaudits of the international money market, faces increasing criticism after more than a decade of social dislocation without discernible and viable economic stability (see e.g Kelsey, 1996; Castles, Gerritsen & Vowles, 1996).

And yet, it is this failed economic ideology which Australian governments continue to embrace. By mobilising the angst of middle Australia against the functioning of the welfare state, successive governments have decimated expenditure on essential service provision. Writing in her column in The Age (15/10/1996:15), Janet McCalman suggests that the objective of governments is less about balanced budgets than it is about a reduction in taxation for those with the greatest capacity to pay4. She continues, “Britain is a terrible lesson for us. It is now paying the price of national job shedding, of a common wealth in the pursuit of greed and selfishness . . . The British stopped investing in their society, and the bottom line is looking bad”. The trends identified in countries on which Australian restructuring is modeled provide only minimal evidence of positive achievements: but negative examples continue to surface.
Arguments that economic recovery necessarily relies on accelerating private investment and diminishing state debt, have engendered widespread justification for public service contraction.

As a body of dogma largely unsupported either by rational analysis or by appeal to empirical evidence, economic rationalism provides a powerful impetus to locate more and more responsibility with the private sector for securing fundamental economic and social goals.

Milly Fels & Rob Watts
(1995:5)

Even as the whisper of dissent is gaining resonance, the aims and objectives of government economic planning remain virtually unaffected, although suggestions of some relief from stringent spending is often mooted during pre-election campaigning. It would appear that any change in approach is motivated by a desire to retain the political influence of control, rather than as a recognition of the ineffectiveness of absolute market based policy. Ironically, the broad divisions, which separated the major political parties in their philosophy of the welfare state, have been seriously eroded by the structural forces of liberalism. Any politicking between these parties is most likely to focus on alternative explanations for what they represent as essential reduction in welfare spending rather than the concept of the welfare state itself.

In her understanding of economic rationalism, Rhonda Sharp (1995:1) also identifies a belief system that is based on the primacy of markets in setting the economic agenda. She emphasises that existing mainstream policies have disadvantaged women, and she puts forward similar assumptions regarding the direction in which market-based theories are developing. As the economist Frank Stillwell (1993:34) asserts, economic rationalism is not value neutral, as it embodies notions of what he terms ‘social darwinism’. In a welfare system based on the integrity of the market for service provision, the probability of equity issues being marginalised - for women, the disabled, migrants, the elderly and indigenous people - cannot be ignored. The circumstances in which the welfare state has been transformed to a corporate culture does indeed place the most vulnerable sectors of the community at great risk, according to Nicholas Tonti-Filippini (‘Losing direction

4 The GST [a goods and services tax] is considered a ‘regressive’ tax. Its imposition increases the tax load for those on lower incomes, while reducing personal income tax for higher earners.
in this corporate world', The Age, 12/12/96 A13). As this ethicist so perceptively notes, 'even charity has become corporatised'.

In discussing the structural mechanisms necessary to advance economic rationalism in the community services sector, sociologist Susan Kenny (1996:4) outlines how the rhetoric of marketisation, with an implied improved efficiency and promotion of self-help, has some appeal. Nevertheless, the contracting out of programs to the private sector for financial advancement may be incompatible with principles of social justice, and continue to ignore the specific needs of women. Greg Whitwell (1990:124), an economic historian, is forthright in his critique.

The 1980s have seen the triumph of economic rationalism. Greater efficiency has become a sacred goal. Increased competition and the unlocking of market forces, we are told, are the key means to obtain it. He accepts that Treasury insistence on improved performance by the public service has a legitimate foundation but is wary of its idealised vision of the private sector and the values this sector promotes (Whitwell, 1990:138).

Concern for the position of women in a minimal, market-oriented welfare state is a theme which Lois Bryson follows (1992:16). Her position is based on the observation that a substantial range of women's gains have resulted from government intervention and legislation, and the political right are leading the vanguard to discredit these shifts in social policy. The success of activism to advance the rights, needs and priorities of women have been widely acknowledged, both within and without legislative structures, but the increasing trend seems firmly committed to pursuing retrograde measures. "The language of finance and 'economic rationalism' has been the vehicle for a major attack on welfare ideology and the downgrading of women's interests on a very broad front . . ." (Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989:45). An urgent problem is not just a downturn in the availability of financial support or welfare services for women, but the not too subtly hidden agenda which underlies declarations of the precarious circumstances of state coffers: to reassert the power structure of the market, and re-establish the advantage of the powerful.
Increasingly, a complexity of language is being summoned to distort and confuse the debate, with the use of jargon and technical words designed to eliminate the uninitiated from participating in any challenge to current policy development. This language of 'eco-speak' gives credence to controversial policy objectives and the pursuit of individualism, and its pervasive influence cannot be under-estimated. Rosie Scott (1995:17) rather scathingly believes the real meaning of state and corporate pronouncements "... is hidden under layers of sanctimonious verbiage, a linguistic morass of euphemism, pretentiousness and doublespeak. The more unpalatable or callous the idea, the more impenetrable the prose becomes". She refers to the 'language of propaganda', which deceptively presents failed doctrine under a new guise, but with similarly devastating implications.

Dexter Whitfield (1992:4) uses, and queries, the legitimacy of some of this language in his assessment of the changes to the welfare provision in the United Kingdom, in the name of economic rationalism. He identifies how privatisation, deregulation and restructuring could be considered as a part of the new right push to undermine welfare provision through "... a diversion, narrowing the focus merely to the individualised consumption of services". The importance of understanding the controlling nature of language and how it frames the debate seems obvious. The term economic rationalism implies a 'rational' - therefore unquestionable - approach to the structure of economic policy. How do you challenge something that is represented as normative and rational? Michael Pusey (1992:64) asserts that in the past decade rationalisation has been used euphemistically to justify 'shutting down as much of the public sector as possible'! Government complicity in legitimising jargonist language, and adapting it for their own strategic advantage, will be considered in more detail later in this thesis.

It is vital to recognise the powerful leverage that both political and corporate leaders have over the language and agenda of economic and social reform, and how their perspectives are reinforced by an empathetic media. The recent reduction in journalistic critique in news and current affairs programs has been identified by Jane Kelsey (1995:350). Evidence from Australia would suggest real concerns about the neutrality of the press. Milly Fels and Rob Watts (1995:5) comment that the term
'economic rationalism' has become established as a journalistic 'buzz word', and one which has been elevated to a position of dominance in any discussion of the welfare state. There is conjecture that the actual term may be losing some popularity, but there is little to demonstrate a move away from the principles it promotes (Stillwell, 1994: 228), a point which remains true at the end of the twentieth century.

These principles, with the transformation they engender, continue to impact adversely within the community. Economic restructuring has involved a massive reduction in employment opportunities, especially in the manufacturing sector of the labour market, with an accompanying increase in income equality (Forrest, 1995: 43). The growing polarisation of income levels represents the success with which contemporary economic policy promotes the interests of the 'new right' without any realistic social or political conscience (Stillwell, 1993: 28). Providing further opportunities for private investment, due to the 'commodification' of services, continues to marginalise the disadvantaged while providing opportunities for greater capital accumulation by elite groups (Whitfield, 1992: 4).

3.6: WELFARE POLICY AND GENDER NEUTRALITY: MAKING WOMEN INVISIBLE

So far in this discussion of the welfare state I have attempted to present a generalised overview of the present situation. What becomes increasingly evident is 'the absence of women', a consequence of the fact that theory related to restructuring and economic rationalism has, until fairly recently, been presented in a male biased context. Feminists recognise the circumstances in which women are consistently rendered invisible in mainstream theory, or if included at all, appear virtually as an addendum. Writing in 1988, Kathleen Jones noted,

Theories [of politics] continue to be constructed as if women, and their interests as a group, were conceptually irrelevant to political discourse. More accurately, mainstream theorists today define the political terrain in genderless terms.

(1988: 11)

In considering the apparent direction of policy related to the welfare state, the necessity for continuing theorising by feminists is vital.
The reluctance by some commentators to focus on women, as a group, can be variously explained. Anna Jonasdottir (1988:33-43) analyses the limitations she perceives in developing ‘women’s interests’ theory. She describes how normatively this concept is used as an all-inclusive term but, she suggests, with only minimal understanding of the contradictory meanings it encompasses. Her acknowledgement that gender is a ‘fundamental organising principle’ is qualified by an appreciation of the difficulty of identifying a) what is a women’s issue, and b) nominating which women we are representing (Jonasdottir, 1988:38). Women are different in a multitude of ways including class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, religious persuasion and marital status. Consequently the impact of welfare policy on ‘women’, as an inclusive group, is problematic (Abramovitz, 1988:4). In supporting this stance, Prue Hyman (1994:3) questions policy which ignores difference in the lives and perspectives of women compared to men, but warns against depiction of women as a universal group with identical interests. At times, separatist political organisation and theorising may appear counter-productive, but it provides the ‘space’ for women to share and develop common understandings (Hyman, 1994:4), and demonstrates that an alternative reading of policy decisions is indeed possible.

Scrutiny of much mainstream theory about the state - whether it is political, social or economic - indicates its exclusionary nature. The persistence of traditional theorising which rarely concerns itself with dimensions of gender is contrary to a feminist perception of the sexual politics inherent in how the state functions (Franzway, Court & Connel, 1989:5). As a feminist academic Birte Siim (1988:178) has a particular interest in state welfare and how it relates to the labour market position of women. In her writing she is critical of the male assumptions which are incorporated into state policies, reflecting male dominance and interests and yet represented as gender neutral. Consistently, policy initiatives for welfare state adjustments are discussed in naturalistic terms without any reference to the differential impact they are likely to have on specific groups within the community. This is an understanding supported by Mimi Abramovitz (1988:1), who agrees that “[T]he result is an understanding of the welfare state that is grounded in the experience of male recipients and generalized to women as if there were no differences between them, at best it is incomplete, at worst quite distorted”.

The impetus for socio-economic theorists to focus more intently on research related to women’s experiences has been partly successful, although the tendency to consider issues from an androcentric position retains the masculine bias for what is valued, and continues to recognise the male as the ‘norm’ (Broom, 1984:viii). Kathleen Jones (1988:25), whose professional experience is in the field of women’s studies, suggests that the task for feminist theory is to develop a position from which women’s experiences are recognised and valued, by defining women’s alternative position as legitimate, rather than ‘oppressed’. Within the context of the welfare state this presents a particular challenge: to dismantle the dichotomy of private and public spheres which is based on the ethics of traditional family structures and perpetuates the economic dependence of women. The state’s complicity, through social policy direction, in the ascription of gender roles is an influential variable in women’s access to social and economic power (Cox, 1988:190).

3.7: THE ECONOMIC MODEL: A SOUND BASIS FOR SOCIAL POLICY?

Reference to a connection between the economic and social power of women is certainly fundamental to this discussion. Increasingly, decision-making at the state level appears to be paying less attention to the complementary nature of economic and social goals in deciding on policy direction (Disney & Rogan, 1993:16). Free market initiatives promote the primacy of economic factors over any other consideration at all government levels, which has profoundly adverse effects on implementation of social equity policy and maintenance of environmentally sustainable development. Peter Saunders (1994:6) agrees that economics is extremely significant in the formulation of welfare state provisions, but the reduction of inequality must be a fundamental aim despite economic constraints.

However, it is in the area of social welfare, the private side of that ever-present public/private dichotomy, that the most substantial sacrifices are occurring. “The language of economics has come to dominate political life. Modern government speaks of customers rather than citizens, of efficiency instead of ethics, of free markets as if there was no duty to protect individual rights and social well-being” (Rayner, 1997:4). Sara Dowse (1988:205) continues the discussion of two
separate realms, noting that corporate ideology privileges the economic considerations inherent in the public sphere. The negative representations that locates women's interest exclusively in the 'non-economic' domestic sphere denies the significance of state economic policy to their lives. There is an urgent need to discredit the 'fictitious' distinctions of public/private; economic/non-economic that have been created in the planning and implementation of government policy (Dowse, 1988:221).

Donald Horne's observation (1992:12) that the formulation of state economic policy is 'too important and too difficult to be entrusted to economists' is profound. What he attempts to outline is the reality of discourse which dismisses Government intervention as protectionist and evaluates any policy from a purely economic perspective. The very nature of welfare provisions mitigates against an expectation of monetary profit, and a variety of measures may be implemented to analyse what constitutes a successful welfare program. To identify and consider human and public capital, as well as private capital, is essential to any evaluation of public expenditure. Researchers at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Chorney, Hotson & Seccareccia, undated:17) stress that failure to invest in 'social capital' has the potential to be more deleterious to the economy and produce a greater burden for the community than a government deficit, not only in its impact on the quality of life of citizens, but in a country's productivity and competitiveness.

The evidence in the United Kingdom, which identifies an escalating discrepancy in the relative position of disadvantaged groups (Bradshaw, 1993:77) has ramifications for Australia, as our governments appear intent on emulating the Thatcher slash and burn approach to welfare. And in New Zealand, Richard Randerson (1993:104) is critical of the social cost of economically driven policy measures already evident, which includes identifiable increases in violent crime, domestic violence and suicide, amongst other negative repercussions.

The clear conclusion in New Zealand is that economic rationalism has produced some sensible reform but accompanied by immense social costs. The social costs have not been necessary to provide
the reform and there is an increasing perception that the changes have been generated by an ideological flavour which is quite out of touch with reality.

Richard Randerson (idem)

The rhetorical question - or is it - is why Australian governments are continuing along a path of reform which has already engendered such dysfunctional results in other similar welfare state countries.

Central to this reform, through structural adjustment, are the dual concepts of corporatisation and privatisation which are well advanced in New Zealand, for example, and are rapidly being embraced by the three levels of government in Australia. Jane Kelsey (1995:127) outlines how corporatisation is a preliminary reorganisation of public services, including welfare services, which emphasises productivity gains and increased profitability, and prepares for ‘privatisation by stealth’. The sale of publicly owned assets and infrastructure to the private sector has been advocated to reduce state debt and improve service delivery, and according to John Ernst (1995:17) is premised on a combination of ‘voodoo, ideology and political pragmatism’. In the short term, some fiscal advantage may be claimed, but the reduction in public control of infrastructure and essential services does not have widespread community support (Ernst,1995:19). A report in The Age (‘Legal threat on water bills’, 30/5/1998:13) exemplifies the concerns associated with privatisation of public utilities, in this case the provision of a domestic water supply in Victoria. Under the new, corporate, user-pays system, some consumers are experiencing difficulty in meeting increased costs for water and sewerage services which has resulted in an upsurge in legal threats to low-income earners struggling to pay their water rates. As Eva Cox contends (1995) the loss of public capital causes widespread community anxiety and undermines further our confidence in state provision of services. In these circumstances, a balanced budget may not compensate for the eventual economic and social deficit.

Ignoring the distributional consequences of government policy by focusing only on economic objectives has contributed to a widening income disparity in Australia (Raskall,1993:50), a phenomenon which Jan Newby (1993:168) suggests has reached crisis point already in New Zealand. She maintains that the failure of
New Zealand’s ‘wonderful monctorist utopia’ provides an emphatic lesson for Australia: to reject policy direction which condones increasing unemployment and growing numbers of poor. However, closer analysis of state intervention may highlight the limitations of previous welfare provisions, and demonstrate that current trends are more a repressive extension of an historical role of governments in facilitating corporate profitability at the expense of all citizens (Head, 1980: 50).

Feminists have long harboured a suspicion of what can be achieved through bureaucratic structures. Demonstrating the marginalisation of women’s interests has been a consistently evident feature of feminist theory, and contemporary policy development suggests that women’s gains in the post-war years are seriously threatened by ideological conservatism. “Those who see outcomes largely as the consequences of choice and individual responsibility, rather than constraints and systems, will be able to justify the resulting inequalities to themselves” (Hyman, 1994: 17). And indeed it is this surge towards ‘individualism’ which is providing such a dislocative effect in current welfare state policy. James Forrest (1995:43) explains that economic restructuring has contributed to polarisation of incomes and resulted in higher rates of unemployment, which effectively disadvantages the already disadvantaged. A study by Access Economics, detailed in the Melbourne Herald Sun (“The rich getting richer”, 12/12/1997:23) reflects on the rapid increase of wealth - the rich getting richer - while recording a continued decline in the income of ‘ordinary’ workers, an increasing inequality which may well undermine sustainable economic growth.

The persistent promotion of concepts of choice and individual responsibility has also contributed to public debate on what is the most appropriate care for dependent community members. What is euphemistically referred to as ‘community care’ is described as a morally preferable and economically more efficient organisational practice than public service provision, but the gendered nature of caring is summarily ignored (Waerness, 1984:67). Susan Kenny (1996:4) identifies an element of self determination and empowerment in community development programs, but she is critical of the limited access to necessary state resources and the proliferation of programs that are commodified and subject to profit-making
outcomes. Available evidence indicates that there is an identifiable negative impact on the range and quality of services available when they are contracted out by government bodies (Whitfield, 1992:255). 

The ascendancy of economic goals over social objectives supports the conservative ideology of economic rationalism, and seriously impedes the possibility of public policy which upholds principles of justice and equity (Stillwell, 1993:36). Don Edgar, in his column in *The Age* (Restoring the common good’ 28/12/1996: N21) questions the direction of state restructuring which is ignoring ‘the social fallout’. He comments,

> Ordinary people want security and some government attention to their needs now, not when the economy is magically transformed. The social fabric needs attention because it sustains the economy. The two are inseparable, not irrelevant to one another. And the social fabric is local, regional, not global despite all the guru sooth-saying.

This opinion raises a valid observation about the alienation of programs from adequately addressing the needs and interests of those for whom they are designed, especially through the redefinition of citizens as passive consumers of government services (Salvaris, 1995:134). Economic advisers have successfully provided the political milieu for a powerful and sustained attack on the responsibility of the state in accommodating the interests of all community members.

Identifying the restrictive policy initiatives of economic restructuring does not suggest that the welfare state that existed before the ‘crisis’ of the 1970s was unquestionably egalitarian in its consideration of all community groups. Nevertheless and importantly, the potential for change did exist. The situation for women in Australia pointed to the possibility of women’s advancement through the legislative function of the state. Support by women’s groups, including the Women’s Electoral Lobby, contributed to electoral success for the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972, and their activism resulted in state funding for many women’s services (Sawer, 1996:2). Additionally, optimism for a directional change in the highly

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5 The document *Public First: Proceedings from the Conference on Privatization* (1995) provides a number of case studies which identify negative results from ‘contracting out’.
segregated paid labour force, including a move towards the concept of pay equity, was an encouraging indication of improved status for women. This was closely linked to major structural and cultural shifts in attitudes to traditional marital and family arrangements.

3.8: A RETURN TO ‘FAMILY VALUES’: THE POSITION OF WOMEN

The political philosophy which championed individual rights for women activated repressive controversy which suggested that women’s rights conflicted directly with the rights of the family unit. The extent and vehemence of criticism is very clearly delineated by suggestions that, “[N]ot only are women’s assertions of individual rights at odds with the conventional definition of the family, they may also be at odds with the very basis of our government and society” (Conover & Grey, 1983:3). The pursuit of traditional family structures and values obviously had persuasive appeal to conservative governments committed to constraining state welfare expenditure. In the United States, the ‘family values’ agenda provided the rhetorical basis for the electoral success of Reagan and Bush (Gibbs, 1992:38) and in Australia, a landslide victory for the Liberal Government of Malcolm Fraser in 1975 signaled a monetarist attack on welfare, and a morally conservative focus on traditional family organisation (Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989:74). The involvement of the state in formulating gender relations focused on the family or “specifically around the efforts of the state agencies to construct, impose and sustain a particular patriarchal family form, and to provide an ideological defence of this form” (ibid:12).

Formulating welfare policy which focused on the nuclear family clearly had the support of a number of influential allies, in politics, community groups and the media. Clare Ungerson, a Professor of Social Policy, notes (1985:210) that policy trends which promote the primacy of the nuclear family provide tacit support for notions of ‘community care’, a task increasingly embraced within the context of the family by voluntary carers. And within the conservative organisation of the family, this is almost exclusively seen as the responsibility of women. It is interesting to note that both major parties in Britain in the 1990s appear to be in agreement on a
basic objective of strengthening the patriarchal family model, and close scrutiny of the two major parties in Australia would reveal comparative support for traditional ‘family values’. Cultural definitions, which nominate women as ‘carers’, are reinforced by assumptions about the sexual division of labour in the domestic sphere, as well as a plethora of social and economic arrangements (Finch & Groves, 1985:229).

Lois Bryson and Martin Mowbray (1985:186), in discussing the Australian situation, iterate that the term ‘community care’ in practical application relates to women as carers. They further observe that official statements and policy review documents indicate the bi-partisan nature of state support for an increased responsibility for the community and the family in maintaining welfare services. "Terms like community care, through an ambiguity well suited to camouflaging the traditional sexual division of labour, are liberally used instead of ones that might more readily reveal dependence on women" (idem). Mimi Abramovitz (1988:2) argues that despite a range of contemporary family types, the model based on the traditional division of labour by gender is actively favoured by the state, as it develops a foundation for social cohesion and the transmission of ‘accepted’ values. The tension between the social welfare system and women’s roles is a constant factor, but maintenance of a traditional family ethic at the state level perpetuates mainstream acceptance of the economic dependence of women (Abramovitz, 1988:8).

Trish Corcoran (undated:4) expresses concern at the hidden agenda evident in the state’s promotion of the traditional family model and its complicity with the corporate sector in its perpetuation.

The family is the basic unit that transfers the responsibility and costs for the welfare of the next generation from society as a whole to individuals - usually women. John Howard expressed it exactly when he said the family is the best welfare system any nation could devise. It’s the ‘best’ because it minimises the cost to capitalism.

What remains unspecified in comments by political representatives, including the Liberal Prime Minister John Howard, is what they mean by ‘the family’. Eva Cox (1996:N7), in her assessment of the 1996 Federal Budget claims that the incumbent government acknowledges and promotes families as providers of unpaid care, but
ignores the evidence that it is women - not families as such - that bear the brunt of diminishing public services and facilities. There appears to be an assumption by the state that women are ‘available’ to intervene in, and provide for, any shortfall in necessary services, an assumption which conveniently ignores contemporary changes to gender roles in society. To define the function of gender in the social welfare system involves complex political realities, but perpetuating women’s dependence and supply of unpaid labour is supported by cultural and societal norms, in what Dorothy Miller labels as patriarchal necessity.

The public policy issue of poverty among women-headed families is difficult to solve because it goes to the heart of the conflict between patriarchal requirements and the demands of capital. It is almost impossible to relieve women’s poverty through public policy without either providing welfare benefits at levels unacceptable to the capitalist economy or providing opportunities for women’s independence unacceptable to patriarchy.

Dorothy Miller (1990:29)

This indicates that the consistency of women’s dependence is imperative to maintaining the hierarchical nature of sexual relations, and is supported by the presumed inevitability of labour market segregation and the sexual division of unpaid and paid labour.

The strengthening of welfare provisions through ‘a family policy’ provides an example of the inter-relationship of economic and ideological factors in political decision-making, and provides an insight into how the allocation of government funding to support traditional nuclear families is justified (Flaskus & Houslow, 1980:14). By promoting this family model as natural, the state is facilitating the transfer of costs of social production and reproduction back to individual families, whether families are willing or able to accept this responsibility. Of course, much of this is not new, although the nostalgia to return to the ‘perfect families’ of the post-war years continues to amass conservative support. Zillah Eisenstein in the early 1980s (1982:568) pursued this issue further by arguing that the attack by conservative political groups is specifically directed against wage-earning women, because they have the ‘potential to transform society’. Hence we have the appeals similar to those earlier this century, to populate or perish through the coercion of women to increase family size and an aggressive resurgence of anti-
choice pressure groups. The representations of conservative governments may indeed be pro-family: their impact on gender relations is decidedly anti-woman and reinforces the doubtful rationale of biological determinism with its inherent assumptions about women’s societal role.

The ideological thrust of conservative policies which focus on families as the predominant target for redistributive strategies, has the potential to obscure prevailing class and gender inequalities (Cass, 1988:188). This form of targeting validates specific family arrangements but its imposition demonstrates how family policy conflicts with current legislative commitment to equality of the sexes (Finch & Groves, 1985:219). Concepts of equality are incompatible with policy which defines groups within the community by their presumed gender characteristics, and prescribes their community role by appeal to ‘natural’ function. Significantly, it reflects traditional assumptions about ‘a woman’s place’ at a time when an increasing number of women are entering the paid work force, which merely compounds the stress on women and indeed the stability of nuclear families. In a discussion of the 1996 Liberal Party Federal Budget, The Age editorial (‘Women and the budget’, 26/10/1996:A10) concluded that there is an identifiable bias which favours families where the woman is financially dependent on a male breadwinner: a Budget which ‘... appears to represent a nostalgic inducement to encourage mothers to stay at home’.

The ‘family value’ model which is being promoted, therefore, has two distinct but inter-related elements. Not only is the two-parent nuclear family represented as essential to community stability, but the breadwinner model is heralded as the most appropriate for catering for the family’s welfare. There is a definite resurgence of an ideology, identified by Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster (1986:45) as predominant in the post-war years, which stressed the need for ‘full-time mothers’, a perspective enthusiastically supported by the state, experts and the corporate sector. In her assessment of new right sexual politics, Zillah Eisenstein (1982:575) maintains that rather than working towards a contemporary vision of the welfare state, the conservative push is directed to re-establishing the ‘traditional self-
sufficient patriarchal family’ with married women ‘released’ from the paid work force.

3.9 WELFARE AND WOMEN’S DEPENDENCY

Historically, the acceptance of the male breadwinner family was well-established in Australia, with the implementation of the 1907 Harvester Judgement, which subsumed wives within the family unit, rather than recognising their individual citizenship (Rowland, 1988:16). This legislation ensured a continuation and compounding of labour segregation and provided a sanction against income equity. The contradiction of this landmark decision is its promotion and perpetuation of an ideology of the dependence of all females on a male ‘breadwinner’, while statistically this has never been a reality (Baldock & Cass, 1988:xii). The provisions of both tax and welfare systems have been centred on the maintenance of women outside the labour market, usually in the role of unpaid carer (Bryson, 1988:136). Despite minor policy shifts and some cultural adjustment, the position of women in the paid labour market is still adversely affected by a decision made almost a century ago in the context of very different social organisation.

As Anette Borchorst and Birte Siim explain (1987:129), women have achieved some integration into the public sphere through a complicated social and economic process - not least due to second-wave feminism - but the growth of dual-earner families has not resulted in women’s economic independence. The status of women in the segregated labour market, their location in the part-time and casual workforce and their generally inferior pay rates preclude women from having real economic equality. The prevailing inequality also determines that the changes in family patterns, e.g. through divorce and the increase in single-parent families, make women more vulnerable to disadvantage and consequently reliant on state support (Borchorst & Siim, 1987:144). Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995:2) provides an alternative perspective on the ‘culture of dependency’ which, she suggests, is developing as the state assumes the provider role, usurping the responsibility of, and necessity for, the husband/father:

The high correlation between welfare and the one-parent family is a
crude indicator of the inadequacy - the ‘dysfunctionality’ of that form of family. And the even higher correlation between welfare and the one-parent family headed by a never-married mother suggests that the family that has not been legitimised by marriage is even more dysfunctional.

Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995:2)

Similar moral panic has been presented by research which ‘indicates’ the relationship between one-parent families and the escalation of crime in Australia. Without consideration of other variables pertinent to the direction of social change, these findings challenge credibility and provide unsubstantiated ‘proof’ for right wing criticism of single-parent families.

The regressive move to traditional gender relations is occurring in the midst of continuing change and alternative perceptions of family restructuring. Hierarchical marital relations, which regard child care as a private family responsibility, are being resisted by the advancement of women’s rights, particularly with their increased workforce participation (Gilbert, 1993:48). This obviously has an impact on our community perception about the provision of caring services - for children, the aged and the disabled - which adequately provide for current family needs. Jonathon Boston (1992:2) is critical of the ‘redesigning’ of New Zealand welfare policy which indicates that,

... the government want to transfer to the family (i.e. the nuclear family) and to voluntary agencies some of the state’s responsibilities for providing care and financial support to those in need (be they children, the aged, the sick or the unemployed.

The reduction in childcare and institutional care in Australia, also, is arguably motivated more by a potential reduction in welfare expenditure than any altruistic desire by the New Right to enhance the quality of mother/child relationships (Dale & Foster, 1986:111).

The difficulties that arise through a simplistic consideration of women exclusively within the context of a family unit is that it not only ignores the impact of gender in mainstream economic processes, but it perpetuates the concept of gender inequality as the result of cultural structures. Diane Elson, a feminist economist, agrees that cultural dimensions contribute to the lack of women’s economic power. However Elson argues that economic dependence is exacerbated by women’s
inequality in the labour market combined with a devaluation of the ‘care economy’ (c1997.2). Barriers promoted by a community which values paid and unpaid work differently are based on economic considerations, and these considerations successfully maintain labour market divisions which discriminate against women’s caring work in the private sphere. To address issues of women’s lack of economic power may necessitate the transformation of an argument which promotes the primacy of participating in the paid workforce, compared to providing for community ‘needs’. There appears to be little justification for denying women the right to economic independence, and yet the continuing move to a market welfare state threatens even the minimal opportunities which exist for many women. In their discussion of women’s work, Carol O’Donnell and Philippa Hall are critical of the limited intervention by the state in extending the possibility of women ‘getting equal’. As they observe: “Part of the problem of distribution is not only to ensure that working people increase their control over and share of wealth that is produced, but also to ensure that women and men share equally in that distribution” (O’Donnell & Hall, 1988:133), an issue which will be the focus of an ensuing chapter.

In his comparative study of welfare in a number of countries, Allan Cochrane notes that despite different welfare arrangements, all policies are based on key assumptions with regard to the labour market position of women. He further indicates that recognising the ‘welfare services’ provided by women is essential to assessing the impact of changes to the mixed economies of welfare (Cochrane, 1993: 10) and, I would suspect, understanding the problems confronting women striving for economic independence. The position for women who are ‘welfare dependent’ encourages the attribution of responsibility to already disadvantaged individuals. Sarah Williams, a political psychologist, reports from her study how effectively the ideological process of blaming the victim is employed and, as some theorists maintain, especially by those attracted to right-wing ideologies. “By focusing on the ways in which individuals cause their own victimization, attention is diverted from the conditions in society which contribute to the victimizing process” (Williams, 1984: 575). This point is emphasised pointedly by the derision attributed
to the 'welfare client' and is responsible for engendering a negative community response to the further disadvantage experienced, especially by women, in a period of welfare state restructuring.

The union of principles of 'family values' and 'women's dependence' as a basis for restructuring provides no support for women in their pursuit of economic power. Mimi Abramovitz is concerned about how the state is integral to the regulation of women's lives:

> It is argued that the ideology of women’s roles, referred to here as 'the family ethic', became encoded within the rules and regulations of the welfare state where it, along with the work ethic, has shaped public policy and regulated the lives of thousands of women who, from colonial times to the present, have turned to social welfare programs for support.

Mimi Abramovitz (1988:13)

The institutionalised dependency of many women ensures their particular vulnerability to contemporary constraints on the welfare system. A woman's aspiration to develop an economically secure existence is hampered in a diverse number of ways, an issue examined by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Two of their researchers, Meg Montague and Jenny Stephens, highlight how women's disadvantage is highly systemic: it 'emanates from and is reinforced by' society's stereotypical view of women within the domestic sphere, and most particularly by their opportunities for participating in the education and employment systems (1985:1). The increase in the number of women reliant on welfare support and within the ranks of the poverty stricken is negatively represented, and yet the structures which compound their disadvantage are rarely scrutinised for gender bias.

In her discussion of the welfare state, Lois Bryson (1992:192) maintains that women's poverty is not a new phenomenon, but has a lengthy history. She explains how the economically powerless position of women was submerged within the two-parent household, and is only quite recently recognised by mainstream analysts because of the increase in female-headed, sole parent families. Patricia Evans (1991:171) concurs with this appraisal, relating the disadvantage for women to their ascribed caring role. She argues that:

> The assumption that women’s primary role is in the home, and that economic dependence flows as a natural consequence from these
household responsibilities, has meant that until recently women's poverty has gone largely unrecognized.

While accepting that 'poverty' is a relative concept, there is an increasing awareness that the over-representation of women and their dependent children in the ranks of the poor is a cause for urgent community concern.

However, the contradictions for women in their relationship with the state has been a source of feminist concern for a number of decades. Female activists have identified a tension in women's association with the state, which necessarily balances the consequences of social dependency with an acknowledged need for welfare support - 'part of a long and complex tango between women and the state' (in Beilharz, Considine & Watts, 1992:71). The manner in which women's lives are circumscribed by the contradictory nature of welfare policies is rarely investigated from a gender perspective, despite indications that the bases for entitlement determine whether policy decisions 'reinforce women's dependency or enhance their autonomy' (Sainsbury, 1996:4).

Not all observers perceive the problem in a similarly enlightened manner. The previously quoted conservative Gertrude Himmelfarb, writing for the Republican Party in the USA, presents an alternative view which is highly critical of the 'social pathology' - violence, illegitimacy, drug addiction, crime, alcoholism and functional illiteracy - surrounding welfare recipients. She continues by criticising the use of 'public relief' as an indication of an individual's 'dependency, misery, weakness and misconduct':

Conceived originally as a temporary recourse in time of need, welfare has become a long-term means of sustenance, a way of life - a 'culture of dependency' transmitted from generation to generation.

Gertrude Himmelfarb (1995:2)

In the Australian context, this view would gain support from politicians like Peter Lindsay (Senior News, February 1998:4) and Pauline Hanson, the leader of the One Nation Party, and numerous right wing organisations. Commenting in the Herald Sun ('Getting off the teat', 2/12/1997) Mike Nahan, an executive director of the Institute of Public Affairs, signals the 'danger' of rapid growth of Australians
receiving welfare. He proposes, in overtly sexist language, that the government legislate to ensure welfare dependents 'get off the teat', and avoid a situation where 'most mothers are married to the state'. He fails to acknowledge the responsibility of the state in perpetuating disadvantage through welfare policy decisions, an issue studied by Bob Birrell and Virginia Rapson, and reported in the Herald Sun ('Child poverty rising', 22/9/1997:15). They identified an increase in poor families headed by a lone parent - almost always female - and stressed the complicity of governments in compounding their burden through moves towards market structured welfare. As they rather ruefully observe: "Nothing provokes the outrage of conservative commentators more than evidence that there are large numbers of never-married mothers being supported by taxpayers" (Birrell & Rapson, 1997:15). However, the evidence they present indicates that more than sixty-seven per cent of female sole parents are over the age of 25, only forty-one per cent receive support from the non-custodial fathers and 'never married' women comprise less than a quarter of single parents. This is contrary to stereotypical beliefs that dismiss sole parents as young unmarried women having baby after baby.

What appears to be undeniable is, that whatever the underlying cause, an increasing number of women rely on state support for economic survival. Birte Siim explains that this necessitates a feminist rethinking of the modern welfare state to determine how women's autonomy and independence may be nurtured in these circumstances. She argues that "... the modern welfare state has a double meaning for women: on one hand women have gained power as workers, mothers and citizens, but on the other hand they have been subsumed under a new public power hierarchy (Siim, 1988:161). The replacement of one gender-biased hierarchy disadvantaging women within the private sphere has, in many circumstances, been replaced by an equally punitive gender-based hierarchy in the public sphere, orchestrated by the state (e.g. Ungerson, 1985:187). In Jill Roe's view, the effects of the social service system tend to intensify the rigidities and contradictions which confront women who are placed in this 'dependent' position by changing social and economic factors (Roe, 1988, 15), over which they generally have extremely limited control. The importance of women participating in decision-making will be discussed later, particularly in the light of opinion which implicates the state in the
subordination of women through its welfare service policy (Franzway & Court, 1989:10).

In her analysis of women and social welfare, Dorothy Miller (1990:22) provides a feminist critique of how policies which were developed historically in the nexus of the nuclear family have not adjusted to the change in gender roles in society. She argues that the welfare system has a binary effect: it perpetuates women’s dependence, while simultaneously reinforcing the inevitability of that dependence. Her suggestion that women are ‘punished’ by this patriarchal system for their ‘manlessness’ would seem to be affirmed by a resurgence of populist notions of women’s domestic role, and by observations like that of Joyce Jacobsen (1994:60), that for women separation, divorce or widowhood are positive indicators of the probability of poverty.

Bettina Cass, commenting on the rewards for women’s ‘work’, echoes the bias in this apparent risk:

Like the women and children of former decades making their claims upon charitable institutions and the state welfare authorities, it would appear that women and their dependent children are disproportionately represented among those whose opportunities for paid market work and secure income have been adversely affected by the recession and by public policies.

Bettina Cass (1985:92)

I would contend that, fifteen years later, the economic position for many women has become more fragile as the rate of change gathers even greater momentum.

3.10: WELFARE AND WOMEN AS DECISION MAKERS

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the importance of women in decision making roles in the development of welfare policy. This will be a recurring theme throughout this study: who is making the decisions which impact demonstrably on the lives of many women, and why has this vital implications for the implementation of gender-sensitive reform? I do not propose a detailed assessment of the tension that exists between those who support or oppose the possibility of effective change through the bureaucracy - or more specifically - the femocracy. However, it is
essential to understand that the introduction of some legislative change has occurred as a result of social movements, and the influence of feminists working within 'the system' cannot be denied. Hester Eisenstein, an academic who worked in Australia for a number of years, admits to a certain optimism in regard to women in confronting state structures. She writes:

From my experience with the Australian women's movement, I have a strong impression that the impact of feminist reforms on government has a deep relationship to the traditions of the welfare state in Australia... The Australian feminocrat may have much to teach feminist scholars in other countries where welfare policies are presently less well developed, about the implementation of feminist reforms through government action, and more broadly about the relations between gender systems and the welfare state.

Hester Eisenstein (1991:30)

Not all observers are as supportive of feminocrat initiatives (e.g. Lynch, 1984:38) but it is a fact that many women sought input to state power structures, to work internally within administration to advance the interests of women and, subsequently, alter the character of the welfare state.

Anna Yeatman (1990:78) in her summation of women in the contemporary Australian state, identified the feminocracy as the 'professionalisation of the ideology of a social movement', an observation that probably has some validity. However, it does signify that the impetus for change was grounded in the activism of disparate groups of women, and the importance of a 'grass roots' social movement has not diminished. The regressive social policy which has been implemented under the guise of economic rationalism may indicate that women were indeed making inroads into decision making processes. In Australia, the rise of the New Right has been linked quite distinctly to feminist achievements in the initiation of major policy changes in welfare services for women (Ryan, 1990:83). Despite this observation, the inequitable representation of women in decision making at all levels of bureaucracy persists and would seem to be incongruous considering that women are the key stake-holders of social policy, as users and providers (Hallett, 1996:13).

Sandra Baxter (1983:176) has observed that the political influence of women, in many countries around the world, is similarly minimal, in spite of obvious
differences between countries. She continues: “While constituting a numerical majority women are relatively powerless politically due to their absence from positions of formal power”. What she identified - despite the political, economic and social disparities evident in a range of countries - was the constancy of women’s alienation from decision making structures. The contention which emanates from this observation is the persistence of a masculine interpretation of welfare needs and service provisions by those least likely to have need of them, or to be consumers of, what the state provides.

Political scientist Marian Sawer highlights the dearth of women at the policy making levels of a number of institutions, and these ‘vital statistics’ certainly bring into question precisely whose values are represented in public policy. In an article in the Women’s Electoral Lobby paper, Inkwel, in 1995, she provides a statistical illustration of the under-representation of women. Citing some examples from this page is illuminating. For example, in 1994 only sixteen per cent of all Commonwealth, State and Territory parliamentarians were women, although women fared marginally better at the local government level (twenty per cent). She further noted the situation in the private sector, where a survey of 188 organisations indicated that women comprised a miserly three per cent of all board members. It is hardly surprising, in the context of these figures that Lois Bryson (1994:199) recognised that most social policies “... had a clear gender sub-text so that in effect there have been two intersecting welfare states, one relating to women and another relating to men”. In the existing welfare state, the perpetuation of sexist policy results from a policy-making process which is inherently sexist itself (Dale & Foster, 1986:61). The exclusion of women, directly and tacitly, ensures the development of policy - and ensuing legislation - which is demonstrably based on rampant patriarchal values.

This discussion has a ‘circular’ notion, which details the connection between women’s economic dependence and their limited participation in political processes, and demonstrates how this minimal involvement culminates in continuing sexist decision making. Women are indeed constrained by their tenuous grasp on economic independence, and the combination of limited market position and the
demands of 'family' contributes to the absence of women in many electoral activities (Nelson, 1984:226). Helga Maria Hernes (1987:76) describes the lack of representational rights and access to policy making organisations succinctly. "In the political process, women are recipients and men are participants". Minor gains in the representation and participation made by women are evident, but the tendency exists for women who do infiltrate the masculinist government system to be located in areas aligned to family and community concerns. The exclusion of women from the more powerful and prestigious departments, in both government and the public service, is a self-evident factor in the Australian system (Watson, 1990:9). The opportunity for women to influence the direction of government policy from their marginalised position is highly problematical.

As I have intimated previously, there is not universal agreement by feminists on the possibility for change by means of women working within social institutions. However, the existence of more women - particularly feminists - within the decision-making structures has at least the potential for reform. This is emphasised by Jim Sidanius and Jo Ekehammar who consider the socio-political differences in the political ideology of women compared to men (1990:23). They challenge studies which portray women as more politically conservative, indicating that their studies identify women as actually less conservative, less racist, less punitive and more egalitarian and tolerant than men. At the risk of continuing stereotypical descriptions and legitimising labelling by gender, it may still be possible to argue that a higher representation of women at the decision-making level would have a positive and beneficial consequence for policy planning and implementation.

A certain air of optimism is reflected in the observations of Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster, in their overview of the feminist/state relationship, and their support for the advancement of women as a means of combating the sexism in many institutions (1986:139). While recognising the enormity of the challenge, they comment:

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6 In this context, it is not merely a matter of achieving greater numbers of women in decision-making, but encouraging more feminists into these roles: not 'how many women'? but 'which ones'?
If women’s existing welfare experiences are still too frequently negative and oppressive feminists must surely keep fighting for reforms to existing welfare institutions however dispirited they become when met by both overt and covert resistance from those with the power to determine welfare policies and practices.

Jennifer Dale & Peggy Foster (1986:155)

In these comments Dale and Foster were alluding to more practical aspects of welfare services and programs, but the recommendation is just as valid for feminist perseverance in engaging with the processes of public finance, public expenditures and taxation. Diane Elson also emphasises the need for continued activism in these areas “. . . because transforming those processes will be quite critical to our moving forward and finding practical ways of putting alternative visions into practice” (Elson, c1997:7).

There is an urgency to appeals for greater community involvement in the direction of state policy, at a time when bureaucratic reform is diminishing the rights of citizenship, accompanied by a parallel increase in the executive control of ministers and public service management (Beilharz, Considine & Watts, 1992:152). This is evidenced in the groundswell of support for community based activism (e.g. People Together Project - see Chapter 1) and the experience of countries further progressed on the economic rationalist path, e.g. New Zealand, where women and Indigenous groups have suffered disproportionately (Hyman, 1994:40). The former Commissioner for Equal Opportunity in Victoria, Moira Rayner, herself a casualty of the government’s increased autocracy, is critical of what Premier Kennett described as ‘his greatest achievement’ - the shedding of more than 50,000 public sector employees. “Arguably, there is no ‘public service’ in Victoria any longer, but thirteen linked mega-businesses, required to run on private-sector lines, with the premier as chief executive” (Rayner, 1997:120). The impact this has on the social and industrial position of women, and the possibility of women gaining some control over decisions which crucially affect their well-being, will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.
3.11: WELFARE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Closely aligned to the issue of women in positions of decision-making is the evolution of state legislative structures for focusing on ‘women’s interests’. This has involved matters of women’s budgets, equal opportunity, affirmative action and the establishment of units specifically designated as promoting the status or rights of women. Historically, from the 1970s, there has been a trend towards the development of specific state strategies for women in response to electoral pressure, and many of the femocrats employed within the bureaucracy owe their appointments to this groundswell of community based activism. Within the context of this research, it is not my intention to provide a detailed chronology of Australian equity legislation which is readily available from numerous sources (e.g. Bacchi, 1996; Burton, 1991; Sawer, 1985), but it is important to acknowledge its influence in the direction of political and social change. Additionally, tracing the rise - and decline - of legislative requirements and women-based special units provides a framework for assessing and evaluating the commitment to positive change demonstrated by federal and state governments in Australia.

Increasing concern for women, encouraged by the comparative gains of the past two decades, is the presumption in some forums that ‘equality’ has been achieved. This point is expanded in an article by Tanya Castleman, titled ‘Premature exultation: how the demise of inequality has been greatly exaggerated’ (1995). She indicates how criticisms of equity programs, in this case higher education and employment, based on superficial interpretation of statistics result in seriously misleading conclusions about the demise of “. . . exclusionary practices and attitudes which challenge the legitimacy of those who do not meet the male, English-speaking standard” (Castleman, 1995:61).

As Lois Bryson (1995:74) outlines, although gains have been made in the area of state provision, we remain far distanced from the point of equality, where women’s political voices, welfare provision and inclusion in the power structures are comparative to those of men. Evidence suggests that the economic constraints imposed by restructuring facilitates a move away from initiatives which have
promoted the position of women, to a more ubiquitous approach referred to as 'mainstreaming', which involves the integration of women’s issues and policies into ostensibly non-gendered programs. Jan Aller (1989:24) warned of this possibility in her discussion of the changing face of the N.S.W. public sector organisation. She indicated an urgent need for renewed activism to prevent the 'slow bureaucratic strangulation and further marginalisation' - in this case of equal employment opportunities - through the devolution of equity responsibility to individual departments. The potential efficiency and effectiveness of such an integrated approach has yet to be ascertained, but earliest indications suggest that 'mainstream' may be a euphemism for 'downstream', and even 'malestream'!

In considering the possibility of gender equity in the restructured state, Jennifer Curtin and Marian Sawer (1996:154) are less than enthusiastic. They comment on the circumstances during the 1980s:

Paradoxically, as women achieved greater political power and as mechanisms for gender audit within government were developed and strengthened, government policy making came increasingly under the sway of economic views hostile to public provision and based on andro-centric paradigms of human behaviour . . .

The resilience of policies and services established to provide for the particular needs of women appears to be under increasing pressure from minimalist governments and right wing forces. In their discussion of reduced funding for feminist service provision, Carmel Flaskus and Betty Houslow (1980:21) warned against a 'too simple siege analysis', and encouraged critical evaluation of changes at the state level as a pre-requisite for 'fighting back more effectively'. Feminist lawyer, Jocelyne Scutt acknowledges an extensive historical background of women’s activism outside state institutions but stresses that legislative structures are essential for the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sex and marital status. She contends that the state’s declarations regarding the illegality of discriminatory practices clearly attests to women’s right to equality through all social policy decisions (Scutt, 1988:227).

The challenge for feminists is to monitor whether state responses acknowledge, and comply with, the principles of justice - and their own state
legislation. As Lois Bryson points out (1992:222), the advances made by women, although far from radical, have resulted from ‘tenacious struggle’ within the context of the state, rather than from the pressure of market forces. Further, she indicates her concern that initiatives designed to more carefully scrutinise the effect of state policy on women’s rights are seriously jeopardised by ‘smaller’ government. The importance of these initiatives, and evidence which demonstrates their increasing curtailment in a diminishing state, will be considered in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

3.12: SUMMARY

This chapter has traced how emphatically state policy has employed the argument of ‘economic crisis’ to justify the reduction in welfare provision. It has examined the extent of state responsibility for social cohesion and argued against contemporary visions of economic rationalism, which ignore the gendered functioning of welfare retrenchment. The emphasis on an economic model for social policy formulation, based on ‘traditional family values’ has reinforced a system which renders women invisible. This brings into question the possibility for, and the feasibility of, women’s advancement through state structures. From the broadest context of welfare provision, the next chapter narrows the focus to the area of women’s work, to present a comprehensive account of the exclusionary impact of industrial and employment policy.
CHAPTER 4: WOMEN AND WORK.

4.1: INTRODUCTION

In April 1992, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs published a report which considered the opportunities available to, and the status of women in Australia. Commenting on the comparative economic disadvantage of women, this report included a discussion of the 'work' experience of women. It indicates the enormous contribution women make to both the domestic and market economy, while succinctly noting that 'all women work but only some get paid' (1992:27).

In this chapter I intend to analyse aspects of women's participation in the Australian paid labour force, over the past two decades, to demonstrate the connection between work and welfare policy, the gendered nature of that connection and how 'the triad of state-market-family' (Edwards & Magarey, 1995:8) is evident in the intervention of economic rationalist governments in industrial relations issues. Two predominant themes will be woven through this discussion, which are fundamental to any consideration of the work role of women:

a) how participation in the labour market is compromised by cultural expectations about women's domestic and caring responsibilities - those aspects of women's 'work' which are systematically undervalued and economically unrewarded, and

b) how these cultural expectations are reflected in welfare state policy which has historically reinforced women's economic dependence.

The inter-relationship between paid and unpaid labour has obvious implications for women's financial status, and I aim to demonstrate the impact of state decision-making on issues of labour market participation which undermines the tenuous grasp women have on the right to social, economic and political independence.

An understanding of the importance of employment and income will be considered in the early section of this chapter, including an explanation of the duality of women's 'work' role. As sociologist Julia Smith (1993:9) comments:
Since both labour force participation and quality of employment are gender-linked and constrained by caring responsibilities, which are in turn gender-linked, those entitlements which facilitate labour force participation are of crucial importance to the economic and social rights of women and in the mitigation and/or prevention not only of economic and social dependence but also political dependence.

This argument suggests that the gender segregated labour force is not merely an economic issue, that locates women at the periphery of the formal economy, but has implications for all facets of women's citizenship. It also has a profound influence on mainstream theory which stresses the marginality of women's economic contribution and dictates public policy based on sex and gender differences.

In fact, the Australian labour market is regarded as particularly gender-segregated and disadvantageous to women. To understand and analyse the impact of state legislation in the employment sector during the last two decades, it is essential to comprehend aspects of women's labour market position at the end of the 1970s, and trace restructuring which has occurred since that time. Where applicable, this chapter will include comparative statistical data and explanatory commentary, mainly gleaned from Australian Bureau of Statistics documents.

Since the early 1980s, there have been many legislative adjustments to the industrial relations structure at both the state and federal levels. Although this research project is centred on the effect of government restructuring at the Victorian state level, any consideration of changes to the workplace for women will necessitate an understanding of the intersection between federal and state decision-making and the representations of advancement in employment practices which they embody. Rather than identify and quantify each item of legislation, I propose to briefly describe major directional changes in workplace policy, the government responsible, elements of change they have introduced and illustrate how broader patterns of restructuring transcend party divisions. This general overview will provide a relevant basis for consideration of a number of evolving themes in the contemporary workplace - including pay equity, enterprise bargaining, flexibility and part-time work, unemployment, union affiliation and superannuation - and clearly define how changes in government redistributive policy has been especially disadvantageous for
women. This entails a critical review of many existing theoretical studies of industrial relations legislation in which gender is emphatically ignored in assessing the outcome of change. Ann Shola Orloff (1996:4) argues that,

patterns of women's labour force participation, the division of household labor, and family and household forms - and of state support for these patterns - cannot be understood apart from the larger political economy, but neither can they be reduced to epiphenomena: specifically gendered interests are at stake.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the 'crisis' dialogue of economic rationalism, prevalent in welfare state discourse, has precipitated radical change to the centralised industrial relations organisation, a feature of the Australian system. Issues related to gender have been subsequently marginalised, and at times, trivialised. And yet the evidence would suggest that in the past decade state intervention in the conditions of employment has the potential, not only to more directly disadvantage women, but to undermine many advances made earlier in the workplace.

4.2: WOMEN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PAID EMPLOYMENT

The debate surrounding women's participation in the paid workforce has a lengthy and chequered history, which is closely related to variations in a country's economic stability, or perceived needs at an historical point in time. Earlier this century, during the recessionary period of the 1930s, the myth of women 'taking men's jobs' became fashionable, and it is a recurring accusation which surfaces whenever the employment market is destabilised by external factors. The evidence (ABS,1997) indicates far higher participation levels for women in the current employment sector but, as argued in Chapter 3, the possibility of women achieving economic independence is seriously jeopardised by the constraints on welfare funding and impassioned pleas for women to resume their role as providers of 'the hidden welfare system' at home. Bettina Cass explains that:

The demands of the New Right that women retreat from their pursuit of paid income in the formal labour market and move back full-time into unpaid work in the home and the community... serve clear ideological...
purposes to reactivate the traditional breadwinner/dependent bond as the cornerstone of the stable, pre-recessionary society.

Bettina Cass (1985:87)

The economic position of women has certainly been restricted by culturally constructed representations of 'a woman's place', which has had consequences not only for women's work choices, but also the systemic disadvantage they have experienced within the paid labour market. The 'naturalness' attributed to women's unpaid domestic role is reflected by a workplace structured on the needs and attributes of male workers, and results in what is commonly referred to as 'the double burden' for women. This has obvious implications for women's access to financial resources as it is influential in directing women's choices concerning the extent and commitment they make to participation in the paid labour market. Consistently, in the sections that follow, the restrictive nature of women's domestic role will be implicated in the disadvantage they suffer through contemporary changes to industrial relations practices, and their resultant economic disadvantage when compared to men.

The relative economic status of women adversely affects their opportunities for functioning as autonomous adults in the social and political sphere of public life. In her discussion of women in the workforce, Julie-Ann Lee (1994:191) makes the observation that women's activism in the nineteenth century sought social and moral equality, but '...the emphasis this century has shifted to a fight for equality on economic grounds'. The movement towards economic independence has been diverse, sustained and fraught with frustration, particularly in the workplace, although some tangible changes have been achieved. My contention is that a lack of economic independence places severe constraints on an individual's capacity to participate fully in all aspects of both private and public life, and it has been women's limited economic viability which has contributed to their diminished status. Discussion of social policy frequently ignores the state's intervention in labour market structures and legislation (Callender, 1996:31), which demonstrates the narrow conception perpetuated by some analysts in considering government welfare policy. The connections between women's economic status and gender inequality is complex, but decisions made in the workplace which ignore the position
of women are mirrored in welfare provisions for women outside the paid labour market.

Diane Elson is an economist with wide general experience determining gender bias in economic policy development. She supports theory which relates gender inequality to women's lack of economic power, maintaining:

This idea is a very important counterweight to the arguments one often encounters among economists, that gender inequality is a cultural phenomenon, not one rooted in economic processes, and that it is something for sociologists, anthropologists, and social policy specialists to worry about. Economic processes are seen as gender-neutral: it is people who are biased, not economic processes...

Diane Elson (1996:1)

That women's economic position compares unfavourably to men's is not a new concept. What was new was the recognition it started to receive in theories concerning the feminisation of poverty, which has so many political, as well as material, consequences for women (Nelson, 1984:210).

To defend women's right to income security gained from paid employment challenges many normative assumptions perpetuated by the ideology of the family, and interpreted in social policy as female dependency. The reality is that women's reliance on a male income earner has been steadily decreasing. Statistics indicate that by the end of the 1980s, less than a third of women over fourteen were fully supported in this manner¹ (Baldock & Cass, 1988:xii) and yet the family ethic was sustained in social policy. Frequently, such policy acknowledges as peripheral the contribution women make through paid employment and identify it as secondary to their domestic role. Rosslyn Noonan (1994:148) explains how the labour market is central to the unpaid/paid labour relationship as 'work, employment and the labour market are at the interface of social and economic policy'. And yet this relationship, which is certainly as pertinent to women as to men, is not reflected in work structures or explicitly considered in the formulation of work practices. Barbara Pocock confirms this absence of gender consideration in the conventional industrial

¹ It is very difficult to locate more recent statistics on women's dependency on a male partner, but the increase in the number of single female parents and the steady rise in women in the paid workforce probably indicates that only a small minority of women are 'fully supported' by a male income earner.
relations analysis. "Mainstream industrial relations has largely acted as if gender relations did not saturate most subjects of research and hold implications for theory, the construction of knowledge and research method" (Pocock, 1997:2). The invisibility of women in mainstream industrial relations issues will be discussed with greater emphasis in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Work, in both its paid and unpaid forms, appropriates an extensive amount of women's time and energy, and as I have outlined, the participation of women in the labour force contributes to the feasibility of female independence. However, as Anne Else (1996:57) emphasises,

. . . that's not the whole story. Women want paid work for the same reason as men do. They want to earn money, be with other adults, use their skills, and be part of the world beyond their own family circle.

For many women participation in the labour force develops self-esteem, fosters independence and results in a range of other tangible and intangible personal benefits. The concept of successful women providing positive role models for younger women has validity, and a study by Poppy Liossis at the University of Queensland ("Just the job mum", Herald Sun, 8/7/97:15) indicates that a high level of commitment by working mothers to their job encouraged positive feelings from their children - a finding which is at odds with many mainstream studies which link working mothers with dysfunctional children.

A more detailed discussion of childcare, and the issue of paid employment for mothers, will be included in a later section of this chapter, but the issue of a woman's right to autonomy is important. This discussion is routinely absent from mainstream consideration. Prue Hyman (1994:186) claims that a 'reasonable feminist perspective' would preclude pushing partnered women from the paid labour force, as well as refraining from coercing unpartnered women into it. However, the prospect of women exercising this choice is clouded by potentially discriminatory state action. For example, in discussing the need for 'mutual obligation' between the government and community groups, Liberal Prime Minister John Howard mooted that sole parents, predominantly women, may be forced to do
community work or lose their welfare benefits (Herald Sun, 9/2/1998:5) in spite of the hardship it may impose. And despite the meagreness of the welfare benefit².

Conversely, in a number of radio interviews in March, 1998, the same political leader criticised strident ‘ultra-feminists’ who ‘demand’ that all women should be in the workforce, assuring the community that a restructured tax system would advantage families and dependent children (Howard, March 1998, with Fran Kelly & Alan Jones). Susan St John (1991:11) considered the use of such a core family unit under the restructured New Zealand tax system, noting that,

The adoption of the family unit is thus based on the assumption that sharing and mutual income support actually takes place within marriage. It is also based on the notion that such family behaviour is morally correct.

Australia already has a tax system based on elements of a family core unit, but it appears that future policy may extend benefits to traditional families, gaining a fiscal benefit for the state through increased domestic production of women as welfare providers. Additionally, labour market goals related to unemployment may be achieved through ‘strong disincentive effects’ which will remove women from the paid workforce (idem).

These insights give some inkling of the ‘push me/pull me’ pressures exerted on women in their endeavour to gain economic independence and some element of autonomous decision making. But whatever the motivation or circumstances of women’s entry into the paid workforce, this has been an extremely significant aspect of the changing profile of the paid labour market. How successfully ‘the market’, and more particularly ‘the state’, are in providing for women’s equitable participation is certainly problematic. Feminist debate would suggest that much of the existing dialogue about workplace relations is based on normative assumptions about women - if it even considers women at all.

² This initiative has not yet been implemented, but almost three years later it is still pending, and probably part of the most recent review of the social security system.
4.3. WOMEN AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The sociology of occupations has been conducted for the most part with gender neutral frameworks . . . Jobs are created for men or for women; assumptions about the gender of the worker are embedded in job prescriptions, hierarchies and workplace practices . . . For over a century, work has been one of the most important arenas for the consolidation and reproduction of gender identity - particularly for men.

Christine Williams
(1995:180)

The predominance of naturalistic assumptions which underline the sexual division of labour has been the focus for feminist challenges in an analysis of labour market theory (for example Bryson, 1994; Hartmann, 1996; Scott, 1984). Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle (1983:141) suggested that the gender segregation of labour is not merely economic, but inherent in the sexual and symbolic representations of dominant ideology. This demands a recognition of how economic dependence through limited workforce opportunities intersects with the constraints imposed by women’s primary location in the private sphere. The gendered division of labour in the workplace and in the domestic sphere are complementary (ibid:134). It is not the intention of this study to examine all the factors which have contributed to a gender-segregated workplace, but rather to acknowledge how historical perspectives have influenced the contemporary situation.

These historical perspectives have resulted in a position in which, as I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the gender segregation in the Australian labour force is so predominant and apparently increasing (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1992:31). As will be detailed later, the existence of both horizontal and vertical segregation is evident for women in the financial, structural and organisational practices in the contemporary workplace. In a media release, Belinda Probert and Fiona Macdonald discuss how their study ‘The Work Generation’, a national study of work and identity, confirms that the distinction between men’s and women’s work roles ‘is alive and well’ despite the influx of women into paid employment (‘Sex roles still rule work’, The Age, 7/10/96:5).
And indeed there can be little doubt that there has been an influx. Women's twenty-two per cent share of the Australian labour market in 1947 had increased to thirty-seven per cent in 1982, and by 1996, after some fluctuations, was forty-three per cent (ABS, 1997). In the sphere of labour market analysis, perhaps the most notable trend regarding gender differences is the convergence evident in participation rates for paid employment (Jacobsen, 1994:41). While the participation rate for men is markedly higher, as figure 4.1 shows, growth in the female labour force in the past decade has been consistently greater than the growth rate for men (ABS, 1997:70). These adjustments which superficially seem to favour women are usually represented in a positive manner for the ideological purposes of neoliberalism and economic rationalists. However, the presumed advantage for women in an apparently expanding employment market must be considered in the context of its impact on the labour market conditions and employment opportunities available to women.

![Graph of Index of labour force growth](image)

**Figure 4.1 : Index of labour force growth**

1986 = 100  Source: Australian Women's Year Book 1997 (Cat. No. 4124.0)

Despite the increasing presence of women in paid employment, as I will detail in this chapter the decision making by governments continues to enact legislation based on the male experience of work. The emphasis on 'familism' and the traditional division of paid and unpaid labour in social policy continues to define women as economically dependent and part of the secondary labour market. This location apparently justifies the lack of justice in industrial relations policy and practices.
This traditional distinction between ‘women’s work’ and ‘real’ paid labour persists, despite the development of feminist ideas and the paradox that governments are often simultaneously advocating equal opportunity in employment and other policies apparently aimed to mitigate sexual discrimination.

Lois Bryson (1985:197)

The participation of women in the paid labour force is not a new phenomenon. Nor are the gender norms that delineate the sexual parameters implicit in the social construction and organisation of the workplace.

The perpetuation of socially appropriate work roles is systematically reinforced by discriminatory work practices, which pervade all levels of the work continuum, despite the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation. The stereotypical mechanisms which make sex salient are frequently without a defensible basis. Jocelynne Scutt (1985:51) noted that "The history of women’s work shows clearly that women have suffered differential treatment in the workplace . . ." so that the predominance of women in low status, poorly remunerated positions is accepted in naturalistic terms. Over a decade later, this observation is validated by further evidence. For example, the assertion that ‘bosses’ prefer to hire men rather than women ‘even if they hold exactly the same qualifications’ (‘Jobs for the boys still rule’, Herald Sun, 7/5/97:12). Or findings which indicate that Australian companies are prepared to bypass more competent women for less qualified men when filling overseas executive posts (‘Women overlooked in top overseas postings: study’, The Age, 9/12/96:A3). It is also evident in data highlighting that although women account for seventy-one per cent of the employees in the public service Education and Human Services Division, they occupy only thirty-six per cent of management positions (‘More women, less pay’, Herald Sun, 15/5/97:23), and a survey which indicates that “. . . more than 70 per cent of women’s careers either stagnate or take a slide when they return to the workforce after time off to start a family” (‘Women job losers’, Herald Sun, 8/4/1994:11).

Figure 4.2 shows the characteristic M-shaped pattern, with the trough in the 25-34 years age group illustrating women’s absences from the workplace, usually for child birth and childcare, a factor which women identify as the most resilient barrier to career advancement (idem), and one which reinforces the
marginality of their relationship with labour markets as they are currently organised (Montague & Stephens, 1985:59). Feminists argue that institutional structures can be adapted, but the social change likely to result from government initiated equity strategies, in the absence of coercive measures, is subject to speculation. This issue, relating to the role and responsibility of governments in addressing workplace issues, and the effectiveness of their strategies will be included later in this chapter.

4.2: Labour force participation rates, August 1996

![Graph showing labour force participation rates by age and marital status]

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (Cat. No. 6203.0), 1996

In a summary of women's participation in the workforce in 1992, John Dawkins, at that time the federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, submitted that,

Women are more likely to be in low paid jobs, without recognised qualifications and training, and working on a part-time basis. Around 85 per cent of women workers are concentrated in five main industries; community services, wholesale and retail trade, finance, property and business services and community service industries.

John Dawkins

(House of Representatives Report, April 1992)

An important aspect he raises in this statement is the concentration of women in the part-time workforce. Susan Richardson, from the Centre for Economic Policy (1997) notes that Australia has the largest proportion of part-time employees of all the countries in the OECD. In the period from 1978 to 1997, in Australia fifty-eight per cent of the job growth was part-time, and generally confined to lower paid
occupations with inferior conditions and opportunities for advancement. Not only are women three times more likely to be part-time workers than men [Figure 4.3], approximately one-third of women are employed as casuals, the most disadvantaged category of work force participation (Richardson, 1997:19).

**Figure 4.3 : Components of labour force participation**

(a) Annual averages

(b) Proportion of the population who are unemployed (not unemployment rate)

Source: Australian Women's Year Book (Cat. No. 4124.0)

The profile of part-time workers, therefore, is that they are predominantly female, usually married with dependent children, and employed in the private sector. In the present labour market, part-time work is overwhelmingly constructed as 'women's work', particularly if those women have childcare or domestic responsibilities. As Wendy Weeks (1987:520) explains:

> Married women, because of their historical relationship to the means of production, their social role as producers and reproducers of labour and labour power in the home, have been the group most implicated by the expansion of part-time work.

And it is married women as a group who have been most affected by the detrimental conditions of part-time work.

This does not imply that women with domestic/childcare responsibilities are an homogenous group, who all experience workforce participation similarly, or in fact join the workforce for the same reasons.
Nevertheless, Sylvia Walby’s recognition that the division between the full-time and part-time labour market is merely an extension of the already segmented social relations of paid employment, is apt. “In so far as the increase in part-time work is to be seen as an increase in segregation, then segregation and flexibility would appear to be part of the same process” (Walby, 1988:12). The increase in part-time employment options has followed the gender segregated market already in existence, perpetuating women’s marginal and disadvantaged attachment to the labour market. The predominance of women in part-time work subsequently relegates the recognition of their conditions to being primarily a ‘women’s issue’ (Glezer, 1991:10), rather than an important consequence of structural changes in capital’s employment policy. This underlines the necessity for government policy to ensure, at both the state and federal level, that women’s disadvantage which is already profoundly evident, is not compounded by industrial relations legislation.

4.4: STATE INTERVENTION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, any discussion of the labour market structure in Victoria must be considered within the context of both Australian and Victorian legislation. It is the intersection of the decisions made at these two levels of government which has impacted so devastatingly on the labour market position of Victorian women. In the past two decades there have been numerous changes in the industrial relations system, implemented by governments and I intend to focus on a few major Acts and trace the direction of legislative change, while demonstrating how each ‘assault’ on the labour market has built on those preceding it.

To some extent, the emphasis on ‘free market principles’ and the initiatives they propose, represents a regressive acceptance of historical aspects of individualism and exploitation in employment practices. Originally, it was these unfair circumstances which instigated the evolution of the contemporary industrial relations model of collective labour law. Although they were discussing the New Zealand situation, the comments of Suzanne Hammond and Raymond Harbridge
(1993:15) are extremely pertinent and can be applied quite comfortably to the contemporary position in Australia. They argue,

A key policy initiative in seeking a fairer social system was the introduction of a system of conciliation and arbitration which set basic minimum wages and conditions for workers. In principle, the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act recognised that the operation of the ‘free market’ had failed to provide a fair and reasonable wage for many workers.

This approach acknowledges the importance of, and necessity for, government intervention in the processes of the labour market, to ensure socially just outcomes. However, the extent of this intervention is seriously questioned by the business sector, which accepts some minimal role for government in fostering a ‘regulatory framework’ for industrial issues, but is generally critical of the degree of government intervention (Brook, 1989:183).

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the escalation of free market theory paralleled by welfare state retrenchment has gained increasing credibility, and the demands for economic rationalist principles have been no less strident in the industrial relations area of welfare policy. In response, successive governments have aligned with the corporate sector to restructure work practices and processes in pursuit of potentially increased efficiency and productivity gains (Reilly, 1993:146), a connection not necessarily proven. Sue Richardson (1997:22) considers that the past twenty years have not provided much in the way of progress in the workplace. She maintains:

Recently a number of conservative governments at both State and Commonwealth level have sought, with some success, to wind back the protection of workers. This has been done by diminishing the power and scope of industrial tribunals, limiting the actions of unions and encouraging the development of individual employment contracts between employer and employee.

Each of these aspects has consequences for the labour market in general, but I believe that the erosion of entitlements and hard-fought for conditions is proving more deleterious for women, as they were already in a position of disadvantage compared to men. And ensuing governments’ placatory support for equity has certainly not been evident in the practical application of structural change to the employment conditions of women.
What are some of the relevant legislative documents which have so altered the landscape of industrial relations in the past two decades? Within the context of this study I will not attempt to explain each item of legislation in detail, but rather present an overview to position the legislation chronologically, indicate its sphere of influence [either state or federal], nominate the political party responsible for its introduction and provide some indication of its more salient features.

Table 4.1: Selected Industrial Relations legislation, state and federal

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<td>1990-1999 Accords VI-VII (ALP)</td>
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<td>1993 Workplace Relations Reform Act (ALP)</td>
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The Accord [Statement of Accord by the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Council of Trade Unions Regarding Economic Policy] was a series of prices and income agreements negotiated between the Labor Party and the ACTU, which preceded the election of the Hawke Labor Government federally in 1983. These agreements were implemented by the Labor Government during its twelve years in office (Australian Encyclopedia, 1996:343). Aimed at overcoming inflationary trends and increased unemployment, it contained a range of broad objectives to address these economic problems. David Peetz (1997:3) identifies two 'halves' of the Accord. The first period, from 1983-1990 reinforced a centralised system of wage determination, but laid the groundwork for subsequent award restructuring. This occurred, from 1991-1996, through the introduction of a two-tier system and structural efficiency principles. With the support of unions, employers and senior government ministers, the enterprise bargaining principle with negotiated agreements based on productivity was firmly established in the industrial relations system during this second period of the Accord.
What perhaps nobody fully realised in 1983 was the extent to which Labor and the ACTU would use the Accord framework to slash worker’s wages when the recovery led to balance-of-payments problems from 1985 onwards—

Tom O’Lincoln
(1993:234)

Even when these changes were combined with the abandonment of free tertiary education and the abolition of universal family allowance, it still does not appear that many observers fully realised the extent to which this government had succumbed to the market principles of economic rationalism (Rees, 1994:176). Nor did they acknowledge how effectively the state had prepared the foundation for a reassertion of a gender-biased wages system, both through the Accord and eventually the Keating Government’s Workplace Relations Reform Act of 1993. The direction of government policy fostered an ‘environment in which the relatively subordinate position of women in the economy has been cemented’ (Rosewarne, 1988:82).

As the ‘cement’ was barely setting federally, the employment conditions for Victorians were subject to the industrial relations framework being implemented by the Kennett Liberal Government through the Employee Relations Act (1992). Michael Quinlan (1996:7), an experienced educator in the field of industrial relations, highlighted how the Victorian government adopted a radical approach, closely aligned to the New Zealand model in which compulsory arbitration and awards were abolished in favour of individual and collective employment contracts.

My search for relevant information unearthed a most instructive training video, released to explain the New Victorian Employee Relations Act to the business sector. This includes a discussion between Ian Dixon, an industrial relations lawyer, and Mark Quirk, a spokesperson from the Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry [VECCI] (Business and Tertiary Training Video, 1992). It exemplifies the use of the language of restructuring that has continued to gain currency while simultaneously directing social policy and the welfare debate. The video alludes to the change in industrial legislation as an attempt to ‘protect’
Victorian workers and give them recourse to greater ‘choice’, in an attempt to ‘free up’ the labour market. However, as Martina Nightingale (1995:126) asserts:

To unravel the industrial relations debate it is necessary to understand that terms such as ‘flexibility’ [or choice, or freeing up, or protection] have quite different meanings depending on who is speaking and whose interests are being represented.

The instructional video continues by exhorting us to ‘put all the old habits of the award based conditions behind us’ and to consider ‘what’s best for business’, despite its impact on workers. For, as Ian Dixon points out (Business and Tertiary Training Video, 1992), “They [the workers] may well be offered less but they are being offered employment”. The decision for women is how enthusiastically they are prepared to accept even less than that offered by their already disadvantaged labour market position.

The general direction of the Kennett government legislation has been criticised as an attempt to return the state’s industrial relations to the 19th century, through a ‘ferocious assault’ on wages and conditions, the elimination of penalty rates, the reduction in workers’ compensation rights, abolition of holiday pay loading and other draconian measures (Boyle, 1992:1). This confirms Jeff Kennett’s pre-election promise to overcome what he perceives as ‘archaic industrial relations practices’. As he exclaims, “We are unashamedly pro-private enterprise, pro-business and pro-growth” (Arbouw, 1992:42). Translating the impact of this ideological stance on each aspect of the labour market position of women is the task of later sections of this chapter. In discussing the Victorian legislation, Richard Mitchell (1993:25) provides a profound and brief evaluation of the industrial change.

In brief, this is a system in which a substantial part of the labour force of Victoria would be severely disadvantaged, obliged to work for very low pay and with little or no employment security. Both in intent and implementation in the author’s view it does its perpetrators little credit.

There seems no doubt that the majority of women would be included in the ‘substantial part’ to which Richard Mitchell refers.

While the blend of federal and Victorian legislation represented ‘significant victory’ for what Martina Nightingale (1995:122) refers to as ‘the
employer lobby’ and the ‘conservative side of politics’, the Liberal success at the 1996 federal election precipitated a further deregulation in the system of industrial relations. The introduction of the Workplace Relations and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, by Peter Reith, the Minister for Industrial Relations, resulted in protracted and bitterly contested debate. In his second reading speech to the House of Representatives, the Minister suggested that ‘structural rigidities in the labour market’ contributed to the continuing poor economic performance, and that this Bill ‘keeps faith with the basic Australian values of ensuring a fair go for all’ [emphasis added]. The belief that the Workplace Relations Bill provided for a ‘fair, efficient and workable’ process for workplace reform was certainly questioned by the then leader of the Australian Democrats (Cheryl Kernot, personal correspondence: 30/7/1996), who expressed genuine concern at the demise of the role and powers of the ‘umpire’ - the Australian Industrial Relations Commission - and the virtual abandonment of the reward system.

Taken together, these documents represent a change of direction from the highly centralised system of industrial relations which has characterised the Australian employment experience. Martina Nightingale (1992:7) emphasises that a deregulatory industrial relations policy, initiated with a decade of successive Accords, is being advocated by ‘all major players’ - both Liberal and Labor political parties, unions and employers - and is causing alarm to women’s groups involved in labour market issues. She continues:

A deregulatory framework contradicts the policies promoted by many of these organisations for a centralised wage strategy where all workers are compensated for the cost of living and where they are protected by a system of industry awards and national award standards.

Investigating more closely aspects of this deregulation and how it is interpreted in workplace practices will demonstrate the validity - and growing urgency - of women’s ‘alarm’. As trade unionist Barbara Pocock (1995:235) acknowledged in her analysis of the Labor Government Accord policy, women were being grossly disadvantaged by the breakdown in the centralist system. However, she asserts, the prospects for women resulting from Liberal Party policy documents would
jeopardise decades of gender equity advancement in "... a most important aspect of our lives - our conditions of paid work" (idem). The following sections of this chapter will illustrate just how prophetic were her remarks.

4.5: THE GENDER PAY GAP

The gender wage differential has been an historical feature of the Australian workplace. Firmly entrenched in the employment system by Justice Higgins in the Harvester Judgement in 1907, it was a decision which introduced the concept of the family wage, only applicable to male workers, to circumvent the inequities prevalent with 'pure market forces' (Edwards & Magarey, 1995:62). Historian Charlie Fox (1991:107) reflects on how the most significant intervention by the state in the workplace involved institutionalising the sexual division of labour through wage relativity decisions of the family wage. Despite the passage of almost a century of industrial change and reform, the disparity in women's and men's wages - the gender pay gap - has remained resilient. Any comparative discussion of the data available must clearly indicate precisely what is being compared, to ensure that, wherever possible, interpretations are not hampered by deliberate or unintentional bias. As a measure to compare movements in gender pay rates, I have opted to rely on average weekly earnings for full-time employees.

An examination of trends in Australian gender wage differentials indicates substantial gains made by women in the early 1970s, which compared extremely favourably with the performance of all other countries during this period (Kidd & Meng, 1995:1). Initially, the 1969 'equal pay for equal work' decision, established in principle by the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission, contributed to considerable change in some women's earnings. However, the exception of 'female work' from this decision, in a gender segregated workplace, resulted in its application being severely limited (Australian Encyclopaedia, 1996:341). An attempt to counter some of these limitations was addressed by the Commission, in December 1972, when the concept of 'equal pay for work of equal value' was implemented, but 'despite this overriding principle, women still earn significantly less than men' (Women's Year Book, 1997:135). In theory, although principles of equal pay have
existed since 1975, as Figure 4.4 illustrates, the gender gap persists and has varied only marginally in the past decade.

As it stands, since the late 1970s, full-time adult female workers earn about 80 cents for every male dollar. When part-time work is added this disparity increases . . . Paid work does not provide the same opportunities for equal earnings and income between women and men even though it is twenty years since the equal pay legislation.

Betsy Wearing (1996:150)

Figure 4.4: Ratio of women's to men's average weekly earnings for full-time adult employees.

The cumulative effect of both the 'equal pay' decisions has resulted in increased parity for women, even if the distribution of income still indicates women are concentrated at the lower end (Australian Women's Year Book, 1997:136). What did create a dilemma for further improvement in pay ratios was the decision to base award rates on 'work performed', resulting in an ad hoc system of comparison. The judicial acceptance of inequality of 'work performed', 'work value' and, more recently, 'comparable worth', has created enormous problems for women in a restructuring industrial relations system which continues the cultural devaluation of women's work (Brenner, 1987:436).

Debates related to work value or comparable worth identify the potential for positive change for women, while acknowledging that as a political
discourse they perpetuate existing ideology. Such ideology is based on 'the necessity and validity of meritocratic hierarchy' (ibid.437), and the value laden assessment of comparable worth. Later discussion in this chapter, concerning issues of equal opportunity will focus on the gender bias inherent in the attribution of merit and the nature of hierarchies in the workplace, where women are clustered at the lowest levels. What needs to be scrutinised is how definitions of skill are imbedded with normative notions of femininity and masculinity (Nightingale, 1992: 16).

The system of wage decision-making in Australia, from federation to the equal pay case in the late 1960s, was remarkably stable, with basic awards for women calculated at 75 per cent of the adult male rate. Wage rates usually comprised two elements, the basic rate and a skill 'margin' (Australian Encyclopedia, 1996:1194), and it was traditionally this latter element, the over-award payment, which created much of the disparity between women's and men's earnings. It was also the element that has always been the focus of decentralised negotiations (Nightingale, 1995:129), a significant factor in the current enterprise bargaining debate. For despite the gender pay gap, the comparative situation for women in Australia has been more equitable than many other western countries because of our reliance on a collective, centralised system. Barbara Pocock (1995:236) provides evidence of how the move to wage setting at the local, decentralised level adversely affects women's pay. She relates that:

International evidence suggests that Australia's relatively centralised wage fixing institutions largely explain the high ratio of female/male earnings - currently around 30 per cent above the level in the US and Japan, for example, where industrial relations is quite decentralised.

Not only is the gender pay gap narrower in countries with a central arbitration system, but other policies and practices, including hours of work, are demonstrably more responsive to women's needs (Quinlan, 1996:19).

How has this been affected by the intervention of restructuring governments in the past two decades? I have already noted that tracing the average weekly earnings for women and men during the period of this study (Figure 4.4) indicates there has only been minimal movement in the ratio of these earnings.
During the period of the Accord, women’s earned income ‘retained its position’ when compared to the rates of male workers. Joanne Schofield (1988:47) maintains that this was an important benefit of the Accord, for although the impact on women’s wages was marginal during this period, without the Labor Party policy there may have been a relative decline. While acknowledging the validity of this argument, it seems to typify an accepted passive response: things may not have improved for women, but at least they didn’t get worse! This period of industrial relations, following closely after the nominal implementation of equal pay, and orchestrated by a ‘socially just’ political party was positioned favourably to make a real impact on the labour market status for women. Instead, women would lament that the prospect of a highly interventionist government supported by a peak workers’ group, the ACTU, was strategically encouraging but factually impotent, as it not only initiated change detrimental to women, it failed to pursue those issues vitally important to women’s participation in the labour market.

Any initial wage gains for women from a return to a more centralised system in Accord I were effectively overshadowed by a retreat to deregulation implicit in a number of policy initiatives in subsequent Accords. In 1986, Accord II aimed to maintain disposable income through a range of tax cuts, but the application of percentage reductions was not applicable to lower income levels, which are disproportionately female (Schofield, 1988:39). Compounding the inequitable approach to wage intervention was the encouragement to workers, through Accord II, to negotiate a productivity based superannuation scheme to a maximum of three per cent of annual salary. This decision left unaccounted the rights of seventy-five per cent of women not participating in any contributory superannuation scheme (ibid: 42). The two-tiered wage proposal introduced in Accord III in March 1987 included a flat-rate payment for all workers, which, while small, substantially improved the position for many women. This was combined with a second-tier supplementary payment achieved through workplace claims for restructuring and changed work practices (Sharp and Broomhill, 1988:4), a virtual substitution for the inequitable ‘over award’ payments.
Both the two-tier system and the ‘award restructuring’ of Accord IV, which began in August 1988, were based on productivity improvements which failed to address the segregated nature of labour market participation, and consequently marginalised the interests of women.

While women’s full-time wage relativities improved under the Accord, the framework within which the Accord operated effectively inhibited progress on equal pay claims. While some gains were made . . . the overall effect of the Accord has been to slow down progress on achieving equal pay through the formal processes of the arbitration system.

Rhonda Sharp & Ray Broomhill
(1988:74)

Whatever the illusion, the Labor Party, supported by a relatively strong union movement, successfully thwarted the Liberal/National Coalition at the 1993 federal election. The Coalition, under the leadership of John Hewson, had presented a vision of economic and industrial policy, documented in Fightback! and Jobsback!, which promised further deregulation in response to the demands of the ‘free market’ (Castles, Gerritson & Vowles,1996:86). Nationally, for a time at least, women were spared the worst excesses of labour market deregulation.

However, working women in Victoria were not so fortunate. In 1992, the Kennett-led Liberal party was convincingly successful in defeating the beleaguered Kirner Labor government. Prior to the election, Jeff Kennett very publicly promised to ‘take on the public service and overhaul industrial relations, and to introduce sweeping pro-business reforms . . .’ (Arbouw,1992:41). The electorate, subjected to media saturation condemning the economic mismanagement of the previous Labor government, subsequently elevated the Liberals to office.

Nowhere in Australia has the stock conservative stunt of appointing a politically stacked Commission of Audit immediately upon coming to office worked as well as it has in Victoria. Designed to publicly dramatise any available fiscal imbalance so as to denigrate the record of the outgoing government, and to prepare the public mind to accept the necessity for the new government to trash its election promises in favour of scorching the economic earth, the Victorian audit was utterly successful.

Christopher Shel
(1997:217)
While some observers acknowledge an economic basis to the drastic reform of industrial relations in Victoria (e.g. Teicher & van Gramberg, 1998), this is coupled with an underlying ideologically driven agenda in the radical change to industrial relations policy implemented by the Kennett government in 1992 (e.g. Mitchell, 1993; Boyle, 1992). The repeal of the Industrial Relations Act 1979 (Vic) signaled the end of a compulsory arbitration system in Victoria, to be replaced by the Employee Relations Act 1992 responsive to ‘the market’. The result for Victorian women was almost immediate. The position for women in Victoria was considerably more advantageous than that for Australian women as a whole when the Kennett government was elected. However, while the ratio for female/male earnings Australia wide was relatively stable, with a decrease of only one per cent between 1991 and 1995, the Victorian female ratio fell 3.5 per cent, to a rate inferior to that of other women workers in Australia (ABS, 1995).

Christine Campbell, the then Shadow Minister for Women’s Affairs, was extremely critical of the attempt by Jan Wade, the Minister for Women’s Affairs, to use selective statistics to present a positive picture of women’s experience under Liberal Party reforms (‘Masking reality as women’s pay falls’, The Age, 15/8/96). Some women workers may have achieved a slight increase in ‘ordinary time’ pay rates in the 1992 Act, but this was at the expense of penalty rates and holiday pay loading as well as a number of other workplace conditions, and it still resulted in an increased gender pay gap. In the public service sector, some unions (for example, the Australian Education Union) successfully applied to transfer their members to the federal jurisdiction, which provided protection from some of the punitive aspects of the Employee Relations Act. However, this respite was brief, as the election of the Liberal Howard Government in 1996 initiated a further round of significant industrial relations deregulation. This included ‘the historic decision by the Victorian government to transfer a large part of its industrial powers to the federal government’ (Birmingham & Fox, 1997:46), so that all Victorian workers are included in the framework of the Commonwealth Workplace Relations Act 1996.
The implications of this Act are far-ranging, but in this section I will direct the emphasis to fluctuations in comparative pay for women and men. The further movement towards deregulation appears to be following a very similar - but not precisely the same - path as already evident in New Zealand. Initial studies indicate that collective employment contracts have resulted in ‘miniscule’ wage increase for most workers, although women have been less successful than men: “. . . so the recipients of the larger wage increases that have resulted from the collapse of traditional relativities have been men not women” (Hammond & Harbridge, 1993: 27). Early indicators from the deregulated labour market in Australia suggest that wage increases in male dominated industries are significantly above those for female dominated industries (Quinlan, 1996: 19), and there appears no reason to presume that such trends will not be compounded by an acceleration of deregulation represented by the Reith legislation.

Clare Kermond, writing in The Age employment section (21/2/1998: 1) concedes that base wages for women and men are relatively equitable, but indicates the advantaged position of men in regard to performance pay, bonuses, overtime and ‘perks’, and she provides the trade union example which shows that women secure only 18 per cent of the bonuses received by men. ACTU president Jennie George (‘ACTU chief in equal pay push’, Herald Sun, 11/5/98: 16) outlined the gender pay discrepancy for academics ‘to show the fight for equal pay was far from over’. Her observations were based on a National Tertiary Education Union study which discovered that women suffered systematic ‘underclassification’, resulting in inferior pay rates.

In the presence of government legislation which implemented ‘equal pay’ in the early 1970s, why is there a persistent discrepancy in the earnings of women and men? Earlier in this chapter, I alluded to the problems associated with the initial concepts of workplace equity, which compared work performed or work value in decision making. Some industries or areas of employment were able to translate this into a semblance of equity, but generally the policy of equal pay is not reflected by the practices. Barbara Pocock (1995: 107) argues that the new pay rates and structures under ‘equal pay’ merely entrench conventional skill hierarchies
as new classification structures 'were not based on systematic gender-neutral work-value assessments to establish equivalence with the appropriate levels in other awards.'

More recent attempts to redress the situation through 'comparable worth' cases has been largely unsuccessful. A landmark test case conducted in the electrical components industry, for example, sought to align pay for women process workers with those of male general hands, based on the higher skill level required by the women's work roles. In an historic judgement, the Industrial Relations Commission rejected the application as they considered 'the value of the women's positions on competency standards or "skills counts" alone was inappropriate' and work value should consider merit, productivity and work conditions ('Anger at wage blow to women', Herald Sun, 5/3/1998:4). While both the union movement and employer groups were outspoken on this result, the government remained ominously silent. A union appeal against the decision has been thwarted by the company involved in the legal battle, which sacked all their male general hands - the specific group with whom comparable pay was sought ('Equal pay case in chaos', Herald Sun, 9/7/1998:12). The government continued to remain silent. As the news report commented, the equal pay case is now in 'chaos'.

However, the historical undervaluation of women's skills has resulted in Australian women being trapped in 'a wage time warp' ('Gender pay gap widens', Herald Sun, 9/3/99:16), which perpetuates assessment of women's workplace skills as 'natural attributes' or social skills (Department of Industrial Relations, 1999:1), and apparently justifies the discrepancy in pay between workers [for example in a plant nursery compared to a childcare nursery]. Women's lack of access to employment with enhanced remunerative opportunities is more closely linked to socio-cultural factors than a lack of skills, commitment or expertise on their part. In this period of economic restructuring it seems that the opportunity to address issues of bias and inequity in the wages system has not been a state priority. Barbara Pocock's words (1995:120) thus still hold true:
The lessons of recent experience reinforce those of earlier decades and wage systems. The systems and its mostly male players will not willingly or easily go against the great dead weight of history to deliver pay equity.

Barbara Pocock
(1995:120)

The structural impediments to women’s pay equity persist.

4.6 : WOMEN AND ENTERPRISE BARGAINING

While the centralized industrial relations systems in Australia and New Zealand did present problems for women workers, they did, when compared to less centralized systems, provide a reasonable degree of equity for women workers. . . . In themselves, the structure of the labour market and the process of bargaining tend to exacerbate the poor position of women in a decentralized system.

Hammond & Harbridge (1995:373)

In their discussion of New Zealand women and enterprise bargaining, Suzanne Hammond and Raymond Harbridge alluded to the ominous implications for policy makers in their consideration of Australian women in a deregulated labour market. They argue that, despite Australian government policy which at a superficial level promotes issues of equity and fairness, the movement towards deregulation appears likely to ‘exacerbate inequalities at work’ (1995:359). In the Australian context, what does ‘deregulation’ involve and how accurately have these two analysts predicted the likely outcome for Australian women?

Previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated how the structural organisation of industrial relations in Australia, based on collective bargaining and unionisation, has provided women with wages and conditions which are advantageous when compared to other OECD countries. There had been concern that the gradual shift towards enterprise bargaining threatened the workplace gains achieved by many women, the group referred to as ‘particularly vulnerable’ by the Industrial Relations Commission president, Justice Deidre

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1 There have been few advances in developing pay equity cases in the ensuing period. A media report (Herald Sun, 12/12/2000: 8) notes that the ‘gender pay gap stays’.
O'Connor ("Attack on labour reforms" Herald Sun, 9/4/1997:23). Understanding how women are positioned in the overall contemporary workplace certainly makes their 'bargaining' position problematic. And yet, the dominant feature of industrial relations debate in the 1980s and 1990s has been the inevitability of enterprise bargaining, and the manner in which state legislative frameworks have directed the development of an increasingly deregulated labour market (Quinlan, 1996:3). This has occurred at both the state and federal level, and has involved governments of both the major parties.

As I argued previously, the foundations for enterprise bargaining at the federal level were established in Accords I - IV, but the impetus for extensive workplace bargaining followed the re-election of the Keating Labor Government in 1993. In his pre-election keynote address to women, Prime Minister Keating was extremely critical of the Liberal 'Fightback!' package. He suggested that the industrial relations 'experiments' promoted in the Opposition document supported deregulation policies which would seriously disadvantage women, especially the 'lowest paid women'. He contrasted this with the Labor Party platform, based on protection of awards within a centralised system under the Accord, and concluded with a commitment to 'protect' women from the inequity of deregulation (Fletcher, 1995:3).

Yet in April 1993, almost immediately after the federal election which returned the ALP to government, Keating assured the Australian Institute of Company Directors that the government's intention was that enterprise bargains should become 'full substitutes' for awards. Karen Fletcher (idem)

The Accords VI - VII (1990-1996), and especially the Workplace Relations Reform Act (1993) clearly demonstrate that the policy direction of the Keating government reflected a decisive acceptance of 'decollectivisation', a decision with severe implications for women.

In her assessment of this federal system, Jennie George, the Australian Council of Trade Unions [ACTU] assistant secretary [later president] cautioned against suggestions that women had been exposed to an unconditionally deregulated market. She emphasised that enterprise bargaining in the 1993
legislation had been 'buttressed' by protective features, including the safety net and 'it is yet to be seen whether the system acts for/or against the interests of women' (George, 1994:34). Quite apart from her inference that policy had been implemented without an accurate understanding of its probable impact on women in the paid workplace, her opinion conflicts with other commentators at this time. For example Bill Harley, of the Department of Government, University of Queensland, concluded from his 1994 study of enterprise agreements that women received no positive benefits from such bargaining (Fletcher, 1995:3). Additionally, as early as April 1991, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission [AIRC] had rejected the principle of enterprise bargaining in its National Wage Case decision because of its concern for the position of female workers, a stance subsequently supported in 1992 by both the Women's Electoral Lobby and the National Women's Consultative Council (Charlesworth, 1997:101).

However, in October 1991, the AIRC endorsed the Enterprise Bargaining Principle which precipitated the development of enterprise agreements as the primary method of determining wages and workplace conditions (Robertson, 1992:19). This acceptance of enterprise specific agreements appears to contradict the AIRC decision earlier that year, although in the latter decision they were mindful to establish a minimal level of protective measures to maintain conditions of employment for industrially 'weaker' groups (idem). In response to criticism by employer groups and reflecting the direction of trade union initiatives, the Keating Labor Government introduced the Workplace Relations Reform Act of 1993 to promote decentralised enterprise bargaining as the focus of industrial agreements at the federal level (Macquarie, 1997:343; Hawke & Drago, 1998:7).

As the gradual shift toward enterprise bargaining gathered momentum federally, 'industrial relations in Victoria was the subject of legislative turmoil in 1992' (Catanzariti & Sullivan, 1993:118). Previous state Labor legislation had addressed the issue of industrial relations with some tentative reform to increase the enterprise focus, while maintaining a clearly established centralised framework. However, as Joseph Catanzariti and Gabrielle Sullivan (idem) commented:

Such efforts were utterly thwarted by the Kennett government's
radical new industrial relations paradigm, which involved repealing the entire amended Industrial Relations Act 1979 and replacing it with the controversial Employee Relations Act 1992.

In an interview before his election in 1992, Jeff Kennett predicted a range of industrial changes to 'liberate' the employer/employee relationship and legislatively recognise enterprise agreements (Arbouw, 1992:42). Within six weeks of election, the Kennett Liberal government passed industrial reform so sweeping and controversial that it was referred to as 'the Kennett Revolution' (Watson & Barron, 1993:52).

In a discussion, generally supportive of Kennett's industrial changes, Graeme Watson (1993:55) maintains that these reforms were not predicated on 'specific proposals or policies of any interest group or the practices in any other jurisdiction'. However, Kennett had a long-standing and well-identified public dislike of trade unions and unionists, and his legislation reflected an ideological perspective as much as an economic foundation. The model he adopted more closely resembled the New Zealand rather than the federal policy (Quinlan, 1996:7), and reflected policy based on guidelines resulting from a Tasman Institute project in 1991. This right-wing think-tank is funded by a number of employer groups including both the Business Council of Australia and the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and almost exclusively represents business sector interests (Teichner & van Gramberg, 1998:61). Consideration for the already disadvantaged position of women in the paid workforce is unlikely to have featured significantly on the government agenda. In fact, the anticipated abandonment of state awards was potentially more critical to women's working conditions as the Victorian state award system protected many areas dominated by female employment (George, 1994:30).

The Business Council of Australia, as early as 1989, was arguing that their research indicated that enterprise bargaining was an element essential for Australian economic advancement. The persuasiveness of their powerful voice was illustrated in the Fightback! and Jobsback! policy documents of the Liberal Opposition before the 1993 election (Nightingale, 1992,10). Although they were
unsuccessful in this electoral foray, the subsequent election of a Liberal government federally in 1996 demonstrated that the industrial relations agenda presented in Fightback! had not been jettisoned. Amanda Birmingham and Phillips Fox (1997) provide a detailed explanation of the significant changes included in the Liberal government’s Workplace Relations Act of 1996 (C’wth), outlining that a form of awards will be maintained, as a safety net with minimum terms and conditions, but only on twenty ‘allowable award matters’. It is apparent that the overwhelming emphasis of this industrial reform is to extend the implementation of enterprise agreements purportedly to increase workplace efficiency and productivity through mutual negotiation. However the opportunistic nature of this legislation cannot be denied.

Now is an excellent time for employers to consider a whole range of employment and industrial related issues. The Workplace Relations Act has provided employers with an opportunity to make the changes that employers have sought for many years, only time will tell whether the changes are suitably far reaching.


And what of the employees?

The preceding discussion in this section, focusing on the evolution of enterprise bargaining, alludes to substantial concerns for the employment conditions of women in a deregulated market. The projected negative impact for women was part of the dialogue before state and federal governments embarked on radical workplace change, but the potential for disadvantage was seemingly ignored. Understanding the reason for this perception of women’s increased vulnerability, necessarily requires an appreciation of their prevailing labour market position, and the implications for their bargaining power. Liberal Senator, Jocelyn Newman, may well argue that women will be ‘fresher’ to negotiate with their employer (1992:9), but she conveniently ignores the disparity in bargaining power implicit in the employee/employer relationship. Similarly, the Business Council of Australia, in the research mentioned earlier, is able to ‘gloss over’ power differences and

... deny the divisions based on gender, class and race and offer a subject position where the genderless, classless and ethnically
undefined employee is able to enter into a free contract, based on mutuality of interest between the worker and the enterprise.  
Martina Nightingale (1992:11)

Women participate in an obviously gender-segmented labour market and their ‘weaker’ position results from participation patterns, wage differentials and employment status which limits their ability to participate effectively in the bargaining process (Robertson, 1992:20; Lee, 1994:192; Quinlan, 1996:18). A study, conducted by Sara Charlesworth and published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, has confirmed that ‘a small but significant number of women were being seriously disadvantaged by the process [of enterprise bargaining]’ (‘Enterprise deals cost women jobs, says study’ The Age, 20/11/96:A3). The ‘subordinate’ position of women workers in the bargaining procedure is also likely to be hampered further by the patriarchal nature of the entire process where ‘the language is masculinist, the processes are adversarial and its concepts have been based on gendered notions of workers...’ (Hammond & Harbridge, 1993:17).

Of particular concern for women is the evidence which suggests that female-dominated workplaces are more likely to be involved in the trade-off of working conditions for a minimal pay rise or more suitable working hours (‘Enterprise deals cost women’s jobs, says study’, The Age, 20/11/96:A3), but as Sara Charlesworth points out (1997:104) women have fewer conditions to trade. Assurances that the ‘no disadvantage’ aspect of the 1996 legislation, which guarantees minimum conditions, will maintain the rights of employees is seriously challenged by at least one enterprise agreement in which these basic conditions - like sick leave - have been given away or ‘cashed out’. In discussing this particular negotiation, Jennifer Thompson (1995:5) argues that,

... the chance remains open for employers to buy out award conditions and take back later the trade-off in wages. This erosion of award conditions over time is the reason business supports enterprise bargaining.

This judgement of the integrity of many employers may appear relatively harsh, but it does seem unlikely in the existing labour market place that conditions traded away by employees will be easily regained.
Reviewing the employment possibilities for women two years prior to the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act of 1996, Leonie Still concluded that it was ‘too early’ to provide a substantial evaluation of women’s employment conditions within the already partly deregulated system. Nonetheless she did indicate that, with the exception of ‘vocal women’s groups and women unionists’, women’s understanding of industrial relations legislation and its possible impact on their working conditions was extremely limited. She conceded that superficially, women’s position did not appear as too disadvantageous, but cautioned that complacency could see women’s needs and interests ‘subsumed’ in normative or ‘generic’ constraints within workplace bargaining (Still, 1994:50). A similar note of optimism is presented by Julie-Anne Lee, in her comparison of the prospect for Australian women in enterprise negotiations, compared to the circumstances of female workers in New Zealand.

The protective mechanisms still in place in Australia, however, are of vital importance and ensure that the implications of enterprise bargaining for Australian working women are not as negative as for their New Zealand sisters.

Julie-Anne Lee (1994:196)

In contrast, a New Zealand business sector spokesperson, Penelope Brook (1989:184), concedes that the state is responsible for fostering a ‘regulatory framework’ for workplace relations, but is critical of increased government intervention during periods of economic change. She dismisses claims of inherent conflict in employee/employer relations, and attributes resistance to change as part of this misconception. This viewpoint is iterated by Graeme Watson’s observation (1993:54) of opposition to the Victorian reform. He asserts that, “It is only natural that those with vested interests are very much opposed to changes which detrimentally affect them”.

The interpretation of both these analysts underlines the problem of deregulation. Its representation as a positive situation for the employee/employer relationship reflects a perspective removed from the reality of how legislative reform of the bargaining process is impacting on workers, who are after all the less powerful
participant in the employment agreement. In general terms, the new industrial frameworks enhance management control in determining employment conditions (Quinlan, 1996: 25). Mark Gosche expresses his concern at the 'bullying' evident in contract agreements. He suggests that particularly in small workplaces - disproportionately female - direct bargaining is a farce, which disguises the evidence that wages and conditions are arbitrarily dictated by the employer.

The reality for over 50 per cent of the New Zealand workers is that no enterprise bargaining will take place. The new worker coming off the unemployment queue... is particularly vulnerable. Young and inexperienced workers suffer most. Women who make up much of the part-time workforce fare worse than men.


While acknowledging that the systems in New Zealand and Australia are not identical - although Victoria more closely follows the trans-Tasman model - it would be patently and excessively optimistic to believe that Victorian women in the paid work-force will be any more successful. The impotence of safety net provisions, problematic initially and perennially flawed by the Workplace Relations Act of 1996, suggests that the potential for women to achieve credible change is virtually non-existent. Meg Smith and Peter Ewer, of the Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEET], are critical of how gender considerations have been ignored in the legislative policy related to enterprise bargaining. They argue (1995:13) that there is an urgent need for positive state intervention to support women's issues, 'since the available evidence on the ability of women to influence the bargaining agenda is not hopeful'. Nowhere is this lack of influence in bargaining more apparent than on the issue of flexibility, the subject of the next section.

4.7: THE ISSUE OF 'FLEXIBILITY'

As the workplace restructuring debate gathered momentum, the focus for reform was increasingly characterised by the need - in industrial relations jargon - for labour market flexibility. Assurances from the business sector suggested that if we addressed the issue of 'flexibility' the economic woes which were impeding Australian growth would somehow abate, and this perception was supported by governments at both state and federal level (1999:12). In her review of literature
developed by the Business Council of Australia, Martina Nightingale is critical of their coercive use of language to promote deregulation. She maintains:

The need for flexibility is a recurrent theme throughout BCA literature and provides a pertinent example of the way in which binary oppositions... within the dominant discourse offer a choice of subject positions which imply greater individual choice and control, but which in fact weight the balance of power in favour of employers.

Martina Nightingale, 1995:127

Controlling the language of the debate ensures that perceptions regarding the validity and value of ‘flexibility’ are presented positively and accepted as preferable to ‘rigidity’, its apparent alternative.

What is labour market flexibility? Jane Kelsey, writing from a New Zealand perspective, observes the destabilising uncertainty and insecurity it engenders, and rather wryly comments that it means ‘going to bed not knowing if you would have a job the next day’ (1996:2). Other analysts may be less cynical, but it is difficult to find widespread support for the concept of flexibility in its normative form, despite its promotion as the greatest advantage of the enterprise bargaining process. In her study of the implications for women from enterprise bargaining, Rachel Robertson emphasises that there are numerous definitions and possible distinctions which typify labour flexibility, but she identifies three broad types: functional flexibility, time flexibility and numerical flexibility (1992:22). These categories are similar to those identified by Ellen Mutari and Deborah Figart (1997:121), although they add wage flexibility to a discussion which identifies flexibility as demonstrably gendered. For this reason, it appears important to briefly outline how each of these flexibilities is defined, before analysing their impact on women’s paid employment.

i) Functional flexibility promotes multi-skilling through reduction in job demarcations. Theoretically, such policy has the potential to advance the position of women, through a reduction in labour market segregation. But in practice it is likely to reinforce employment insecurity and reduce career structures, especially in the absence of adequate training procedures and a recognition of the equity issues involved.
ii) Time flexibility covers those work practices which include part-time, job sharing, 12 hour shifts, rostering and flexitime. This form of flexibility may be advantageous for all workers, but the evidence suggests that the implementation of some of these work practices perpetuates the gendered culture of the workplace.

iii) Numerical flexibility refers to a dual market system, where a long-term core labour force is supplemented by casual, temporary or contract labour as a peripheral or secondary labour force as the employers' needs dictate. Concern focuses on the possible proliferation of a substantial number of women with limited employment security and inferior conditions and pay.

iv) Wage flexibility is characterised by devaluation of women's skills through feminisation of jobs, the rejection of comparable worth principles, and an intentional deflation of wages through the deregulation process.

(Based on Robertson, 1992: 22-23; Mutari & Figart, 1997: 12-128)

The introduction of government policy representing conservative forces in the industrial relations field supports each of these flexible arrangements, to varying degrees.

Flexible employment, with wages and working conditions that are culturally gendered as female, is being promulgated as the solution to restoring profitability.

Ellen Mutari & Deborah Figart (1997: 128)

As I will illustrate in the following discussion, women, because of their location within the paid labour market and their relative lack of bargaining power, appear to be disproportionately experiencing the disadvantages of the move towards greater flexibility.

The industrial relations agenda in the 1990s has firmly entrenched the flexibility model. A cursory review of the legislation included previously indicates a rapid shift towards flexibility as a focus for the productivity debate. In general terms, in Victoria the Kennett Employee Relations Act (1992) prepared the way for the introduction of a diversity of flexible arrangements and although Keating predicted an 'evolutionary' introduction for more flexible industrial relations agreements federally, the Industrial Relations Reform Act of 1993 firmly established a parallel framework for negotiating workplace flexibility. Discussing the
introduction of these measures, the Minister for Industrial Relations, Laurie Brereton, comments that '... businesses, unions and workers will have greater flexibility under the new industrial system' to 'co-operatively' reach agreement without feeling 'threatened' ('It's a stronger system', Herald Sun, 28/3/1994:15).

This position was exacerbated by the subsequent legislation introduced by the Liberal government almost immediately after their election in 1996, and proffered as family friendly legislation which provided 'freedom' and flexibility for women to pursue their preferred option for unpaid or paid labour. Liberal Senator Margaret Reid, a senior member of Cabinet, commented that the Howard Government was 'taking a huge step to finally creating an equitable workplace' and that the pursuit of workplace flexibility gives choice 'back to the individual in regard to balancing work and family life' (Personal correspondence, 4/7/1996). However, a group of trade union research officers commenting on the period of the early Accords, argued that while workers' flexibility is the catch-cry, in reality it means '... freedom for management to engage and deploy labour solely at its discretion' (Ewer et al., 1991: 41). The evidence regarding provisions within the subsequent legislation appears to reinforce the continuing aptness of this comment.

What prompts this negative assessment of 'flexibility' for the circumstances of women? To address this question, I intend to focus initially on the issue of time flexibility, as this is frequently cited as providing women with individual options. Martina Nightingale (1992:14) concedes that the notion has some appeal to women, intent on gaining at least some independent income while fulfilling childcare and domestic responsibilities. The reality of women voluntarily accepting part-time employment, which presently is almost uniformly discriminatory and disadvantageous, without the pressure of social and cultural ideology is certainly contentious. Arguably, part-time work is the most exploited area of the present labour market and the impact of contemporary government legislation appears destined to compound the disadvantage in terms of pay, conditions, status and occupational security for women, particularly in an ever increasing part-time labour force. The overwhelming silence - and even rebuttal - of the state's complicity in
disadvantaging women, demonstrates mainstream assumptions regarding women's role in the labour force as peripheral.

The structural inequities which have traditionally existed in part-time employment for women have been compounded by deregulation. "While part-time work has enabled many women to enter the labour force, the inferior working conditions associated with it are a factor in women's lower labour force status" (Lewis, 1990:77). Although it provides an important source of employment for women, especially married women or those with caring responsibilities, it has always involved exploitative conditions for the exchange of women's labour with capital (Yeandle, 1984:123). What is so disturbing about the current time flexibility debate is that, rather than improving the options and conditions for women in the part-time workforce, state legislation in the past fifteen years has seemingly exposed women to even further exploitation.

While part-time work may be represented as a 'good' compromise for women, employment arrangements specifically advocated for women's advantage may ultimately be counter productive. In feminised areas of employment, flexibility for labour needs is clearly provided by the expanding use of time flexibility, particularly when compared to male dominated areas where flexibility is attained through different policy measures, for example extended working hours (Beechey & Perkins, 1987:76). Although there has been a discernible increase in the male part-time labour force, it is still an employment model that is culturally female. There is nothing inherent in the nature of specific jobs which necessarily ascertains their time structure: part-time jobs are 'constructions' closely related to gender (ibid). And the depressed nature of financial rewards in feminised occupational categories contributes to the inferior renumeration for part-time workers, who are segregated into lower level tasks defined as requiring minimal skills or training (Lewis, 1990:15). Obviously, this 'flexible and cheaper pool of labour [is] very attractive to capital' especially in periods of economic downturn, where decreased costs of production are a vital motivating factor (Weeks, 1987:520). The persuasive and consistent demand for labour market deregulation by the conservative employer lobby has
gained currency in the global economic 'crisis' of the 1990s, and is reflected in the restructuring framework of contemporary industrial relations.

Wendy Weeks (1987:516) identified part-time work as an important issue in the labour market discussion, 'because it provides a window onto the experience of women' in an area of employment vital to capital, but inadequately addressed by government policy. The very aspect which promotes part-time women workers' attraction to the business sector - their flexibility and adaptability - mitigates against their recognition as valued workers deserving of improved status and appropriate conditions of employment. In an economic environment in which employment opportunities are curtailed, the vulnerability of part-time workers, in the absence of legislative protection, destabilises their security. "It seems that employers often feel that they are doing women a favour by offering them part-time work" (Beechey & Perkins, 1987:152). The reciprocity of advantage offered employers appears conveniently ignored when renumeration and conditions are decided.

The controversy surrounding the part-time work debate stems from the tension between flexible time allocation as an aspect of the casualisation of labour and the implementation of part-time work based on worker choice (Weeks, 1987:517). Initially, in the 1950s and 1960s, women moved into part-time employment, despite a tendency toward downward occupational mobility, as it did provide the opportunity for workforce participation which complied with competing family demands, in what was perceived as a culturally acceptable manner. More recently, as the demand for flexibility has gathered momentum, women in part-time positions are discovering that employers' needs are fitting less easily with domestic and childcare responsibilities. Under deregulation, women are frequently employed for the 'unsocial' hours required in service industries, without the compensation of penalty rates.

In a discussion of flexibility in the banking industry, Kerry Barlow, Ann Junor and Michelle Patterson are extremely critical of the distribution of part-
time hours. Workplace organisation, despite the family-friendly rhetoric, is taking precedence over the needs of employees (1993:44). An example they provide relates to permanent part-time work, purportedly the most ‘protected’ form of flexible time. Here, a change in protective legislation permits the distribution of total agreed hours to be spread across a four week cycle. A woman contracted to provide what was previously ten hours per week could well discover herself employed for forty hours in week one, with no hours at all in the subsequent three weeks. This indicates a substantial movement, aided by legislation, towards casualisation by stealth and denies recognition of women’s other commitments. The trend, with significant increases in the proportion of women in temporary or casual positions, has serious consequences for not only women’s wages and conditions, but also their longer term job security.

It also belies the corporate sector advocates who promote an aura of co-operation and mutuality in the implementation of flexible hours. The choices made by most individual women, are constrained by the narrow limits of institutional arrangements (Yeandle, 1984:181), including governments, employers and families, which combine to perpetuate the disadvantage for women’s workforce participation in an increasingly deregulated labour market.

Changes in hours of work and the loss of employee prerogative with respect to shift arrangements and hours carry important consequences for women and their families and swim against the rhetoric of family friendly flexibility. While 12 hour shifts may suit some men who rely on their partners to look after dependents they will not suit many women.

Barbara Pocock (1995:242)

Consistently the context of legislative change, in industrial relations as in most policy areas, renders invisible the position of women. This is compounded by many theoretical understandings which ignore the extent of women’s disadvantage through flexibility arrangements, and similarly ignore the contributing role of governments. In their haste to signal a trend towards economic recovery, governments show an inclination to produce statistical evidence of ‘job growth’ without considering the effects of restructuring on the potential labour market. The potential for hidden unemployment and underemployment, evidenced by the
dramatic increase in part-time positions, ignores the unequal access which women have (Baxter & Gibson, 1990: 68; Weeks, 1987: 516).

As Lisa Macdonald points out (29/4/1998), the overall increase in the proportion of women in the workforce has slowed dramatically, and the statistics indicate that the proportion who retain full-time employment has decreased in the past five years. Arguably, this might indicate that the needs of women who want employment are being met but in the absence of comprehensive research, this is based on mainstream assumptions about how the market has adjusted to women's choices. The narrowing of employment opportunities, most recently as a result of the Howard government's industrial reform, indicates that for many women 'there is no choice' (idem). In her submission to The People Together Project, Meredith Doig outlines how dramatically patterns of work are changing, with the growth in part-time jobs 'at six times the rate of full-time jobs' (Doig, 1998). Women's participation, she suggests, is frequently based on the need for family income, so the increase in casualisation may contribute to reduced living standards. This point is confirmed by Lois Bryson, who cites evidence that 'full-time full-year employment is the only life pattern that is likely to keep people out of poverty', but increasingly workers, especially women, are being denied access to the form of employment which provides the most 'significant protection against poverty' (1996: 18).

The Victorian Employee Relations Act 1992 provides for similar base rates of pay for employees, whether they are full-time, part-time or casual. Mark Quirk of the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry [VECCI] argues that we have to move past the concept of 'ordinary hours' [of work] for the continuing financial benefit to business, in a transfer from 'old outmoded conditions' (Business and Tertiary Training Videos, 1992). This enabled the abolition of leave loadings and penalty rates, which had previously existed in many awards.

Awards will not be able to contain penalty rates unless for work on public holidays, so the idea is to enable a much more flexible system.
of payment of wages. This will affect particular employees, for example, shop assistants and, in some instances, nurses.


The removal of ordinary hours has resulted in a decrease in pay for many women who already receive an inferior pay rate in comparison to men, and it has supported the proliferation of many 24-hour service industries. Ellen Kleimaker (1999: 12-14) indicates a number of methods used by employers to implement time flexibility, and provides examples of how they are used to the employers’ advantage. They include:

a) Split shifts, where workers may have to attend their workplace for a few hours, two or even three times each day. This is a common work pattern for women cleaners and kitchen hands.

b) Extended shifts, which provide the same number of hours per week, but worked over fewer days. This has involved women, including those with domestic responsibilities, working 12-hour-plus shifts.

c) Working only a minimal numbers of hours each week, but spread over a five or seven day cycle, which involves more travelling time and costs (Personal discussion with an integration aide, 1998).

d) Trading predictable hours to be ‘on call’ and available at any time, on any day (Doig, 1998:2), a common work arrangement in convenience stores and supermarkets.

Before deregulation, these work patterns would have been unacceptable, or if they did exist, would have attracted substantial penalty rates. But perhaps more importantly, they contribute to a more pronounced gender divide in the workplace, with marginal workers, almost exclusively women, trading off their few existing conditions to gain the ‘flexibility’ necessary to accommodate domestic and childcare needs (Bennett, 1994: 203).

In some cases women were being driven out of the workforce because unpredictable shift changes made juggling their work and family responsibilities impossible.

The paradox with time flexibility is that what causes the problem is also part of the solution! For many women, and an increasing number of men, the key to managing the competing demands of work and personal lives is flexibility (Else, 1996:134), but not as it is currently being interpreted as an 'unfettered managerial prerogative' (Hammond & Harbridge, 1993:28). The corporate sector continues to present flexibility as a 'win-win' situation, in which the interests of both employees and employers are respected. However, as this discussion has shown, the notion that flexible hours are family friendly and structured around employees' individual circumstances is extremely problematic (Barlow, Junor & Patterson, 1993:43). Vivien Griffin (1984:392), very early in the debate, commented that the move towards part-time work, in all its forms, was 'a covert and relatively unsophisticated means of achieving higher productivity' without additional labour costs. And while the Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993 contained a modicum of protection for women in the flexibility saga, through regulations to be policed by the AIRC, the reality did not fulfil the promise (Charlesworth, 1997:108). With the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act 1996, the role of the AIRC has been even further diminished.

The AIRC currently has no power to set part-time hours, either in terms of the number of hours or in terms of when these hours are to be worked. As a result, many employees, including many women, will have little or no say in relation to these aspects of their employment. For new entrants it will be a 'take-it-or-leave-it' scenario.

Sara Charlesworth (1997:109)

In a review of this discussion of time flexibility, the link to numerical flexibility becomes evident. By deregulating hours of work and merging the distinction between part-time and casual labour, employers have been permitted to develop a range of work patterns to accommodate their needs, usually to the detriment of the employee. This is exemplified by the exploitative mode of employment, sessional teaching, introduced into the TAFE system. An account of the 'career' of a woman ('Life as a sessional teacher', The AEU News, 13/5/1999:4) employed in this educational sector, illustrates the increasing difficulty confronting many women marginalised as casual labour. Currently, 'Helen' works at three different institutions, for a 22 hour week, without paid preparation and correction
time. She has no employment security, as the positions are not deemed ‘ongoing’ and her income only applies to the 34-36 weeks during which TAFE lectures are conducted. As she comments,

It is terrible and humiliating. You are on welfare - you are wedded to the welfare system - you have to be otherwise what are you going to do at Christmas? It is demeaning . . . I think technically I am living below the poverty line.

‘Helen’ (The AEU News, idem)

A parallel situation has developed in a range of community service areas, where women account for eighty per cent of the workforce. The introduction of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) has resulted in the casualisation of work patterns, where full-time jobs have been replaced by part-time and casual work.

The impact of this legislative change will be considered in greater detail in the discussion of health services, in Chapter 6, but the system of ‘contracting out’ has some similarity to the system of ‘outworking’. Jennifer Curtin (1998:2) identifies outworking as a limited, but growing, source of exploited labour dominated by women. This mode of employment was afforded some protection - although rarely policed - by the AIRC in 1987, which ruled that outworkers qualified for award conditions. The reduction of award provisions under the Workplace Relations Act 1996 ‘ . . . suggests that the continued protection of outworkers is being undermined’ (ibid). Martina Nightingale suggests that in considering flexible work patterns, ‘women are obscured in the employer’s discourse’ (1992:14). Quoting from an International Labour Office report she notes that, “It has sometimes been argued that the main reason why part-time workers do not receive better treatment is that most of them are women . . .” (Nightingale, ibid). The radical approach of restructuring the workplace to really accommodate family life may challenge the dichotomy of family/work, but depends on state intervention which is presently not forthcoming.
4.8: **UNEMPLOYED, UNDEREMPLOYED OR JUST ‘GIVEN UP’?**

What is unemployment? A cursory glance of state policy and most research on unemployment would appear to indicate that it is not a pressing issue for women! The focus of unemployment research is almost exclusively male and, as Juanita Muller (1997:159) argues,

... policies and strategies to assist the unemployed are limited to those developed from research using predominantly male subjects and merely imposed upon female samples.

This effectively ignores the economic, psychological and health impacts of unemployment on women, and continues the theme of ‘invisibility’ of women in mainstream discussion. It also presumes that the circumstances and patterns of unemployment for women - and the solutions - are identical to those of men. Further, normative assumptions that employment relates only to the paid labour market are tacitly reinforced by perceptions that ‘welfare mothers ought to work’, which Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1994:99) argue therefore defines child-raising, caring and domestic duties as ‘non-work’. Again, the development of a presumptive dichotomy, in this case of employment/unemployment, is strategically based on male defined language and experience, and perpetuates ideological views that devalue women's unwaged domestic labour (Fraser & Gordon, 1994:103). The promotion of waged labour as the definition of employment, permits the identification of those receiving welfare support from the state as dependent, and in the perception of many, as somehow less deserving of income above the poverty level.

The implications for women in any discussion of unemployment is the fragility of their connection to the labour market. Even in the contemporary setting, the right for women to economic independence continues to be challenged. Writing in the Women’s Electoral Lobby Journal, Inkwel (1997:2), Mary Jenkins considers the current political campaign promoting ‘the family’ as,

... nothing but a covert policy to undermine the welfare state which was set up to keep women in the workplace to help the country out in boom time. Today women are made to feel unemployment is their fault so they should get out of the workplace.
As I have already shown in this thesis, there has been identifiable growth in paid employment opportunities for women, mainly concentrated in low paid, casual and part-time jobs. But in August 1997 "... women comprised forty-one per cent of all unemployed people in Australia, with the rate of those looking for full time work ... being higher than that for men" (Women's Electoral Lobby, 1998). A combination of factors therefore creates one of the complexities of examining women's unemployment: are women a) unemployed, b) underemployed or c) discouraged from seeking work? Available data makes it extremely problematic to extrapolate the figures for each of these groups, but Figure 4.5 (Women and Work, 1994) gives some indication of the 'hidden' problem of unemployment for women in comparison to men.

**Figure 4.5 : Persons looking for full time work, 1989 - 1994**


In an article titled 'Women give up hunt for work' (Herald Sun, 10/3/1998) ABS statistics were quoted which indicate that in the preceding twelve months there were almost 120,000 discouraged job seekers, two-thirds of whom were women and one-third men. This was reflected by the slight 'drop' in the 1997 Australian rate, not as a result of employment growth but because 41,000 people [mainly women] 'vanished from the job market' ('Jobs growth slow', Herald Sun, 11/4/1997.12).
Women in New Zealand have indicated their opposition to economic restructuring through the pursuit of free market policy. The adverse impact of the Employment Contracts Act, which has its parallel in the Victorian state legislation, has resulted in declining rates of participation by younger women and women with dependent children (Noonan, 1994: 148). In common with the Australian data, a lower rate of unemployment for women conceals the reality of their increased marginalisation in the labour market. As Rosslyn Noonan comments, “Women’s official unemployment rate is lower than men’s because many women have simply been written out of the formal economy” (ibid). I would suggest that the key indicators for women’s labour market participation, including the gender pay gap and the proliferation of flexible arrangements, presents a similarly ominous future for Australian women.

The state plays a significant role in the paid workforce prospects for women. It’s complicity, through legislative deregulation, in the deteriorating job market for women has been compounded by government constraints on service provision. Not only are women more reliant on the availability of public services, they are “... the most dependent on the state sector for income and employment in "women's work" of teaching, nursing, clerical and social services” (Kelsey, 1995: 286). The pro-business stance of the Kennett government is well documented and it was in the ‘over-staffed and inefficient’ public sector that the Premier indicated his intention to establish a ‘pro-business beachhead’. Pre-election he had been ‘marshalling his troops for a blitzkrieg on the state’s public service’ (Arbouw, 1992:41). The masculine language, which creates an adversarial position between the state and public sector, is telling because the state’s cutbacks to public sector employment have the confrontational and aggressive focus reminiscent of a military encounter.

However, the Kennett government was not solely responsible for initiating the desolation of the public sector workforce. In the period from 1990 to 1996, firstly the Kirner Labor government and then subsequently the Kennett Liberal government were responsible for ‘the largest public sector job cuts in the history of Australia’, reducing the government workforce by more than 300,000
down to 191,000 (‘State fails to kick start jobs, Herald Sun, 17/12/1996:7). In its first year, the Kennett government retrenched 20,000 public servants, and this reduction in workers on the public payroll has continued (Teicher & van Gramberg, 1998:62). In a mixed capital economy, public sector employment is substantial, and government restraint that results in job losses tends to be counter-productive.

Public sector cutbacks do not build consumer confidence. They may appease the government’s business supporters, but they make average citizens and workers very uneasy - particularly if they involve the layoff of public employees.

Harold Chomney, John Hotson & Mario Seccareccia (undated)

Privatisation of public utilities and services and contracting out do not compensate for the loss of public sector jobs, and a growth in the state’s economy does not necessarily create an enhanced labour market. For example, in Victoria the state’s economy grew 12.5% from 1990 to 1996, but this coincided with a decline in real jobs growth (‘State fails to kick-start jobs’, Herald Sun, 17/12/96:7).

The major losers in the Victorian reforms have been public sector employees. The rapidity and extent of downsizing has contributed to the level of long-term unemployed in Victoria as employees sought work in the same depressed job market.


Evaluating the adverse effect of public sector attrition on the employment opportunities for women, and acknowledging this effect in state policy development and budgetary decisions, did not appear to be a priority of the Kennett government. After seven consecutive budgets which focused on public sector reduction and budgetary restraint, the 1999 Victorian budget was hailed by the media as ‘Pay Day’, when ‘jobs cash ends austerity years’, with a predicted labour market boom in response to government spending (‘Pay day: jobs cash ends austerity years’, Herald Sun, 4/5/1999:1). Without maligning the intent to expand the labour market, the direction of budgetary estimates is problematic for women. A few initiatives may provide employment opportunities for women, but generally the emphasis on capital works programs, i.e. bricks and mortar and in this case bitumen, demonstrates a bias towards developing the labour market for the advantage of male workers. ‘Extra cash’ for hospitals, schools, mental health and
transport, while a positive move, is targeted towards building programs rather than
an extension of the public service workforce - new schools, but not new teachers,
new hospital facilities, but no increase in health care personnel, new library facilities,
but no extra librarians.

The federal budget in 1999 confidently predicted a surplus of $5.4
billion, but conceded that there is a ‘negligible jobs growth forecast in 1999-2000’
(‘Special budget supplement’, Herald Sun, 12/5/1999:1), with the estimated
employment rate to remain at the current level. $111 million has been earmarked to
extend Work for the Dole, with participant places, to double by 2001, and although
this may have been ‘a winner’ electorally, its impact on unemployment is likely to be
only marginal. It is difficult to locate much evaluative assessment of this entire
training program, and in the absence of any specific supporting evidence, increasing
expenditure on unproven programs is difficult to justify. Observation suggests that
to this stage programs have been under-subscribed, in some locations have focused
on stereotypically masculine pursuits, and have been fraught with administrative
glitches. On a more positive note, in 1999 funding of $24.2 million was allocated
for a return-to-work program for women, ‘to improve and renew the skills of
women absent from work caring for children or relatives’ (Herald Sun, 12/5/99,
‘Special budget supplement’:8). Further discussion of vocational training programs
will be included in the chapter detailing education issues. However:

Many women continue to face economic, educational or family
barriers to successfully attaining employment. Therefore the
Government’s policies should centre on a commitment to increasing
women’s freedom of choice in the context of the paid workforce.
Women’s Electoral Lobby (1998)

4.9: WORKING TOWARDS INSECURITY: THE SUPERANNUATION
DEBATE

All over the world, even in countries with generous universal pension
systems, elderly single women are most at risk of poverty in old age,
and have far more constrained lifestyles in old age than men.
Diana Olsberg (1997:7)
The limited discussion and consideration given to issues of women's workforce participation is never more evident than in the debate concerning access to superannuation benefits, despite its potential impact on the financial security of women at post-employment age. In this section, I will highlight some of the historical factors which have precluded women's membership of superannuation schemes, and provide a brief overview of the direction of change. Government legislation in the past two decades, in the industrial relations arena of occupational superannuation, intersects with the changes in welfare provisions for older Australians, and indicates the very real problems confronting all women in their pursuit of economic independence.

In Chapter 3 on women and welfare I discuss the perceived 'crisis' in welfare, and provide analysis which challenges the continued dismantling of public sector provision in the name of economic rationalism. Moreover, doubt concerning the sustainability of the welfare state has precipitated community concern for the impact of the 'greying' population in Australia in the 1990s. Diana Olsberg (1994:45) disputes this view, but describes how some economists predict that an increasing number of elderly Australians will render publicly funded pensions unaffordable, and will be an intolerable tax imposition on future generations. Consequently, they emphasise that it is imperative for the state to intervene now to circumvent impending disaster. This dire warning, according to Deborah Mitchell (1997:55), is prefaced on the experiences of OECD countries with vastly different welfare systems and compounded by 'questionable aspects' of a National Audit Commission Report in 1996, which provided a 'selective assembly of worst case scenarios' to engender a debate based on 'fear rather than fact'. However, the impetus for this debate had its beginnings in government legislation a decade earlier.

In December 1985, as part of the Accord II, the federal Labor government provided the framework for extending existing occupational superannuation through a productivity based scheme. As Eva Cox and Catherine Myson point out (1995/6:4):

Superannuation is essentially a form of saving aimed at providing some type of financial support for the post retirement years... Until fairly
recently Australia had relatively few people covered by employment
based superannuation schemes… These people were mainly public
servants and senior managers, so it was a privilege of the relatively
few.

The majority of Australians relied on the state funded aged pension for financial
security: women at age 60 and men on reaching 65. However, the introduction of
an award based superannuation policy initiative signalled the government’s intent to
move away from the redistributive welfare system for aged provision (Cox &
for the Superannuation Guarantee Charge, which introduced a mandatory employer
funded scheme (Olsberg, 1997:90), with the clearly stated objective of reducing
The development of these two parallel systems - occupational superannuation and
state welfare pension - have continued to change as a result of government
intervention and, as David Knox argues (1994:4), with apparent detriment to
women.

These changes have included a provision in the Labor government
budget of 1995 for the deduction of a compulsory employee contribution of 3% of
income by the year 2002, to combine with the employer contribution which was to
increase to 9% by the same year. Despite some minor changes, the federal Liberal
budget in 1996 maintained the core elements of the occupational superannuation
provisions (Olsberg, 1997:90-94), ensuring the further progression of national
retirement income policy towards privatisation (ibid:96).

Future retirement income was substantially devolved as a state function, as
the Labor government adopted policies requiring all employees to save and
provide for their future retirement income needs...

Diana Olsberg (1997:97)

The introduction of this legislation, and its impact on women’s security will be
detailed later in this chapter, but it is important to recognise that as state
responsibility was devolving, changes to the pension age for women were mooted.
In their Fightback! proposals before the 1993 election, the Coalition leaders had
indicated that the change in community attitudes combined with the rapid increase in
women’s workforce participation rates indicated that a differential retirement age
for women was no longer justifiable (Hewson & Fischer, 1991:286). The Labor
Party, in its pre-election campaign, 'strenuously rejected' this policy direction, but with their electoral success 'abandoned principle' and declared a 'policy backflip' (Impact, 1993:16). This provided for the incremental increase in the pension age for women, as indicated by Table 4.2 (Impact, 1994:9), which indicates that eventually female and male pension eligibility will be recognised at age 65. A spokesperson for the Australian Pensioner's and Superannuants' Federation, John Barber, claims that it is unacceptable to 'condemn women to languish' on unemployment benefits until 65, in a labour market and a superannuation system characterised by unequal entitlements (Impact, 1993:16).

Table 4.2: Pension Age for Women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at 1 July 1995</th>
<th>Qualifying age for Age Pension</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From 58.5 to less than 60</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 57 to less than 58.5</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 55.5 to less than 57</td>
<td>61.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 54 to less than 55.5</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 52.5 to less than 54</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 51 to less than 52.5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 49.5 to less than 51</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 48 to less than 49.5</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 46.5 to less than 48</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 46.5</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Impact, 1994:9

What needs to be emphasised is that the development of state policy regarding retirement income is in fact no different to the general provisions for industrial relations and labour market policy, which is formulated around the male model of participation and then generalised to include women. This point is explained by management consultant, Nancy Dailey, who has worked extensively on issues of women, work and retirement in the USA. She comments that.
The history of work and retirement is really the story of men’s work and retirement. Women’s retirement had been virtually ignored until the 1980s.


In Australia, this ‘history’ is also evident. The current retirement structure, with its emphasis on the work experience of men, makes numerous assumptions about women’s retirement income which are definitely problematic. Discussions by decision-makers negotiating superannuation policy virtually ignored the representation of women, and made assumptions about women’s access, as dependents, to the retirement income of men (Sharp & Broomhill, 1988:130). And yet, as Rhonda Sharp and Ray Broomhill conjecture, the absence of specific strategies acknowledging and catering for the circumstances of women would provide ‘an important structure for extending existing economic inequalities into retirement’ (ibid, 132).

A number of writers have outlined the factors which mitigated against women benefiting similarly to men from state legislation for occupational superannuation (e.g. Cox, 1995; Dailey, 1998; Olsberg, 1994). Almost without exception, these writers focus on women’s paid workforce participation patterns, which vary markedly to those of men, and reflect the systemic disadvantage intrinsic to women’s employment opportunities. Jenny Onyx, in her study of women’s retirement planning, outlined the structural issues which make the situation ‘a gloomy one for women’ (‘Retirement study finds women in a time warp’, Weekend Australian, 16-17/11/96:70).

Even those women in full-time employment are severely disadvantaged in terms of their preparation for retirement. They are employed for fewer years, in discontinuous employment at lower salary levels, with ongoing care responsibilities and few opportunities to save.

Jenny Onyx (idem)

What this so readily demonstrates is the inherent danger in creating policy for one group in the community and extending it to embrace disparate groups without adequate analysis or discussion of its potential impact. Research indicates that women do not have the same opportunity to develop self-funded retirement provision, and the suitability of superannuation policy based on a ‘male breadwinner model’ is extremely problematic (Wieneke, 1993:49). Unfortunately attempts by
the federal government to compel women to ‘invest’ in retirement funds, through industrial legislation like the Superannuation Guarantee, ignores the negative effects of these decisions for lower paid, intermittent workers - the majority of whom are women (Cox, 1995:7). Further, as Eva Cox argues, the very existence of a supposedly universal, and compulsory, tax supported superannuation system “... makes the medium term demolition of the pension system politically possible” (ibid:6).

At a time when the state openly encourages individualism, it seems unlikely that those advantaged by the system, through the substantial tax concessions for higher income earners, will be supportive of workers who ‘failed’ to adequately provide for their retirement. Forseeably, ‘aged pensioner’ could develop the same negative connotations attributed to other welfare recipients, like the unemployed, single parents and the disabled. Nancy Dailey may have been commenting on the American system when she observed that “… retirement as a social institution is relatively new, [although] the notion of an earned retirement has become firmly entrenched ...” (1998:8), but the content of federal government policy suggests that this is the direction in which the Australian system is headed. In her maiden speech to the New Zealand parliament Liz Gordon (1997) expressed a similar concern about the decline of universal social security. She was harshly critical of the discriminatory nature of a proposed compulsory superannuation scheme similar to that developing in Australia. She considered that such a savings scheme ... will again penalise women, especially those with children. Our lifetime savings are smaller, and we will save less, and will be less able to afford to save. When we retire, we will still get less, because who here believes that women’s contributions to society will be recognised by a top-up in our pensions to the level that men get? It will not happen. We are poorer than men all our lives, and we will live longer, but with a poorer retirement income, than our male peers.

Liz Gordon (1997)

This discussion has focused on the precarious financial prospects for women who do participate in the paid labor force. Importantly we need to recognise
that if these women are at risk, those who do not participate in paid work at all are in severe jeopardy, especially if the national retirement income system continues its government-inspired drift towards the privatised market sector. Women in unpaid work are unable to contribute to their ‘retirement’ benefits, although in 1997, the Howard Liberal government legislated to permit a spouse with adequate income - usually the male - to deposit funds in Retirement Savings Accounts (RSAs) for non-earning/low-income partners through a bank or other financial institution (WAA Newsletter, December 1997.1). Superficially, this may indicate a change in policy direction to protect the interests of women, but closer analysis identifies and highlights a number of real concerns about the inequities of this change. The evidence indicates that women most in need of personal provision for later years are probably the least likely to have the financial resources to maintain RSAs. And by their nature as capital guaranteed investment, RSAs are financially less attractive than many other forms of personal investment (idem) although they do attract tax concessions for the contributor.

Combined with the existing organisation of taxation on superannuation savings and the tax breaks provided for high income earners who ‘purchase’ more benefits, the current superannuation system is a telling example of the redistributive action of the state - welfare - which privileges the most affluent workers at the expense of low-income, marginalised workers. Eva Cox and Catherine Myson (1995:7) perceive existing tax concessions as a ‘particularly noxious part’ of the present scheme, with estimates that “…most high earners will gain more by subsidised tax concessions than the cost of offering them universal aged pensions”. With conservative governments so concerned with the welfare budget ‘blowout’, the continued affirmative discrimination for high income earners, through a regressive tax system appears without justification. While the succession of changes to the Australian retirement savings system has been rapid in the past decade, there is only minimal investigation and assessment of the impact of a privatised system for different groups within the community. Superannuation reform has ignored and even exacerbated the existing problems which provide benefits disproportionately to high-income earners, and, as Diana Olsberg explains
"... those who continue to face the most grim prospects of penury in old age are women."

In considering the dual aspects of post-employment issues for women - retirement age and occupational superannuation - it is readily evident that the concerns and needs of women have been excluded from consideration in the development of state legislative policy. With the diversity of research and advisory resources available to modern governments, it would seem simplistic to believe that decision-makers were unaware that what was suitable and sustainable for male workers (particularly affluent male workers) was not necessarily in the interests of an ever-increasing female labour force. The reality is that the 'average' woman will live far beyond even the 'new' retirement/pension age, usually alone. For while women comprise fifty per cent of the population aged over sixty years, this percentage has increased to seventy-five for the population aged seventy-five plus (Wieneke, 1993:1). Unfortunately, calculation of the social and economic costs of ageing in Australia fails to account for this imbalance in the demographics of older Australians (ibid:9) and issues of superannuation are frequently considered 'irrelevant' to women's economic interest (Sharp & Broomhill, 1988:130).

The lack of representation of women in decision-making positions is considered by Diana Olsberg as a contributing factor in the invisibility of women in the retirement/superannuation debate.

And there are very, very few women in top jobs... all the places where decisions are made about what happens in the system... In my research I found people in senior positions (mostly men) were aware of the difficulties for women in the new system... Time and again people explain to me that superannuation has not been constructed to meet social needs, these remain the preserve of government.

Diana Olsberg (1997:158)

As governments are increasingly abrogating this responsibility to the private sector, the position of women assumes some urgency, but recent history is not reassuring. In 1989 the Women's Electoral Lobby organised a conference on this theme, but it did not proceed despite initial support from the Office of the Status of Women. Public protests by activist and welfare organisations were unsuccessful in gaining political support (ibid.116). And despite the introduction of unions into the
superannuation ‘market’, the position of women remains bleak. The current model for retirement income is undeniably ‘not a super deal for women’ (Cox & Myson, 1995:4) and the continued revision and reform of minor issues is unlikely to improve the circumstances substantially for the majority of women.

4.10: THE ROLE OF UNIONS

Reflecting on the outcomes for women who participate in the paid labour force involves an understanding of the role of trade unions, especially their interaction with state restructuring in the industrial relations sphere. During the past two decades, it is possible to define phases of union activism which reflect the relationship between the ruling political party and unions. Federally, this is demonstrated by the period of the Accord (1983-1996), where the tripartite cooperation of unions, business and a Labor government set the industrial relations agenda, in comparison to the post 1996 workplace where decision-making between the Liberal government and the business sector excluded unions. [In Victoria this latter phase commenced earlier, in 1992, with the election of the Kennett Liberal government]. Reviewing the legislative changes to industrial agreements during the past two decades appears to confirm Jo-anne Schofield’s contention that

... until women achieve equal status with men within unions, parliament and industrial tribunals, then historic and discriminatory norms will continue to work against them.

Jo-anne Schofield (1988:73)

The problem for women in the workforce, therefore, is that trade unions represent merely another example of the institutionalised invisibility of women, and the gender neutral ‘unionist’ (Henry & Franzway, 1993:146). As Stuart Rosewarne explains (1988:61-63), the amelioration of women’s disadvantaged labour market position was given significant credence by the federal Labor government, when it was elected to office in 1983, but this was interpreted in policy which caused a deterioration of the economic position of women in comparison to their male counterparts. While some consideration has been given by unions to employment policies which reinforce women’s gender-based dual role as unpaid
carers and paid workers in the market place, generally women's needs have been subordinated to policies which pursue the interests of men (Owens, 1995:46). The state's continued promotion of a traditional family model is hardly challenged by many normative assumptions implicit in union policy.

Historically, women have rarely enjoyed any support from male unions, male co-workers or government, rather the reverse, and often from those who pride themselves as 'family men'...

Michael Bittman & Jocelyn Pixley (1997:208)

However, as I have argued in earlier sections of this chapter, it is undeniable that the employment conditions for women have advanced more markedly in workplaces where collective action through union organisation is evident (Affirmative Action Agency, 1994:6; Zajdow, 1995:51). A 'meaningful union presence' is vital for the protection and promotion of women's position in the market place in the face of conservative reform at both the state and federal level (Pocock, 1997:9). It is unions that have been instrumental in 'blunting' the effects of the 'raw working of the market' (Thomson & Pocock, 1997:68), despite their masculinist ethos. Economic restructuring by successive Labor and Liberal governments has destabilised the workplace gains achieved by women, but none more so than the repressive measures by the Kennett government at the state level and the Howard government federally. In his discussion of the Workplace Relations Act 1996, Richard Naughton (1996:131) concedes that the Howard government has been less stringent in dismantling the union structures than the New Zealand government reform, but contends that nonetheless the intention of this legislation is clearly to diminish the power, role and status of the trade union movement. Peter Reith, Minister for Industrial Relations in the first Howard government ministry, was responsible for the introduction of this Bill. Addressing the House of Representative (1996), he asserts that the 'government is not anti-union, and our legislation is not an attack on unions'. This assertion is seriously challenged by many aspects of the legislation, which threatens punitive legal remedies for 'illegal' industrial action, and promotes a focus on employer/employee negotiating 'without unnecessary complexity or unwanted third party intervention'.
The proportion of employees with trade union membership has decreased in the past decade, but the decline has been significantly less for women (Australian Women's Year Book, 1997:86), and while the male culture of unions persists, “...they are much less male-dominated than many other organisations and have a much more positive impact on women’s working lives than many other institutions” (Pocock, 1997:21). Potentially, trade unions may provide the most substantial protection for women as the centralised system of industrial relations is rapidly dismantled by on-going state restructuring. However, unions need to accommodate the priorities of women and create more women-friendly structures to ensure that they provide a collective and powerful voice which does not marginalise women.

It is a bitter irony not lost on women trade unionists that just when it appeared that women were making some headway towards economic independence and greater equity in employment, the restructuring of the labour market threatens to lock women into cheap, peripheral sectors of the workforce, dispersed in small workplaces and without any form of union representation.

Martina Nightingale (1995:137)

The negative effect of lack of union representation is exemplified by the disastrous conditions for one of the most exploited groups of workers in Australia - 'outworkers' - in which 95% are migrants and 90% are women. In 1999, there were 144,000 outworkers in Victoria, whose average income was $2.00 per hour worked (Kleimaker, 1999:32). Legislation which is designed to 'decollectivise' worker groups, exposes many women to a similar vulnerability, at precisely the same time that the dismantling of worker rights, for example through the compensation system, is rapidly proceeding. The Kennett government in particular has embarked on a dramatic reduction in the provisions of 'WorkCare' in Victoria, almost continuously since first being elected. While the impact has been profound and punitive for many workers, a disproportionate effect has resulted from changes to particular injury types (e.g. stress and occupational overuse syndrome) which occur most frequently in female-intensive industries. If Workcover is a real concern for any workers, the impact is probably intensified for women, who present with particular problems, and because their role as 'real' workers is undervalued.
4.11: SUMMARY

The scope of this chapter includes aspects of labour market structure and decision making which reinforces women’s economic dependence. By superimposing state and federal legislative measures on the existing gendered labour market it is possible to identify how the contemporary workplace compounds gender inequity, under the guise of enhancing women’s options. Issues of flexibility, enterprise bargaining, the gender pay gap, unemployment and superannuation all suggest a state that implicitly ignores women’s increasing role in the paid workforce and is eminently prepared to create policy based on solely on mainstream, male work practices. The right of women to just consideration in the workplace is overlooked, trivialised or dismissed as impossible in these ‘straitened’ times! Once again, despite the rhetoric, the most vulnerable sector of the market - in this case the employment market - is exposed to the dire consequences of conservative policy making. The inadequacy of ‘adding’ women to structures designed by and for men is readily apparent, and yet women’s dissenting voices are diminished by assertions that modern state policy is empathetic to their different lived reality. The evidence does not support this contention.

During the discussion on women’s employment opportunities, the circumstances of female participation and perceived success in the education system is used to prove that the equitable labour market has arrived. In the next chapter, I will analyse state education policy in it’s gendered context, to illustrate how the perception does not align with the practice: girls may seem advantaged in the education system, but this does not translate into major gains in the employment sector. In fact, the comparative success of girls in education appears to have simplified the government’s constraint on programs targeted to redress inequity. Simply, why do we need programs and policies tailored to the needs of women and girls, when their achievements are apparently already surpassing those of men and boys in education?
CHAPTER 5: WOMEN AND EDUCATION

When women have no place in educational thought, policy suffers, the society’s devaluation of women’s lives, works and experiences is reinforced, and also the field of educational thought itself is diminished.

Jane Martin (1984:344)

... analyses of 'gender' have been remarkably muted in recent scholarship on, and debates about, marketisation. At first glance, it might appear that the changes referenced by this term are neutral with respect to gender, and that market ideologies and discourses eschew references to women and girls. Closer investigation suggests, however, that assumptions about gender difference support notions of 'economic man' and 'rational choosers' that populate education reform discourse ...

Kari Dehli (1996:364)

5.1: INTRODUCTION

Historically, the redistributive policy of the state has been a positive feature of the Australian education system. In the past twenty years, what began as 'shifts in emphasis' in the development of educational organisation and practice has culminated in the rapid and radical reform of education in the past decade. In Victoria, economic imperatives have driven the devolution bandwagon, seemingly unfettered by official analyses of how this change impacts on those using the educational structures provided. Kari Dehli (idem) indicates that the implementation of marketisation principles focuses on economic factors in education provision while marginalising the social and cultural implications of change. This chapter is designed to contribute to the discussion which problematises the direction of educational policy generally, and is concerned about its inequitable application, particularly as it pertains to girls and women.

I will begin the discussion by presenting an overview of the state system in Victoria as it was in the early 1980s in order to provide a framework against which recent reform may then be compared. This will be necessarily brief, but should convey an understanding of the importance of the education sector for the
welfare and advancement of women and girls, and highlight how the evolution of
gender issues is currently being undermined by 'rationalist' discourse. Aspects of the
institutional structure of the education system, and the perceived responsibility of
federal and state government in educational provision and decisions, are pertinent to
the public/private tension evident in the debate.

As I mentioned earlier, much of state restructuring is being prefaced
by the rhetoric of improved efficiency in a period of economic austerity, a position
which, as I have shown previously [see Chapter 3] has been variously challenged.
The reality is that fiscal adjustments have indeed undermined the redistributive
process implicit in the welfare state in general and, more specifically, public
education. Through a consideration of state and federal budget allocations, this
chapter will consider their broad-ranging influence, and then detail the consequences
for education at the pre-school, P-12, and post-school levels. An analysis of the
situation in Victoria requires an awareness of how the two major sources of
government funding - federal and state - are allocated within the binary system of
public/private provision, and the differential manner in which a reduction in
education budgets is experienced.

Significant constraints on financial resources for the public education
system have been accompanied by a steady but relentless movement towards
systemic reform characterised by marketisation and devolution. A general analysis
of these trends in restructuring in Victoria suggests that they were initiated by the
Labor government of the 1980s in pursuit of a localised and participatory decision-
making model, which focused on social reform. The election of the Liberal
government in late 1992 signalled the rapid implementation of a conservative agenda
masquerading as 'progressive' reform, which presented an "... ideological agenda
to transform Victoria's education system into a market-based model of education"
(Crooks, 1996:4). Through a critical consideration of education policy and the
legislative and budgetary decisions of the past decade, this chapter will theorise how
such a transformation challenges the rights and interests of women and girls.
This challenge is especially evident in the direction of gender policy reform in education. Commencing in the late 1970s, the Victorian Education Department demonstrated an ongoing commitment to providing programs and resources to enhance the participation of women and girls. The strategy of advancing feminist aims through state intervention is not without its critics, but in the area of education a range of positive outcomes from gender equity strategies was evident. The Liberal electoral success in 1992 precipitated a downgrading and dismantling of most - if not all - programs and resources directly aimed at women and girls in the school sector. The results are not conclusive, but preliminary indicators suggest that the purported 'gender-neutrality' of current systemic change cannot be sustained. The destabilising of public education in all sectors, and the implementation of a competition-based market model indicates that pursuing the interests of disparate groups of women and girls will challenge the resolve and ingenuity of educators committed to social justice.

This chapter will highlight a number of themes which permeate any discussion of women's position within the restructuring state. As this thesis consistently demonstrates, the language of conservative 'rationalist' reform is impressively seductive and frequently exploits terms from the feminist and social justice discourse to advance market liberalism (Blackmore, 1997:3). This is highlighted in the nostalgic persuasion to recreate 'traditional family' structures, and to provide more parental 'choice' and 'participation' in education decision-making, and tacitly compounded by concepts of individualism supported by the unrestrained market. This case study of education provides an excellent example of how state withdrawal from welfare provision, represented as gender-neutral, is complicit in re-enforcing social relations along gender lines.

5.2: THE EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS OF WOMEN

While on the one hand women have achieved some success in gaining entry to education, it is entry to men's education and it serves to reinforce male supremacy and control in our society.

Dale Spender (1992:27)
Notwithstanding this critical observation by Dale Spender, women have made tremendous advances in their participation and involvement in education. The aim of this section is to explain the relevance of women's relationship to the education system, through:

i) their contribution as educators

ii) their needs as students

iii) their role as primary caregivers of children

and the pertinence of state educational reform to the welfare of women. My intention is not to suggest a false homogeneity of women, but to argue that the impact of change is experienced differently by women as a social group, in comparison to men as a social group, and that gender is implicit in the organisational practices at all levels of the educational hierarchy. While the following outlines are presented as discrete groupings, they are not mutually exclusive. It is important to acknowledge that women may be simultaneously fulfilling a number of roles, and participating in education in some way, at very different levels. Consequently, the complexity of this relationship to the range of educational provision permeates any discussion.

i) Women as educators - or education 'providers'

The involvement of the state in the provision of compulsory schooling is a feature of the modern welfare state. It was initiated in some of the earliest social policies by democratic governments (Porter, 1988:249), and resulted in the gradual evolution of universal education in Victoria in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of a continual and expanding demand for teachers, women's participation as education providers escalated, especially in the primary sector. Women were stereotypically seen as 'natural' teachers, whose participation in the formal education of young children was represented as merely an extension of their 'maternal' abilities (Shakeshaft, 1987:26). "Classroom teaching was compatible with the community's designated role for women, that of nurturing, homemaking and child rearing" (Ellis, 1983:12). Additionally, it was easier, and more economical, to increase the number of young women teachers, in preference to young men, as
middle-class women sought a viable alternative to financial survival based solely on marriage (Widdowsen, 1980:8).

However, what was effectively replicated, in primary schools in particular, but evident at all levels, was a prevailing patriarchal system of male authority: women fulfilled the role of classroom teachers, supporting male administrators (Ellis, 1980:12,215). To this extent, the model in teaching was consistent with the division of labour evident in other sectors of the paid workforce, with a predominant disparity in distribution of employment opportunity, advancement and financial reward, based on gender (Ackor, 1987:91; Apple, 1983:612). Sari Knopp Bicklen (1980:3) observed that this historical model of teaching, based on ‘the ideology and pocket books’ of teacher employers, proved especially resilient and persisted into the system of the 1980s. The presumption of a male principal leading a predominantly female staff reflects a long-established cultural norm, institutionalised by the state, of paternal authority and the identification of administration as a masculine enterprise (Blackmore, 1993:27,31). Similar patterns of employment also typify the tertiary sector.

While a consideration of inequity in employment in the education sector will form the basis of a later section of this chapter, this brief historical glimpse establishes the importance of the state as an employer of women. In a submission to a Senate Inquiry into the status of teachers (1998:3), the Federal Australian Education Union [AEU] indicated that the majority of those employed within the education industry are women - that indeed education is a ‘feminised’ industry - in which “. . . women are disproportionately concentrated in positions which are precarious in nature . . .”. Women are statistically more dependent on the state sector for employment, most notably in education and health services, and their workforce participation is consequently undermined by continuing structural adjustments. For example, Michaela Kronemann (1997:9) estimated a reduction of 8000 teaching positions and more than 4000 non-teaching positions in the P-12 school sector from 1992 to 1997, although in the absence of published data from the Education Department, the precise number and the gender breakdown is unavailable.
However, the ongoing reduction in employment opportunities for women in the public education sector, both now and in the future, is a serious concern.

ii) Women as students

Issues of reform are also important to women as students, or 'consumers', of state educational provision. The system that had evolved by the early 1980s may not have provided equitable access to women and girls, but the prevailing policy direction was a source of optimism. Leonie Rowan concedes women's continuing marginality in educational environments and the subsequent devaluing of the female experience. However, she argues for the possibility of taking women 'into spaces where they have previously been denied access' and dismantling what passes as 'natural' and 'normal' in the educative process (Rowan, 1997:139). In Victoria there was evidence of such a systemic response to the specific needs of girls and women in education which encouraged improved educational outcomes (e.g. Kenway & Willis, 1997, Kronemann, 1998), particularly in the P-12 sector. What needs to be addressed is whether state restructuring affects the promotion and resourcing of gender equity programs and, if so, the implications of such policy change for the continuing advancement of women and girls. Feminist discourse, translated into legislative action, has raised expectations that educational opportunities will provide for all students to achieve their potential. Further analysis, later in this chapter, will explore the reality of these assumptions.

iii) Women as primary caregivers

One area of educational involvement which appears to be neglected in mainstream analysis is the appropriation of women's unpaid labour to compensate for deficiencies in the public education sector. Julia Wrigley (1992:11) indicates how parental intervention in children's education is gender specific. She comments that:

> ... in the educational system, there is a vast world of private support and caregiving that bolsters the public world of the school, and this is largely provided by women.

This blurring of the distinction between the private and public sectors in this context appears to be intensified by the withdrawal of state resources. Acceptance that parents - overwhelmingly mothers - will provide the labour necessary for fund-
raising, maintenance, classroom assistance, canteen facilities, and a raft of other responsibilities has implications for their continuing participation in the paid workforce\(^1\). Further, it reinforces conservative ideology of gender relations based on the nuclear family and re-establishes stereotypical assumptions about women’s roles and responsibilities. Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster (1986.60) refer to the ‘familialisation’ of state policy, which promotes the location of women in the private sector as carers and intermediaries between the state and the family, to alleviate the ‘fiscal’ problems of the welfare state, in this instance in the area of education.

5.3: FUNDING PUBLIC EDUCATION: ARE SCHOOLS AWASH WITH MONEY?

In August 1998, Phil Gude, the then Victorian Minister for Education released a media statement in defense of the Liberal government’s spending on education since its election in 1992. He maintained that ‘schools were awash with money’ and should stop ‘hoarding’ funds, but this was labeled as insulting and simplistic by the president of the Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals (Brierley, 1998), and as deliberately misrepresenting the reality of state funding pressures. The allocation of funding for state education is premised on the objective of providing education that is free, secular and compulsory, and is evidenced, for example, by the Education Act 1958 [Section 22 (2)] which provides for all Victorian pupils in state schools to receive ‘free instruction’. Although education does not involve the transfer of cash or similar benefits, nonetheless it is a primary provision responsibility of the welfare state (e.g. Jamrozik, 1988:181 - see also Chapter 2). Jill Blackmore explains (1999:178) that in Australia there has been a ‘strong tradition’ of state intervention and provision resulting in ‘highly centralised state education bureaucracies’, with Victoria’s state system a prime example. The underlying inference in appeals for deregulation and marketisation, and statements

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\(^1\) As funding and staff cuts began to impact markedly on schools programs in the early years of the Kennett government in the early 1990s, the voluntary labour of parents and other community members was frequently counted as part of the staffing ratio, e.g. for camping and excursions. Previously, parental assistance was in addition to the qualified staff and not included in staffing ratios.
like those from the Minister quoted above, is that the concept of adequate state education funding as part of broader social welfare policy is unsustainable.

The task of tracing Victorian funding allocations is complicated by the evolution of an ad hoc system of complementary state and federal responsibilities. Jane Edwards, in her discussion of education and the legalities of the Constitution (1997) explains that earlier this century, federal interest in educational responsibility was 'sporadic'. During the post World War II period, federal funding was generally limited to tertiary and technical education, and it was not until 1964 that funds were specifically directed towards secondary education in federal budgets (Edwards, 1997:283). While the role of federal government in the education arena has certainly expanded, the tandem system for funding - state/federal - has created a framework where federal funds may be directed to the private sector, ostensibly to compensate for lack of funding at the state level. Further, inadequate funding by the Victorian government may be 'blamed' on the deficit in their 'share' of federal funds. In the 1996 pre-election education policy document (Liberal Party, 1996), the Liberal/ National Coalition expressed concern that:

... over the past ten years, there has been a decline nationally in public expenditure on school education. The Coalition will address this issue as a matter of priority ... A Coalition Government will also provide certainty for government and non-government schools ... Access to appropriate educational opportunities for all Australian students is a key plank of the Coalition's Schools Policy.

The Howard Liberal Government is now into its second term of office, and while its support for the private education sector is apparent in budgetary allocations, its promise of providing opportunities for 'all' students remains questionable ('Education slides towards an impoverished future', The Age, 1998 A15). The initial Howard budget immediately reduced funding to the states for specific programs, including the Disadvantaged Schools Program, the Country Areas Program and early literacy intervention programs, and abolished the Students at Risk (STAR) Program entirely (Kronemann, 1997:5).
While the federal rhetoric of a need to address declining education funding was significant in most Australian states, it was certainly very pertinent for Victoria. By the time of the above quoted policy in 1996, the Kennett-led Liberal government in Victoria had already subjected the state school system to four years of structural reform and financial reduction, and despite some minor adjustments, the downward trend has been maintained. David McRae, in a report prepared for the Victorian Branch of the AEU (1999:3), is critical of what he perceives as 'the largest reduction in resources ever to occur in the history of Australian systemic education', accompanied by a simultaneous increase funding for private schooling. A discussion of specific details of funding constraints will be deferred until later sections of this chapter. However, the material prepared by Linda Hancock and Sally Cowling (1999: 19) for the Women's Audit Project provides a starkly graphical representation of the de-funding of state education in Victoria during the Kennett leadership. Using statistical data from the Commonwealth Grants Commission, figure 5.1 traces fluctuations in the real per capita spending on education (1993-1998), comparing Victoria with New South Wales and the Australian average.

Figure 5.1 : Real per capita expenditure on education 1993/94 to 1997/98

Source : Victorian Women's Audit, 1998

This indicates that the devastating reduction in general education funding between 1993 and 1996 has only been partially restituted and that, as a consequence,
Victoria's overall performance is well below the Australian benchmark: Victoria's expenditure is fifteen per cent less per capita than the Australian average (McRae, 1993:3).

Tim Colebatch, economics editor of the Sunday Age, reports that reduced public education funding has been the most significant factor in the financial 'turnaround' in Victoria. However, in his article 'A wealthy state, but at what cost?' he indicates that funding cuts have varied substantially in different areas (1998:6). This is evident in Figure 5.2 (Women's Audit Project, 1999:20) which presents the growth rate in real per capita expenditure from 1993-1998 in four sectors: vocational education and training (TAFE), non-government schools, government schools (primary and secondary public schools) and the pre-school (kindergarten) area. Commenting in 1996, Mary Crooks was critical of key criteria - including expenditure cuts - which indicated that Victorian education was 'at risk' (Crooks, 1996:30).

Figure 5.2: Victoria - Real per capita expenditure on education 5 year growth
1993-94 to 1997-98

![Diagram showing percentage growth in expenditure by different sectors]

Source: Victorian Women's Audit, 1998

I would argue that any welfare policy formulated solely on economic factors, without regard for redistributive responsibility or socially just outcomes, is fatally flawed. In this regard, education is no exception.
5.4 FUNDING PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Childcare and pre-school education has been the subject of much political activity in the past two decades and reflects a considerable change in policy direction by successive governments. Under the mantle of the Children's Services Program (1976), the Coalition Government of the early 1980s merged the boundaries between the provision of care and education for children 0-5 years. Moreover, it substantially withdrew its support from primarily educational settings which emphasised the developmental needs of children in favour of work-related care (Lee & Strachan, 1998:84). This represented a significant change in the presumptions on which federal funding of children's services was based: from a service for children to a service for parents.

Although in this section I focus on funding for the educative sector of early childhood provision, it is important to acknowledge how the 'blurring of distinctions between childcare and education' effectively negates the role of federal governments in pre-school education and has resulted in a transference of this role to individual states (Kronemann, 1998:4).

Given the central role that the Commonwealth Government has played in education at all other levels, the failure to maintain a national commitment to pre-school education must be addressed as a matter of national urgency.

Michaela Kronemann (idem)

Nowhere is this 'urgency' more apparent than in Victoria. The distancing of the federal government from pre-school funding rendered the Victorian state system of early childhood provision extremely vulnerable to the budgetary constraints of the Coalition government, first elected in 1992. As Figure 5.2 illustrates, the real per capita expenditure on pre-school education since 1993 has been reduced by almost forty-five per cent. For the purposes of comparison, in 1996/7, the Australian average allowance for pre-schools was $19.10 per head; in Victoria this figure was $13.12 per head. Even discounting the added expenditure in some states as a result of different geographic and cost factors, the rate of funding in Victoria was the lowest of all states (Kronemann, 1998:43).
As Janet Taylor, a researcher for the Brotherhood of St Laurence, recognised, the changes to funding policy for kindergartens/pre-schools determined that the state no longer retained responsibility for teacher salaries, or indeed for auxiliary staff like cleaners. Instead, a subsidy based on enrolments was instituted in 1994, decreasing overall funding by thirty per cent. Despite minor increases in 1995 and 1996, the funding level in 1997 compared unfavourably with 1993 grants (Taylor, 1997:5). The resulting shortfall became the budgetary responsibility of parent committees in each centre who sought to offset funding deficiencies through a substantial increase in fees (Kinson, 1994:7). Addressing the Southern Women’s Action Network in 1999, Mary Bluett, the state president of the Australian Teachers’ Union, related the dire circumstances of a local kindergarten. This facility, in a socio-economically disadvantaged area, planned to maintain a service for local children through a fee increase. However, the ‘voluntary’ levy necessary to maintain the centre’s viability excluded so many families that the parents’ committee recommended that the centre be closed. Community anger was directed at the committee, as the state government assumed no accountability for what was their decision-making (Bluett, 1999).

The issue of increased kindergarten fees has occurred as a direct result of the Coalition funding cuts since 1992. Estimates for this increase range from 120 per cent over five years (Kronemann, 1998:20) to surveys reported in the Herald Sun (1997), which suggest that the average increase may be in excess of 280 per cent. This article also quoted evidence provided by the then Shadow Minister for Family Affairs, Christine Campbell, that some kindergartens were ‘hiring debt collectors to force struggling parents to pay their fees’ (idem). Within the current model, some families receive a fee rebate from the state. Nevertheless, a survey initiated by the Brotherhood of St Laurence indicates that fees are a ‘major issue’ for forty-four per cent of low income families in this study, and did restrict the attendance of some children. “While the numbers were small, the children in low income families were more likely to miss out on the opportunities provided by kindergarten . . . (Taylor, 1997:xi). The number was even more significant for the three-year-old cohort (idem).
The contrition in state funding for stand-alone kindergartens was accompanied by an extension of subsidies for long day care. Such a redirection of funding was cost-effective for the state welfare budget as the per capita rates were considerably lower for childcare centres (Kronemann, 1998:20), and pressure could be exerted on the federal government to assume greater fiscal responsibility for early childhood education under the guise of childcare. The dismantling of a well-resourced kindergarten system which provided an almost universal service, signified the promotion of a potentially inequitable service provision, in which access to early childhood education is controlled by the vagaries of childcare funding. It is apparent that federal expenditure in the provision of childcare is inextricably linked to broader economic and ideological motives of women’s workforce participation, exemplified by the changes to childcare funding by the Howard government (e.g. Gunn, 1996 Lee & Strachan, 1998). The withdrawal of adequate state government funding will possibly contribute to a two-tier system of education provision already established at other levels of the education sector. The proliferation of early learning units attached to private schools is evidence of an increasing market force approach to what has traditionally been a state-funded welfare provision.

5.5: FUNDING FOR P-12 EDUCATION

Access to public schooling is one of the practical ways in which our society recognises the status and value of children... It is one thing to pay lip service to the idea that all children are entitled to a decent education. It is another to take active responsibility for making this happen.

Lindsay Connors (1989)

The Victorian state school system in the past decade has been exposed to radical restructuring which has promoted the primacy of economics as an organising principle of educational provision. This process did not originate with the election of the Kennett Coalition - the previous Labor government for example had commenced

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7 Aggressive marketing programs by the private sector at the pre-school levels seems destined to establish the dual system of public/private provision at the earliest stages. The impact of this 'residualisation' on the continuation of state facilities, and the survival of the local kindergarten, has not been widely researched.
the introduction of a devolved system. But the new government opportunistically promoted the vision of state 'poverty' to introduce regressive and draconian organisational and funding reform represented as economic necessity. In the context of the introductory quote to this section, it would have been difficult for the Kennett government to argue that the changes they have implemented will contribute to the value and status of all children or provide the 'decent' education which a community has the right to expect.

Aspects of program and policy development will be pursued in later sections of this chapter: this discussion is to place in perspective issues of change in financial resourcing of state education. Figure 5.2 [above] indicates that the real per capita expenditure for government school education has decreased by more than five per cent, from 1993-1998, while the non-government sector has received a funding boost of more than eleven per cent during the same period. Initially, a funding reduction of five per cent may not appear as a substantial change, but it compared unfavourably with considerable increases in the majority of Australian states. The reduced per capita expenditure removed Victoria as the leading state to the position of second last on a comparative basis (Blackmore, 1999:183). In November 1992, the newly elected Education Minister, Don Hayward announced an $86 million cut in the mini-budget, assuring school communities that education funding would not suffer again during that financial year. The April mini budget, less than six months later, belied that assurance, with a further proposed round of budget cuts to education of $237 million (Lewis, 1993). In a discussion of funding cuts, Michaela Kronemann (1997:4) provides detailed information which produces a total figure of $340 million, from 1992-1996. “In addition, notional Department budgets from 1994-95 on have been ‘inflated’ by the inclusion of a superannuation levy payment [$201m] and capital charges [8% of capital outlay]” (idem), indicating that the actual school system was deprived of resources of an even greater magnitude than a cursory perusal would suggest.

In June 1997, the Senate Reference Committee published a report which dealt with aspects of government school funding. This document presented opinion critical of the increasing expectation for major funding contributions from
parents (1997:5) and argued that "... for many parents, the pressure to contribute financially to schools exacerbates difficulties they already face in meeting the growing costs of schooling" (ibid:46). In both the primary and secondary sectors, a range of resources and experiences which were originally provided for students free of cost are now subject to a fee or levy, and student participation is dependent on a parent’s capacity to pay. A review of research completed by the Smith Family, a welfare agency, claims that Victorian primary state school charges are the highest in Australia, and in secondary education Victoria is second only to New South Wales in costs to parents (‘Education too costly for families’ Sunday Herald Sun, 26/11/1997:11). For an estimated third of parents struggling to cope with the burgeoning burden of education costs, this has resulted in students being deprived of adequate text books, courses, excursions, sport and a range of other essential activities, as ‘the charges put a proper education out of the reach of many students’ (idem). The survey revealed that ‘many children are dropping out of school before age 14’ as ‘free’ education costs have reached more than $3000 average per year for one child within the state system (‘Costs force children to leave school’ Herald Sun, 16/4/1997).

State defunding has contributed to a situation where state schools are responsible for ‘topping up’ dwindling funds to provide for basic resources. As Gabriella Coslovich (1997:19) discovered, this has resulted in bullying parents for fees, including refusing to enroll students for Year 12 until Year 11 costs for the preceding year have been paid. Despite Education Minister Phil Gude’s rejection of these and similar claims, the Auditor General reports that in 1996, Victorian school communities raised $97 million dollars - or 16.9 per cent of school operating costs (‘Parents bullied for fees’, Herald Sun, 15/5/97:4). Anne Davies and Michaela Kronemann (1998:3) also referred to findings from the Auditor General’s 1997 Report on Ministerial Portfolios:

The growing pressure on school communities to meet the funding shortfall impacts more on some families, and some schools, than others. . . [the report] noted that, on average, locally raised funds equated to a net $186 per student in 1996 . . . with considerable variation between schools in their capacity to raise such funds. . . The inequities between schools appear to be increasing with those schools which have a greater dependence on systemic support and
equity structures which have been reduced often also having a limited fund-raising capacity.

A similar survey introduced into the Senate hearing (1997:66) indicated the differential capacity of schools for supplementing state funding: the most 'entrepreneurial' school averaged an extra $522 per student per year, compared with $19 per student in a socio-economically disadvantaged school. Many school councils, despite the urgency of funding deficits, have maintained a commitment and sensitivity to the communities they serve, and continue to promote practices to enhance student/parent/school relationships. The most appropriate action to redress the shortfall in resources is not to bully and harass families, but restore state budget allocations to ensure schools are not reliant on locally-raised funds (Kronemann, 1997:3).

In 1988, the Victorian Labor government had acknowledged the increasing parental expense for children at school. Through the Education Regulations (1988) they implemented a means-tested education maintenance allowance (EMA), to be distributed to low income families and used at their discretion. However in January 1997, the Coalition amended this payment with the Education (Maintenance Allowance) Regulations 1997, which effectively halved the amount available. This was achieved by legislating that the EMA be divided evenly between the parent/guardian and the child's school. The government's declaration that this would ensure that the allowance was 'used for educational purposes' conflicted with the findings of a number of welfare groups which identified the financial hardship inflicted on needy families. Additionally, a spokesperson for the Salvation Army, John Dalziel, emphasised that "... the allowance was only given to the most disadvantaged families and it was important they be given the dignity of deciding how to use the money for their children" ('Student hardship claim', Herald Sun, 5/2/1997:22). As a consequence of this decision, $16 million, allocated as welfare support for needy families, was redirected to offset state education budget cuts (ibid). This was contrary to the recommendation by the Senate Committee Inquiry (1997) which indicated that "... such schemes are designed to benefit families to meet the costs associated with schooling. They were not in the first place
designed to help schools’ ("School funding - not a level playground", The School Bell, 1997)

During this period of ‘renegotiated’ funding for government schools, the private system was receiving a more favourable hearing. An increase of $4 million in 1992 and a further $29 million in 1993, placed the increase of seventeen per cent well above the inflation rate. The Education Minister at that time, Don Hayward, supported the movement of students to the private sector as he deemed it a cheaper proposition than the full cost of funding students in government schools (Marginson, 1993/4:49). This strategy implies the tacit withdrawal of full government funding from state schools, with a gradual transition to a system of dual funding between parents and the state (idem), and contributes to even greater disparity between schools within the state sector. Promoting a market approach to education may appeal to conservative, right-wing governments intent on reducing welfare spending, but it abrogates community responsibility for a fundamental provision, and would ensure the compounding of inequalities of access. “All children matter, not just those whose parents have learnt to play the market effectively...” (Pring, 1987:2).

Referring to Figure 5.2 [above], it is obvious that only the non-government sector in Victoria registered a positive change to funding levels from 1993-1998. And there was little solace for public education in the direction of budget policy at the federal level. While some modest initiatives have been introduced for government schools in the Commonwealth Budget, May 1999, overwhelmingly the budget is ‘designed to give resources and structural support to the private sector at the expense of public education’ (Kronemann, 1999:12). In Victoria, this is reflected by an additional $20.4 million for government schools, compared to a funding boost of $62.3 million for private schools (idem). Speaking on Radio National (1998), Kirsti Melville outlined a trend in which public schools are growing ever more reliant on private funds. She quoted the 1994 National Report on Schooling in Australia which noted that “... government funding for State schools has increased by 50% in the past 20 years. Over the same time, the money going to non-government schools almost trebled”. If the Victorian state
education system sought to counteract the substantial decrease in budgetary allocation already imposed by the Kennett government through compensatory funding by the federal government, it is obvious that it would be singularly disappointed.

The possible fluctuations in federal government funding were first mooted in the pre-election documents of the Liberal/Coalition in 1996, which identified increased recurrent and capital grants to non-government schools as key policy initiatives. Previous federal Labor governments had provided fairly extensive support for the non-government sector during its thirteen years of office, but the election of the Howard government accelerated the pace of funding transfer. Two aspects of the incoming government’s policy, which had serious implications for state schools in Victoria, were the Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment (EBA) and the removal of restrictive measures in the New Schools Policy. The EBA reduces Commonwealth funding of the government sector for each new student in the non-government sector, ‘whether or not the total number of government school students actually falls’ (Marginson, 1999). In Victoria, when the EBA was applied in 1997, state education ‘adjusted’ $1.7 million to the private system, despite the increase in enrolments in government schools of 8500 students (Education Foundation, c1997).

Persistent changes to federal policy have demonstrated a declining parity.

In 1996 the Federal Government spent 73c on government schools for every $1 that was spent on private schools. By 1998 this had declined to 61c. As a result of the windfall private schools are to receive in the 1999 budget, which will be progressively implemented to the year 2002, the figure will go down to something like 57c.  
Roy Martin (1999)\(^3\)

The conjunction of state and federal education budgets predicts an ominous future for a comprehensive, equitable and viable government system of education.

\(^3\) The position of state schools is set to deteriorate still more rapidly with the impending implementation of new funding formulas introduced by federal Education Minister David Kemp in 2000.
5.6: FUNDING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Post-secondary options in education are generally provided through either universities or Technical and Further Education [TAFE] courses. Historically, the resourcing of universities has been almost exclusively the province of federal funding, while TAFE has been maintained by a combination of state/federal allocation. To pursue all the subtleties of budgetary changes at the post-school level is beyond the parameters of this study. However, it is possible to identify the general principles which are intrinsic to changes to tertiary sector education.

Mirroring a trend in most advanced capitalist countries, in 1974 the Australian Labor government was pushed by a strong ‘free education’ movement to abolish all university tuition fees. Fees were the single biggest barrier to women’s entry into tertiary education.

Sarah Stephen (c1997)

Through increased federal government funding, the opportunity for gaining advanced qualifications was extended to include many more school leavers and mature students returning to study, and enrolments expanded rapidly. This is exemplified by a growth rate of seventy-three per cent in the number of students enrolled between 1983 and 1995 (Armitage, 1996:5). However, as Gabriella Coslovich (‘Drop the Rolls talk, Senator’ Herald Sun, 12/5/1997:19) observes, in 1997 the entire costs of the nation’s 650,000 university students could not be exclusively taxpayer-funded. In fact, funding was pared back through the 1980s and in 1987 the controversial Higher Education Contribution Scheme [HECS] was introduced by the Labor Government, in the form of a user-pays deferred fee.

The continued expansion of university student numbers was partly funded through student contributions, which was especially relevant to Victoria. In the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission Report in 1992, unmet demand for higher education places, estimated as the highest in Australia, was identified as an area of concern. Forecasts suggested that the growth of higher education places funded through HECS would be inadequate to meet the continued increasing demand.

Apart from the problems of short term under-supply, the Report indicated that:

... there will need to be a continuation of funded growth at about
the levels of recent years in Victoria for the balance of the decade if higher education is to meet... relatively conservative estimates of future need.


What has occurred, since the tabling of that report is a radical reform of the HECS legislation, which has included the introduction of differential, and vastly increased fees, and a substantial reduction in the repayment threshold (Stephen,c1997). This increase in projected income has been paralleled by a reduction in funding for university operating costs and a relaxation of the prohibition on tuition fees at undergraduate level (‘Narrow visions’, The Age, 8/10/1996: A11), which has placed serious limitations on the capacity of the Victorian system.

In their pre-election policy in 1996, the Liberal National Coalition argued that a ‘quality higher education sector is an important public resource’ (1996: 4), and were critical of the previous Labor government’s ‘under-funding’. They also expressed concern that increasing fees mitigated against equitable access. Yet on election they embarked upon a policy of annual cost-cutting. The Federal Education Minister at that time, Amanda Vanstone, when commenting after the first year’s budget changes, attempted to silence student voices of opposition to HECS liabilities by suggesting that protesters were ‘squealing like stuck pigs’ (quoted in ‘Vow to stick squealers’, Herald Sun, 3/9/1996). Rather than resorting to insult, the Minister may have been better advised to explain why this regressive tax was being increased, and whether the new HECS repayment threshold, at twenty-seven per cent below average weekly earnings, was an indication that not all graduates would attract high incomes (Distant Planet, 1997:3). This is a salient consideration for women who continue to be economically disadvantaged in the labour market, and early indications are that:

Prospective mature-age students, mainly women, are emerging as the main group affected by the Federal Government’s changes to tertiary fees, with Victorian enrolment applications falling 13 per cent.

‘HECS fee changes hit women’, The Age, 2/10/1996:4

Despite a slight increase in operating grants in 1997, the Howard government’s budgets have continued to decrease operating grants, and persistently refused to fund justified salary increases for university staff, exhorting universities to
make ‘adjustments’ to post-graduate fee-paying courses to cover the shortfall (Anderson, Johnson & Milligan, 1997:1) Graham Reilly (‘Fee education’, 18/4/1998:5) estimates that these budgetary decisions ‘would effectively take about $1 billion out of the higher education system over five years’. And for the first time since the introduction of ‘free’ university education, regulations now permitted tertiary institutions to provide a percentage of places for domestic, fee-paying undergraduates (‘Drop the Rolls talk, Senator’, Herald Sun, 12/5/1997:19).

As a consequence of these decisions which may limit access for many students, particularly mature-age women, there was an expectation of increased enrolments in the TAFE strand of higher education, but how adequately this sector will cater for an influx of students – let alone those already there – is extremely dubious in the context of dual funding cuts. For example, the 1999 Howard budget reduction for TAFE of $230 million compounded cuts in the three previous years (AEU, 1999) and when combined with spending constraints by the Victorian Coalition government jeopardises the effectiveness of TAFE provision. As Figure 5.2 [above] illustrates, the per capita spending on vocational education and training has decreased by more than twenty per cent since 1993.

Only in Victoria has spending on TAFE declined in the past six years. Spending under this government is now 78 per cent of the Australian average per head of population.

David McRae (1999,3)

This is despite the findings of the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission in 1992 that the TAFE sector had been disadvantaged by reduced Commonwealth funding compared to universities, and that there should be a priority of growth in TAFE funding and programs to cater for an expanding student population (1992:26-27).

Aspects of the 1999 Federal Budget in fact were a cause for major concern. Funding to the states through the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] had effectively decreased through the abolition of growth funds. Any enrolment increases would have to be financed through declining budgets in what the Federal Government describes as ‘growth through efficiencies’ (Newcombe, 1999:1). The sleight of hand involved in this decision was exposed by loudly
proclaimed federal budget incentives, which will increase the number of students seeking enrolment in TAFE, while reducing the resources available to cater for these additional students. This includes the ‘New Apprenticeships’ program, which provides incentives for employers to ‘progress’ new apprentices, the ‘Women in Small Business’ program and the expansion of ‘Mutual Obligations’ for long-term youth unemployed (idem). While these may all be exemplary programs, it is questionable whether the under-funded Victorian TAFE sector can absorb a larger student cohort, and maintain quality programs, without increased funding. Additionally, at least one of the two major programs is innately gender-biased, as previous experience indicates that the majority of participants in vocational training through apprenticeship provision are male and “... any national plan for women in TAFE clearly demands greater commitment from Federal and State bodies involved in its implementation” (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1992:187).

Such enthusiastic ‘commitment’ appears unlikely in a TAFE sector marked by shrinking funding and increased enrolments, and the consequent reduction in non-vocational access programs - a vital pathway for women’s re-entrance to the workforce - appears inevitable (Kronemann, 1998:7).

5.7: ... BUT THAT’S HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

Access and equity, and the values of participation and tolerance which are embodied in public education, are as important now to this nation as ever before.

Mary Crooks (1998:7)

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I have outlined the quite dramatic changes in funding provision that have occurred at all levels of the education continuum. In the context of ‘economic crises’ it might be possible to concede that although funding constraint is unfortunate, it is nevertheless inevitable. Governments on all continents are insistent that while they regret budgetary cuts, global circumstances have necessitated drastic decisions - and not only in education. But the discussion is about more than expenditure. It is about the reform of state provision of social policy services based on an ideological agenda which favours private over public, the individual over the group and consumerism over welfare. This is the era of glossy documents and short timelines (Seddon, 1996: 46), jargon and acronyms. Sandra
Milligan (1994: 10) commented on the rapidity and extent of educational change, through systemic restructuring, a diversity of industrial relations reform, curriculum ‘development’, budgetary restraint and ‘even the language in which reforms are cast’. The movement towards market models of education encapsulates an increasingly conservative government view that its responsibility is ‘steering not rowing’, and that the real business of education can readily be provided through free market philosophy rather than democratic values (Tickell, 1997:19-20). It is the combination of these two actions - reducing expenditure and restructuring the system - which combine to impact on the quality and accessibility of education.

In the following sections, which traverse the education sectors, I intend to illustrate why this so profoundly affects the welfare of women and girls. Throughout this discussion, I do not imply that the changes are not disadvantageous to other community groups. But my focus is on the complexities of women’s disadvantage, which is so frequently and surreptitiously subsumed within mainstream analysis. Also, as I have previously indicated it is imperative to recognise that women are connected to education, in rationalist language, as providers, consumers and carers, and that, consistently, the multiplicity of roles women perform compounds the disadvantage.

5.8: SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In Victoria, free kindergartens for needy children were first established by benevolent church groups in the first decade of the twentieth century, to offer ‘developmental and educational experiences free of charge’ to working class families (Moyle et al., 1996:5). Designed to foster social change and reform, they were initially mainly philanthropic institutions, with limited financial assistance from state governments. It was not until the Whitlam government election in 1972, that federal funds were allocated to the early childhood sector, based on a strong commitment to a universal preschool education (ibid:6). However, after a checkered history, this funding was finally withdrawn by the Hawke government in 1985 (ibid), and since that time the Victorian government provided for preschools - somewhat tenuously - through the Department of Human Services. David McRae (1999:7)
advocates that the importance of early years education is accepted by the community and confirmed by reputable research, but not demonstrated by the educational funding priorities of the Kennett government (see 5.3).

A press release from Marie Tehan (1993), the Health Minister in the first Kennett government, outlined how many of the traditional family and health services needed ‘updating’, and pointed out that ‘structural inefficiencies and outdated practices have plagued the kindergarten service’, which was inflexible and did not cater for parental needs. Her comments preceded a significant change which promoted competition between community-based kindergarten facilities and private sector childcare, and successfully blurred the distinction between the two systems. The principle educational objective of preschools, to provide foundation skills for children in the year prior to school entrance, disappeared beneath the government rhetoric of flexibility and accessibility of services ‘responsive to changing needs’ (Tehan, idem). Since 1993, the number of locations with funded pre-school programs has increased by more than 300 (Napthine, 1999) mainly through increases in private-sector childcare programs. “However, over 90 per cent of parents continue to choose the traditional model of pre-school programs provided by stand-alone kindergartens” (Auditor-General, 1998.11).

Despite the difficulties of combining and utilising a number of children’s services to accommodate their needs, parents appear to be demonstrating tremendous confidence in the ‘traditional model’. This has particular significance as kindergartens have been ravaged by defunding and management change, and subjected to substantial ‘voluntary’ fee increases, and yet they continue to be the preferred option for an overwhelming majority of parents. Certainly the systemic changes ‘designed to create a more streamlined system’ (John, 1993) have contributed to a number of negative indicators for children, parents and kindergarten teachers, which rapidly became apparent after policy and funding changes in 1993.

A disturbing trend has been the increase in the number of students in kindergarten groups. Amongst Australian pre-school groups, Victoria already had
the highest staff student ratio of 1:15, and the equal highest ratio for qualified teacher/student allocations of 1:25.

The ratios permitted in Victoria are a particular scandal, and in a climate of cuts, have resulted in 44% of 4 year old groups having more than 25 children. At the same time, unfunded 3 year old groups, previously understood to have an optimum size of 15 children, have grown to a point where more than 25% have more than 20 children in the group.

Michaela Kronemann (1998:35)

The quality of programs provided under these circumstances must be hampered under the sheer pressure of student numbers. In an even more disturbing trend, some centres enrol 'extra' children in each group who attend on a rotational basis (Kinson, 1994:7). As well as undermining the stated objectives of early childhood education, such management practices place extreme pressure on teachers who are responsible for observing, designing, planning and evaluating individualised programs for children in their care. Since 1994, there has been a significant increase in caseloads, with more than twenty-three per cent of full-time teachers responsible for at least sixty children (Kronemann, 1998:36).

The impact on overall working conditions for kindergarten staff, who are overwhelmingly women, has also been devastating and sustained, and what was originally acknowledged as an economically rewarding and personally fulfilling career option is rapidly deteriorating. After initial funding cuts and kindergarten closures, by 1994 only forty-one per cent of teachers had full-time employment; by 1996 this had decreased to thirty-two per cent (Davies & Kronemann, 1998:4). Additionally, there is limited employment security as the viability of centres is dependent on maintaining enrolment levels and encouraging fund raising within the local community. Almost ninety per cent of teachers surveyed in 1996 reported increased workloads since 1994, as "... teachers have faced reduced hours, reduced non-contact time, increased contact time and increased group sizes ..." (idem). In fact eight per cent of teachers have also assumed the role of cleaners for the centres in which they are employed, as these positions are no longer funded (Kinson, 1994:7).
"The salaries of Victorian teachers across all sectors have slipped behind those in the rest of the country" (McRae, 1998:16), but nowhere is this more obvious than in the early education sector. In a news release in May 1993, the Community Services Minister, Michael John, was harshly critical of teachers and the Kindergarten Teachers Association of Victoria [KTAV], for their refusal to relinquish existing conditions of employment. His government’s proposals included increased ‘flexibility of work arrangements’ with all its negative connotations, increased hours of work and unpaid meal breaks, with the expectation of a twenty per cent ‘improvement in productivity’. He suggests that the ‘KTAV stands condemned for acting purely out of self-interest’ (John, 1993). The concern expressed by the KTAV appears to have been well-founded, if we give credence to their secretary’s address to parents and teachers a year later.

I would say most weeks we would get up to five calls from teachers saying they’ve has enough and asking how to resign. Because you can’t take this funding crisis out of the context of what happened industrially in Victoria ... Most of our teachers had screws put on them to sign individual contracts that reduced their terms and conditions of employment ... Teachers were threatened, intimidated and harassed.


Kindergarten teachers’ salaries continue to lag behind similarly trained professionals in the school system. Increasingly, teachers moving into childcare centres as qualified educators are discovering that salaries are considerably lower for almost double the teaching hours (Kronemann, 1998:40).

In a news release from the Office of Youth and Community Affairs (1999), the then Minister, Denis Napthine, described how “... Victorian families placed a high value on kindergarten programs – as did the Victorian Government”. His estimates of participation rates for pre-schoolers indicates the strength of parental support, but the government commitment is challenged by the ‘damning’ 1998 report from the Victorian Auditor-General (Johnston, 1998:11). In Special Report No. 55, tabled for the Legislative Assembly in April 1998, Charles Baragwanath describes how the range of children’s services extends beyond the traditional kindergarten program, to cater for changes in family needs. He expresses disappointment
... that quality assessments undertaken during the audit indicated that many of the State's children services do not currently meet minimum standards in relation to some of the key factors influencing outcomes. These include the provision of developmentally appropriate programs, sound interactions between staff and children and the adoption of practices which protect the health, hygiene and safety of children.

Charles Baragwanath (Auditor General, 1998:3).

Relating this report to community based kindergartens as compared with private childcare service providers is difficult, as many items included in the collection of data do not differentiate between the two models of provision. Despite this, there is obvious concern that the state government, as regulator and purchaser of these services through budget allocations, has a responsibility to effectively monitor the quality of care provided. The Auditor-General's Report (1998:4) is critical of the Department of Human Services framework for 'purchasing' preschool services, which "... enable(s) some services in receipt of funding to provide programs which are not in line with agreed funding conditions". The developmental programs provided in private sector long day care were considered inferior to those in both stand-alone kindergartens and community-based long day care centres on a number of criteria which would impact on the quality of educational outcomes (ibid:41). Yet it is the private sector which has benefited from changes to the funding formula (Black, 1994: 121).

The emphasis on a market environment places community-based kindergartens in competition with private pre-school facilities, and has contributed to a substantial increase in the role of volunteer committees of management for budgetary and fund-raising activities (McRae, 1998:7).

... a majority of preschools reported that their need for voluntary assistance had increased, but 78.6% reported that the actual level of voluntary assistance had remained the same or decreased ... [and] a significant minority of centres reported having insufficient voluntary support ...

Ann Davies & Michaela Kronemann (1998:5)

It seems entirely probable that as the number of tasks, and their complexity, increased, the responsibility for 'voluntary' labour became more onerous. Committees of management assumed responsibility for a range of roles which were originally located centrally with local councils or state government, including
insurance, staff payrolls, workcover and superannuation, debt collection and staff employment hours and "79 per cent of centres have reported they rely on voluntary help for repairs, cleaning and maintenance of grounds" (Kinison, 1994:7). Despite this reliance on unpaid help, the Auditor-General's report (1998:43) indicated that generally, the 'physical environment' of both indoor and outdoor facilities in stand-alone kindergartens compared more than favourably with private sector long day care centres. While voluntary labour has always been a part of the stand-alone kindergarten formula, it is apparent that the work load for parents - generally mothers - has dramatically increased with suggestions that some women provide at least fifteen hours per week of unpaid labour to ensure the viability of local centres (Johnston, 1998:11). The stress for parents is considerable: "... they are responsible for the operation of a small business with little or no support" (Kinison, 1999:2). Additionally, they "... also bear serious legal responsibilities and liabilities under our Children's Services Act and Regulations and must expose themselves to potential prosecution for breaches of the legislation ..." (idem).

The redistribution of funding from the public sector to the private sector of early childhood education appears to be having a negative effect on the participation of children from low income and disadvantaged families (Kronemann, 1998:9). This view was supported by the findings of the state pre-school audit, which also indicated that virtually no progress had been made in the past five years to improve the participation rates for Koorie and non-English-speaking background [NESB] children, despite an identified need (Auditor-General, 1998:104). Denis Napthine [then Minister for Youth and Community Services] acknowledges state commitment to enable 'all children to access one year of preschool' (1999) but without definite policy development this ignores the urgency for disadvantaged groups, and even children who are deemed 'not ready' for transition to formal school programs after their obligatory 'year'. The possibility of even further radical change to the system, which included the relocation of kindergartens to primary school settings under the control of the Department of Education, caused parental concern ('Parents fear kinder plans', 15/9/1996:29). However these reforms appear to have been temporarily shelved. The dismantling of the stand-alone kindergarten system may provide impetus for the resurrection of such organisational change or even
extend the debate to question the responsibility of the state for publicly-funded 
kindergarten programs. In her discussion of the system in Ontario, Kari Dehli 
highlights how 'helpful strategies to improve efficiency and accountability of 
government and education' has transferred programs to 'the domain of corporations, 
communities or families' (1996:368). She continues:

One currently debated example is Junior Kindergarten programs, 
which the government would prefer to eliminate, much to the distress 
of mothers of young children and women who teach in these 
programs ... the Ministry of Education claims that the responsibility 
for the care and education of very young children 'belongs in the 
family'.

Kari Dehli (idem)

Whether the gender implicit 'family values' rhetoric will be applied to 
the early childhood education of young Victorians in the post-Kennett era is yet to 
be revealed, but general trends indicate that the role of kindergarten teachers is 
simultaneously being devalued and deskilled, and that this entire sector of education 
is being destabilised. Transferring 'kindergarten' children to school locations or to 
settings within long day childcare centres is extremely cost-effective for the 
Victorian government but whether this is educationally desirable is contentious. In 
response to the 1998 Auditor-General's Report, the Secretary of the Department of 
Human Resources maintained that the implementation of regulatory changes 
embodied in the Children's Services Act 1996 will address many of the critical 
issues, and asserted that this Act "... was passed following a comprehensive public 
consultation on the overall legislative and regulatory framework for children's 
services in Victoria" (Auditor-General, 1998: 5). While this 'regulatory' response 
may have resulted from a consultation process, the accompanying 'comprehensive 
organisational redevelopment' which threatens the viability of an effective functional 
educational preschool provision was not the result of community consultation. It 
was initiated from a Health and Community Services review soon after the 
government's election in 1993 (John, 1993) and reflected budget decisions which 
demanded reduced state costs coupled with increased productivity. Community 
Services Minister Denis Napthine may reject many of the criticisms in the 1998 
Auditor-General's Report but "... the vast majority of teachers believe that the
capacity of their centre to provide high quality programs has been diminished..." by the direction and extent of systemic change (Davies & Kronemann:1998:4).

5.9: RESTRUCTURING THE P-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM: IN PURSUIT OF 'EXCELLENCE'

...'excellence' is an ideological tool that has been used for maintaining the status quo. It is a keyword in the vocabulary of conservatism that is used to justify the selective and often elitist disposition of resources while maintaining the appearance of equity.

Donald Fisher (1991:49)

Perhaps the area of greatest systemic restructuring in the educational sphere has been in the state organisation for children from Prep to Year 12. As I have previously argued, the reform of the schools' sector in Victoria was precipitated by the Liberal government in the 1970s and continued, at a reasonably leisurely pace, into the next decade by the newly elected Labour government. As Jill Blackmore outlines (1999:179), the Ministerial Papers (1982-3) promoting Labor government policy ushered in a movement towards more extensive school-based decision making and curriculum, by a government intent on developing the participation of parents in the educational process through a less centralised, bureaucratic system. Initially, this was part of a broad restructuring of state welfare provision, which represented an 'effective alliance' between the state and teacher unionists, to promote policies based on the 'democratic participation' of parents, teachers and the state (Angus & Brown 1997:4).

The Victorian school system inherited by the Kennett government in 1993 had benefited from two decades of reasonably sound policy, supported by generally adequate resourcing. Yet even before the electoral change from a Labor to a Liberal majority, the AEU had alerted the education community that the "difference in policies and attitudes between Labor and the Coalition were more of degree..." (Spaul, 1998:139) and that the major parties, at both state and federal levels, were pursuing policy increasingly structured on market forces (Angus & Brown, 1997:2). However, the full realisation of principles of marketisation, based on economic decisions rather than sound educational reform were evident from the
earliest stages of the Kennett coalition government. Education Minister Don Hayward almost immediately introduced a new model of school management, referred to as Schools of the Future [SOFT], commenting that "Quality education is all about people - students, teachers and the principals who lead them ... It is not about 'the system' ..." (1993: Foreword). Although the Minister may have had his supporters (e.g. Caldwell & Spinks, 1992), not all educationalists were convinced by the rhetoric of devolution and deregulation; his detractors - many strident in their opposition - considered that the Hayward reforms were an abrogation of state responsibility. To argue that economic efficiencies could be achieved through radical defunding was in reality to focus foremost on 'the system' (e.g. Moore, 1992), and conveniently ignore the vital position of public schools which

... admit all students wanting to attend them, irrespective of the incomes, ethnic backgrounds or beliefs of their parents, or of the scholastic aptitude or personality characteristics of the students themselves... Because public systems uniquely undertake the full educational task... and because they promote values common across our society with all its differences, recent moves downgrading them must be of particular concern.


The structural change implemented by Schools of the Future, and compounded by its successor 'Schools of the Third Millennium' represents a transfer in emphasis from education as a social welfare provision, to a marketable product for individual consumption, in which the needs of many different groups are ignored.

Educationalist Gerry Tickell (1997:19) argues that devolution as it was practised in Victoria demonstrates how restructuring conceals many of the effects of cost-cutting, and provides increased control of curricula by central authorities, which in turn facilitates universal testing, a prerequisite for the production of a comparative ranking system of schools. This is designed to "... assist 'consumers' choose wisely between competing 'providers'" (idem). The publication of 'league tables', in the form of listing of schools in order of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) results has already commenced, with initial indicators that private schools are clustered at, or near, the top. While the results of the Learning Assessment Project [LAP] has not been so openly publicised, anecdotal evidence indicates the preparedness of many schools to promote their favourable
achievements in the pursuit of increased enrolment (Personal discussion with Primary Principal). "Privatisation and marketisation, which is what SGS [Self Governing Schools] is all about, encourage individual schools to look after themselves first and put community, society and other children second" (Blackmore, 1998:13).

The prospect for the future entails more than an intensification of the division which already exists between the public and private school sectors: it appears destined to include also a two-tiered system of public education characterised by a growing ‘residual’ strand of schools which are very poorly resourced (Crooks, 1998:7). Such a trend is apparent in New Zealand, where the ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ model, a forerunner to the Victorian reform, has resulted in inequalities of resourcing and diminishing political concern for system-wide equity (Marginson, 1993:54), as market reform has winners and losers. Barbara Preston warned of the manner in which a residual orientation advantaged the already privileged and had serious social implication as it ‘exacerbates divisiveness’ (quoted in Kenway, 1991). In her discussion, in the mid-1980s, she focused on the growth of the private schooling sector and described how public services are eroded by the movement of the middle class from the system.

Similarly, the promotion of self-managing schools and the introduction of global budgets in the 1990s sustains, in this case, a public school system based on the socio-economic position of parents, as escalating the market role in education appears destined ‘to augment, reproduce and legitimate’ the existing socially constructed divisions in the community (Hogan, 1997:135). In these circumstances, residualisation appears as an inevitable consequence, and the economic position of most single-parent families below the poverty line has implications for many women and for the education of their children. "The past six years have seen a series of radical changes of unparalleled scale to public education in Victoria, promoted under the guise of being the ‘way of the future’ - a deeply divided and unequal future” (McRae, 1999:2).
The direction of education reform, hinted at in Liberal pre-election policy, was more comprehensively presented in a report from the Quality Provision Task Force in 1993. A number of the proposals indicated in this framework have positive connotations for the advancement of public provision (Auditor-General, 1995), but generally its tone was ominously patronising and paternalistic: the entire document would require a major deconstruction. I include the following rather lengthy introductory statement from the report as it exemplifies the generally prescriptive condescension of this slim document.

The Quality Provision Framework assumes that school communities will wish to provide a quality education for their students. It also assumes that with appropriate guidance and processes, school communities will recognise when there is a need to change schooling arrangements, and will seek to do so. It is anticipated that the Minister for Education's decisions to change schooling arrangements will be based on substantial community support. However, where the DSE perceives that students are being disadvantaged, because a school or group of schools is not willing to change, recommendations considered in the best interest of students will be made to the Minister for Education.


The Auditor-General's Report (1995:3) indicated that despite the conciliatory aims of the report and demographic grounds for some of the decisions, the process of school reorganisation did not proceed with complete effectiveness, causing 'disruption and disharmony' for some school communities. Documentary vision of the protests against the compulsory closure of Richmond High School provides evidence of the conflict which resulted from some task force procedures. That there was a pre-set and underlying politically expedient agenda to pursue more cost-effective larger schools appears to be verified by the available data. This includes, among a range of telling statistics, that the rate of school closures in Labor electorates was four times greater than in Liberal held seats and that the traditional stronghold of Labor support - the western region of Melbourne - saw the closure of twelve secondary schools, 'nine of which were closed in complete opposition to the

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4 The proposed closure of Richmond High School provoked widespread community outrage in December 1993. Public demonstration and picketing by protesters was rapidly dismantled by aggressive police measures, which had their sequel in successful court procedures against police officers involved in the fracas.
will of their school communities' which contrasts to National Party seats where no secondary schools were 'terminated' (Marginson, 1993:52).

In the three rounds of school closures between 1992 and 1996, 351 schools were closed [17.4% of the Victorian total], including approximately 250 primary schools (Kronemann, 1997:7), ostensibly because their relatively small enrolment made them 'inefficient' or 'ineffective' and disadvantaged the educational opportunities for students according the Education Department guidelines. Margaret Rees considered this merely as part of a 'two-track agenda' in which '... federal and state governments are dismantling public education, and simultaneously stepping up the funding and promotion of private schools' (1997:1). To illustrate her argument, she cites a number of examples where Victorian state facilities have been closed, usually because of an inadequate enrolment, sold to religious or ethnic communities and reopened as state-funded private schools with even smaller enrolments (idem). This entire process has been accelerated through the implementation by the Howard federal government of the EBA, through the States Grants Act (See: Funding P-12).

In his review of state education before the election of the Kennett government, Des Moore (1992) promoted the view that the Victorian system was generally inefficient and that many smaller schools were economically and educationally unviable. He used a comparative table based on average school size in other Australian states to 'prove' his argument, and included 'evidence' that larger classes did not detract from the educational achievement of students. While his reasoning may have attracted support from conservative governments, there was already a growing body of research which suggests that larger schools/larger classes may result in reduced costs but, educationally, are extremely problematic (e.g. Sawyer, 1997). “The changes have been designed by people who have assumed that education and commerce are indistinguishable, and that an educational institution is identical to a business” (McCrae, 1999). What these changes have permitted is not only a surge towards devolution and self-management of educational institutions, but a renegotiation and redefining of the teaching profession. Rosemary Deem (1996:88) considers that educational restructuring has affected teachers and their
conditions of employment, rather than the content of curriculum and evaluative policies. Obviously, this has serious implications for women in what is a female-intensive profession.

In an earlier section of this chapter, I described the historical background from which the gender segmented nature of the teaching profession had evolved. During the 1970s and 1980s women in the teaching service began to make some inroads to this division of labour where women were the teachers and men the administrators. Jill Blackmore (1997:442) presents an analysis of the re-gendering of educational work as an accompaniment to restructuring policies.

I suggest that restructuring in the 1990s has significantly altered the nature of the educational labour market, leading to a reassertion, rather than disintegration, of the gender division of labour... It has reformed the “old” gender division of labour...

The corresponding rise in corporate management related to devolution and self-governing schools encompasses a gender dimension which makes the state complicit in the social construction of gender and devalues the workplace participation of women. In her discussion of the rise in corporate managerialism and its impact on women employed in primary schools, Grace Distant (1995:216) reflected on the apparent need for broader research. She conceded that the ‘intensification’ of professional responsibilities in a decentralised system significantly increased the workload for both women and men, but that the demand on women to renegotiate domestic and childcare duties compounded the impact (ibid:218). I would suggest that theory related to devolution is extremely limited, and the literature generally available presents a gender-blind analysis of possible outcomes, despite the participation of women in educational provision.

Statistically, women are a majority of teachers at the P-12 level and consequently, the state is an important source of professional employment for women. Their location at the lowest levels of the educational hierarchy, furthest removed from the decision-making structures, makes them especially vulnerable to any deterioration in conditions of employment. Chris Curtis (1993:61) maintained that the Kennett government in Victoria embarked on a radical - and effective-campaign to discredit teachers and reduce their rights through industrial and
systemic reform. He traced the worsening of pupil-teacher ratios which has occurred as a direct result of diminished resources, a trend that features prominently in AEU research (Kronemann, 1997). Pupil-teacher ratios [PTRs] provide a simple way of comparing resources over a period of time and between different systems, and the most recent figures indicate that since 1992 these PTRs have regressed to pre-1980 figures (ibid:23). The reduction in special needs teachers and specialist teachers as a result of 'global budgets' places increasing responsibility on classroom teachers to ensure that all students receive adequate support.

The reduction in resources has contributed to increased work loads in a number of additional ways. As an example, the extent of face-to-face contact with students was pegged at 15.9 hours for secondary classroom teachers in 1980. By 1994 this had increased by more than ten percent, despite the massive increase in non-teaching duties related to structural change. The figures for teaching workload, including preparation, curriculum development, staff meetings, professional development and a range of other responsibilities, indicates that Victorian teachers average fifty hours per week, compared to 44.5 in 1984 (Curtis, 1993:63). Barbara Rogers (1997:11) has commented that the combination of larger classes and increased workload has 'made it harder for women with a workload at home'.

Considering the extent of reform and the change to teaching roles, it appears difficult to understand the lack of prior research by state education authorities to assess the probable impact of their decisions and the absence of any post-reform evaluative structures. An AEU survey of principals (1993), which attracted a response rate of approximately twenty per cent, despite a government directive for principals not to participate, indicated that the increased workload for teachers, principals and support staff is identified as an extremely significant problem. Commenting on the results of this survey, Mary Bluett (ibid) stated:

The professionals asked to run our schools have passed judgement on education policies in this state. In every area under their supervision, resources and opportunities for today's students are diminishing. It is only the thin line of teachers and principals and their commitment to take on increasingly heavy workloads that is holding the system together.
How adequately teachers will cope with the continued extension of their work role outside normal hours, through an ‘infiltration’ into their personal time, cannot be estimated, but the connection between the government’s erosion of employment conditions and a projected future shortage of teachers through a lack of suitable university entrants would be difficult to refute (McRae, 1999:15). Education reporter Carolyn Jones (‘Spend your cash Gude tells schools’, 29/8/1998:8) reported that a federal inquiry maintained ‘serious concerns’ about the future of the teaching profession, claiming that “Excessive workload was identified as the most significant contributor to stress and low morale” and that teachers were experiencing a ‘widespread crisis of morale’.

For teachers in Victoria, this has been exacerbated by a ‘downward spiral’ in teachers’ pay rates. Table 5.1 illustrates the comparative rates of pay for a ‘typical’ teacher at the top of the Teacher Level 1 salary scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Award rate</th>
<th>% difference (to base year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>39,016</td>
<td>base year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>46,449</td>
<td>+ 19.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>42,087</td>
<td>+ 7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>36,108</td>
<td>- 7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates that after initial gains through the 1960s and early 1970s, teachers have experienced a decline in income over the period of the Labor government. The accusation by Don Haywood (1993:x) that teachers had ‘milked the education budget over the past ten years’ was inaccurate and undermined the integrity of the profession. However, it also very successfully prepared the ground for further restraint on teacher incomes. Discussing some minor adjustments to pay structures in the ensuing years, Monash University education lecturer Lawrence Ingvarsen (‘Low pay cause of poor quality staff’, 4/11/1996:A7) nevertheless laments the professions’ inability to attract the ‘best’ school-leavers. He continues:
... the poor pay and working conditions had led society to devalue
the job and fail to appreciate that good teaching was a highly skilful
activity that should be rewarded as such.

In New Zealand, the 'experiment' with self-managing schools has similarly resulted
in increased workloads, larger classes and a demoralised work force. "A host of
surveys has found between 30 and 60 per cent of teachers would leave teaching if
they could afford to" (Matheson, 1997:23) and the principal turnover rate since 1989
has reached forty per cent (ibid: 24).

One positive feature of the New Zealand system is that teacher
resistance to salaries being included in bulk funding arrangements has been
successful. In Victoria, under the Kennett government, an allocation for teachers' pay
is included in global budgets, but school principals and councils have
discretionary powers in how this is administered. Staffing schedules, which
prescribed the number of teachers at each level of the hierarchy, have been
abandoned in favour of 'appropriate' staffing schedules at the local level. This has
resulted in the dismantling of the career structure with very few opportunities for
advancement or promotion, and the exploitation of teachers obliged to accept
additional responsibilities with little or no financial reward (Primary principal, 1999).
Rosemary Deem (1996.98) believes that women teachers are disadvantaged more
severely by the financial instability which accompanies the temporary, casual and
fixed term contracts required for a 'flexible' teacher supply. The use of a
core/peripheral staffing model, with thirty per cent of teachers at each school on
'contract', is the Victorian Education Department's stated objective (Bluett, 1997),
and appears certain to be experienced differently by women and men.

In Victoria there has been a gradual movement away from the
patriarchal hierarchy towards a corporate management style of bureaucratic
organisation (Blackmore, 1993:44). This style of management maintains the
gendered connotations of administration, and what comprises 'merit' appropriate for
principals undoubtedly relates to masculinc perceptions of necessary skills and
experiences (Sampson, 1987:41-2). In concurring with the direction of this
argument, Clare Burton (1987:425) considered that "... ideas about masculinity and
femininity are embedded in organisational arrangements and . . . the opportunity to accumulate 'merit' and the attribution of 'merit' are structured along gender lines'.

Susan Hopgood (1989:13) asserted that any new structure or administration system should be established on policy which promotes equity principles, and the compilation of criteria for management positions must be gender neutral. While this is an admirable objective, the execution of such a task is more difficult than is initially apparent. Definitions and interpretations of meritocracy are intrinsically political and reflect the gender and cultural bias of those making the judgements - of selection criteria, performance markers and relevant experience (Martin, 1987:445). Education policy at both the primary and secondary level includes school-based autonomy in the selection of teaching staff and administrators, and while the increasing formality of the hiring process is constrained by numerous regulations to ensure equity principles are implemented, in practical terms selection panels have extensive discretionary powers (Schmuck & Wyant, 1981:74).

Unfortunately, the collective biases of selection panels in their appraisal of women's performances results in many competent women being eliminated at various stages of the promotion process (Ruble, Cohen & Ruble, 1984:351). "Most of the available evidence suggests that women are under-rewarded, and that this has little to do with differences in competence" (Milligan, 1994: 15). Rosita Vila (1993:10) accused the state Coalition government and the Principals' Federation - both overwhelmingly male 'clubs' - of embarking on a conscious program of 'disempowerment' and 'devaluing' inflicted upon a basically female profession, through the implementation of inequitable policies of school closure, senior appointments, requirements for interview panels, teachers named in excess of school requirements and redundancy packages that favoured teachers with continuous service.

Additionally, the bureaucratic management model instigated within Schools of the Future [SOTF] mitigates against the preferred management options which many women have demonstrated, those of co-operation and developing personal relationships. "The effective woman [in educational management] does not
copy the effective man, neither does she find that what works for him necessarily works for her" (Shakeshaft, 1987:12). The renewed emphasis on organisational hierarchies constructs understandings about educational leadership based on male practices (Blackmore, 1998:467) and Andy Hargreaves (1997:17) highlights how men in the centralised bureaucracy take the ‘hard decisions’ to reduce resources while relying on an increasing number of school-based women in leadership to be the ‘emotional managers’ responsible for the implementation of policy and funding constraints. This form of corporate line management creates a gulf between the principal and the teaching staff, and there are indications of a decline in the proportion of women seeking senior management and school leadership roles (McRae, 1999:19). The changing relationship between the principal and teaching staff is discussed quite extensively by Alan Reid (1998:62), who suggests that the changing form of the labour process has a profound gender dimension.

As the relationship between teachers and principals changes . . . the gendered nature of the employment relationship is brought into stark relief. And those women who are promoted are required to work within a male administrative culture. This has placed unbearable pressure on women principals in the current environment.

Alan Reid (1998:64)

An increase in the number of women in leadership roles is not an end in itself, but an objective for encouraging a change in the masculine culture of the educational workplace (McMaster & Randell, 1993:10). Programs and policy to promote women’s advancement will be the focus of a later section of this chapter.

In the context of systemic reform in education, the effect on women as parents provides another example of how state restructuring has a gendered facet. As I indicated earlier, theory relating to the change in the expectations for, and of, parents is certainly limited, but initial indicators recognise the changing relationship of the state and family in educational terms (e.g. Teutsch, 1997:8). Paige Porter (1988:260) refers to the development of educational social policy which emphasises the importance of mothers’ volunteer labour, due to economic change, and cites evidence of criticism of mothers in paid employment as ‘depriving’ their children.

The ‘innovation’ of greater parental involvement in schools, again, usually means mothers and despite the rhetoric, seldom involves
participation in important policy decisions but does increase pressure on mothers.

Paige Porter (1988:260)

In many resource-depleted schools, parents - essentially mothers - are providing unpaid substitute or support teaching in classrooms and for other educational experiences, for example camping programs and homework. The appropriation of parental labour in school programs is not a new phenomenon: what has changed is the dependence on that labour for the continuation of essential programs. Miriam David (1992:9) identifies how the development of parent participation in the early childhood and primary sectors relied heavily on the sexual division of labour which enabled mothers to assume an increasing involvement in educational provision. With restructuring, there is an assumption that the unpaid labour of mothers will 'replace the financial obligations of government to fully fund schools' (Blackmore, 1999:186). However, within this climate of increased commitment by parents, and an apparent 'louder' voice in decision-making because of decentralisation, a senior administrator from the Victorian Federation of State School Parents' Clubs maintains that school councils have been reduced to merely an 'advisory' role: the real decision makers are principals and bursars (Bode, quoted in Teutsch, 1997:8). "Victoria provides the extreme example of the rhetorical rather than the real promotion of community involvement" (Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998:105).

Absent from any state consideration is the effect of school closures in communities, largely in rural areas, where the school provides the central site for women's social contacts. It was difficult to locate any information or research which considered the impact on parents of relocating students to more substantial school facilities further from their homes. Issues of parental participation, community support, friendship and social contact for isolated women have apparently not been explored at any mainstream level. Although the isolation for women living in urban areas may be less critical, the closure of 'local' schools could hinder accessibility. Women without personal transport may find a substantial portion of their day devoted to escorting children to and from school. The effects of closures on ease of
accessibility and the increased responsibility and cost for parents to ensure children’s attendance is undocumented. Appropriation of women’s time also is implicit in the abandonment of school zoning regulations, where the exercising of ‘choice’ has become an element of responsible parenting (Morrow, Blackburn & Gill, 1998:14), no matter how far distant the ‘best’ school. Marketisation and privatisation are contributing to a system which ignores that education is a source of ‘collective social activity’ for interaction within communities. This has “… significant implications for familial responsibilities and the social relations of gender, given the feminisation of the casual labour market and women’s assumption of the caring responsibilities of the post welfare state” (Blackmore, 1999:188).

5.10: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: THE GENDER DIMENSION

Much of the evidence… highlighted the paradox in the potential of education to both entrench and alter gender stereotypes. From primary school through to tertiary studies, girls’ and boys’ expectations and behaviour models are heavily influenced by a combination of curriculum and pedagogical attitudes and styles. The institutional environments of schools and universities often do little to challenge prevailing stereotypes.

House of Representatives Standing Committee (1992:181)

The evidence presented to the Standing Committee in 1992 reflected the educational climate for women and girls after almost two decades of policy and programs at the federal and individual state level focusing on issues of gender. Jill Blackmore (1999:180) suggests that while gender reform during this period was based on liberal feminist principles of ‘improving’ the individual, there had also been considerable achievement in the development of equity infrastructure and inclusive curriculum in Victoria. Processes of gender reform are frequently contentious and documentation of the effects of particular initiatives is an onerous task (Kenway & Willis, 1997:xvi), and despite criticism of the limited agenda followed by reformers (e.g. Yates, 1997:341; Kenway & Willis, 1997:61), the impact of their activism has had some positive effect.
Importantly, the intervention in educational practices through state provision provided a legitimating framework which facilitated significant gender reform (Blackmore, 1998:462). As a result of government studies, publications and most importantly legislation "... preventing discrimination and harassment is not simply a moral imperative. It is a legally enforceable obligation" (Walpole, 1995:10). However, the Gender and School Education Study, commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs [DEETYA] in 1996 presents a disturbing report of the school-based experience of gender for both girls and boys (Ms Muffet, 1998:9), which indicates a continuing need for focusing on inequity at all levels of educational provision. Nelly Stromquist (1992:399) points out the vulnerability of gender to 'symbolic politics' where funding and implementation efforts are surpassed by rhetoric, and sex equity educational legislation is restricted by the state's limited willingness to alter gender relations. The narrowness of this 'tokenistic' approach compounds the vulnerability: the enduring nature of change being undermined by the marginalisation of state programs through 'mainstreaming' was identified as a major concern as early as the 1980s (Spender, 1988:98). The continuation of projects and programs which support women and girls 'within the gendered realities of educational contexts' (Rowan, 1997:131) are made substantially more problematical by state restructuring. How this has altered the landscape, in each area of educational provision, is the theme of the sections that follow.

5.11 : GENDER POLICY AT THE PRE-SCHOOL LEVEL

The constraints on state funding and the implementation of systemic restructuring by government agencies at the pre-school level has absolved the state of many of their administrative functions and accountability, while strengthening their control of program provision (Shacklock, 1996:2). The Office of Pre-school and Child Care issued guidelines for curriculum development in 1991, which included only minimal mention of 'gender and equality' (Baird, 1992:16). If gender is indeed a 'crucial aspect of childhood learning' even at a very young age, then there remains a dearth of research which examines aspects of gender construction at the pre-school level. The development of early childhood networks, designed to
alleviate the professional isolation of pre-school teachers were a potential source for continued gender awareness, the emergence of gender based curriculum initiatives and the support necessary to implement strategies for gender reform. These networks which frequently spanned the pre-school/primary school division, are unlikely to be sustained without funding support from government agencies and at a time when there has been a dramatic increase in the demands on pre-school teachers' energies. Judy Baird (1993:17) suspects that

[W]ith increasing competition between centres for students and lower levels of government funding there is pressure to run the centre as a business and at times in opposition to the teachers' educational philosophy.

While teachers may identify a moral obligation to implement policy which directly addresses the process of gender construction, there is no 'pedagogical obligation' to pursue equity strategies (ibid:17), and at the local level, teachers may experience a reluctance by parents to interfere with what many perceive as the 'natural' socialisation of children into sex-stereotypical roles.

In a general discussion of early childhood services, June Wangman (1994:16) argues that concern for educational outcomes necessitates some incentive to encourage all providers to improve the quality of their programs. The promotion of market-based structures, directed by economic rather than educational decisions, is unlikely to provide the opportunity or the impetus for policy aimed at challenging the stereotypical assumptions of pre-schoolers. Without specific, detailed and mandatory state policy directives, any momentum towards implementing, for example, gender-inclusive curriculum will be difficult to maintain. The proliferation of private-sector pre-school services, many in conjunction with single-sex, elite schools may not contribute to any commitment to gender-related social change by a large number of early-childhood providers.

5.12: A PROLIFERATION OF GENDER POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

... we cannot accept any teacher's (or school's) statement that we treat everyone as an individual, we treat everyone on their
merits at their face value. Sex and gender permeate teachers' assumptions and arrangements of schooling.

In the Victorian schools sector, the support for programs to advance the position of women and girls has been central to policy development since the late 1970s. A commitment to the implementation of policy objectives for girls and women from the federal Schools Commission earlier in that decade has been consistently pursued by the Department of Education in Victoria. Commencing with the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Unit in 1979, a 'multi-faceted structure' has evolved to develop and review policies and design and provide programs specifically targeting equity and sexism (Davies & Kronemann, 1998:9). In the period from 1979 until 1992, these equal opportunity [EO] structures included:-

- Ministerial Advisory Committee for Women and Girls [MACWAG]
- Curriculum in Schools Advisory Committee [CSAC]
- Equal Opportunity Unit [EOU]
- Equal Opportunity Resource Centres [EORCs]
- Regional EO Committees
- Regional EO Networks

This list was compiled by Anne Davies and Michaela Kronemann (1998:9) and they provide a brief overview of the contributing role of each component in the pursuit of socially just and equitable educational outcomes for girls and employment opportunities for women. The groups were responsible for the publication of numerous documents, including a series of action plans for girls, a number of action plans for women in the teaching service (1986, 1989 and 1992) and a Ministerial review of employment equity for women (1994), as well as contributing to other departmental strategies and services.

The extent of funding for the provision of state initiatives is indicated by entries in the women's budgets, prepared by the Women's Policy Co-ordination Unit of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Generally, Labor governments have demonstrated a more identifiable 'formal progressive commitment' to programs of social reform, and have 'provided a distinctive context for reform related to girls
and schooling’ (Yates, 1993:167). Consequently, I have attempted to identify change to state commitment to equity measures which resulted from the defeat of Labor and the election of the Kennett Coalition in 1992, through a comparison of budget allocations and program provision. In the final Labor Women’s Budget (1992), the text for the Department of School Education affirms that ‘Equal opportunity for girls in schooling is a major objective’ and that the Department ‘aims to provide a comprehensive education system and improve educational outcomes for girls’ (Women’s Policy Co-ordination Unit, 1992:227). In the 1995-96 Women’s Budget the gender specific objectives have been replaced by the rationalist language of the market provider: “The mission of the Department, stated in its Corporate and Business Plans, is to give Victorians the opportunity to benefit from high quality education and training” (1995:42). The following table highlights some of the specific changes to funding allocation contained in these two documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>1991-92 ($)</th>
<th>1994-95 ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunity Resource Centres</td>
<td>223,592</td>
<td>63,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Talk Work Register</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>17,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths, Science &amp; Technology for Girls</td>
<td>202,400</td>
<td>171,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education of Girls Section</td>
<td>238,511</td>
<td>148,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan for Girls</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>Not funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Advisory Committee on Women &amp; Girls</td>
<td>71,904</td>
<td>Not funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice, Students at Risk, School Equity and Learning Pilot Programs</td>
<td>257,000</td>
<td>Not funded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reduction in overall funding commitment to girls’ educational provision is evident, particularly as no adjustment has been made for inflation rates between 1991 and 1995. Helen Thomas, the Women’s Officer for the AEU, outlines

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5 This comparative process is reasonably difficult, because of an alteration in the structure of women’s budgetary documents. Under the Kennett government, many non gender specific programs were included in the overall ‘women’s’ allocation - which effectively hid a range of budget reductions. Separate women’s budgets are no longer available.
a few of the consequences of reduced funding for the maintenance of women and
Girls programs in Victoria (1998:24). She comments:

The support for Gender equity (Women and Girls) programs in
Victoria has been seriously undermined since the election of the
Kennett Government. This has left Victoria (once at the forefront
in this area) seriously behind the other states and Victorian schools. 
at a considerable disadvantage in their attempts to implement
Gender Equity policies and programs in schools.

In pre-1992 Victoria, each of the eight Regions had a funded Resource Centre with a
collection of relevant instructional and professional development materials and
staffed by three trained EO consultants, supported by eight centrally-based project
officers. By 1996, the number of project officers had been reduced to 3.5 (Hand,
1995:4), some centres had closed completely [for example in Northern and Western
Region], and those centres that survived were without any full-time staffing
internationally acclaimed initiative, was summarily closed and its ‘extensive and
current collection of research documents and curriculum resource materials’ (Hand,
1995:4) was to be dispersed to ‘a school library’. Jill Blackmore’s discussion of
educational restructuring in Victoria (1998:462) intimates how apparently radical
changes in school organisation may not necessarily be ‘progressive’ as far as gender
is concerned. She considers that institutional restructuring provides for the
‘mobilisation’ of male bias and is compounded by the evidence that

... a conscious political strategy of the conservative government
was to dismantle the Gender Equity units within the central
administration and to change the language by replacing equal
opportunity and gender with the more ‘value neutral terms’ of
merit and equity.


The net effect of all these staffing reductions was an inevitable loss of
extremely valuable expertise (idem) as many women with specialist skills moved to
different roles within the government sector, or left for more lucrative rewards in the
private sector. At the school-based level, teachers attempting to address equity
issues were deprived of outstanding leadership and support, and many of the district
networks that had advanced the skills and knowledge of school-based educators
were no longer centrally funded. Initially, an annual allocation of $1000 was
provided for the maintenance of networks, but the additional demands of this role combined with full-time teaching responsibilities contributed to the demise of many progressive and comprehensive networks. These networks provided an essential support structure for school-based reformers, as issues of equal educational opportunity are so frequently the responsibility of women, usually located at the lower end of the staffing hierarchy. The position of EO co-ordinator is fraught with frustration and, as Ramona Kowal (1984:26) observed, apparently designed to be ineffectual. Jane Kenway (1998:16) suggests that school leaders 'do anything but take responsibility for gender reform, preferring to deny or cover up inequities', giving 'in principal support' that is not reflected by their actions, policy or funding decisions.

In recent years, the dismantling of provisions for women and girls in the education system has coincided with the promotion of 'gender equity', to encompass issues for males. As Robyn Woolley explains (1998:2), this 'waters down' and redirects the focus to a notion of male disadvantage in education, and supports what she refers to as 'serial' equity service delivery: the girls had their turn and now 'what about the boys'? The emphasis on the 'new disadvantaged' [i.e. boys and men] is prefaced on a judicious selection of comparative indicators, including tertiary entrance scores and student retention rates to 'prove' that 'decades of feminist reform' has unfairly advantaged girls (Teese, 1997:29). The political impetus for gender-based school reform, distinct from discrete programs for girls, is evident in documents such as the executive summary of 'Schools Work Towards Gender Equity (DEETYA, 1998). The comprehensive extent of the project is encouraging and the issues it introduces are central to the debate, but with the exception of one title and a solitary 'dot-point' question, the word girls is missing. Most key areas highlighted - violence, harassment, bullying and participation - are

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6 For example, in the primary sector, the 'EO person' was rarely a senior staff member, but they were expected to ensure widespread social change in the school setting. They frequently operated with minimal - or no - funding and little administrative support. Government requirements for EO representation on all selection and assessment panels and curriculum committees could result in THE designated teacher being grossly overworked - and under-supported! Yet when promotions were being considered, these experiences were discounted (Unpublished Honours Thesis: A Fair Go for All: A Fair Way to Go).
expressed in gender-neutral terms, however 'how masculinity is defined and its impact on boys' underachievement' (ibid. 3) is specifically indicated.

This no doubt placates commentators like Alan Barron, the Convenor of The Institute of Men's Studies. Writing for the Endeavour Forum (1999) he is critical of 'the mad scramble' to improve girls education. He continues:

The modern educational system is failing boys. This is severely disrupting young men as they plan for the future as the equal opportunity movement is completely dominated by women beset by the needs of women and girls . . . our educational institutions think nothing of relentlessly pursuing reverse discrimination against men/boys . . . In a bizarre twist in the equality war, it is now men who are being punished for being the wrong sex.

Alan Barron (1999)

This form of backlash theory advanced by right-wing masculinity groups distorts the feminist interest in boys' education which advocates attitudinal and behavioural change by men to advance the welfare of both sexes and contributes to discourse which "... has the potential to subvert many of the hard-won gains achieved by women for girls in schools" (Mills & Lingard, 1997:51). In the 'Education of Girls Highlights 1996', published by the South East Metropolitan Region, a number of valuable initiatives have been described in the 'priority area of the education of girls' (1997:4). While these activities are to be commended, the schools involved represent only a small minority of those in the region and there is an absence of a comprehensive framework or evaluative structure. The claim that "... outcomes and benefits from these initiatives ... are critical in ensuring a safe and rewarding learning environment and providing the skills needed for life beyond school" (1997:4), is not applicable to the majority of students who are summarily excluded from these programs.

Without a substantial state commitment to resourcing, staffing and reporting procedures, the pursuit of educational equity becomes vulnerable to 'symbolic politics' (Stromquist, 1992:399). The imposition of bureaucratic imperatives from a central authority [the Department of Education] has been queried as an effective strategy for change to school practices. However, the imposition of
perceived ‘penalties’ for non-compliance has successfully reduced the legitimacy of opposition to a plethora of other new programs and policies in schools. What mitigates against the introduction of real educational equity for girls appears to be based on the political nature of gender issues and ineffectual enforcement by a conservative state authority. While gender has become more visible as a substantial organiser of social life (Mills & Lingard, 1997:53), the education system has failed to maintain the momentum for socially just change. As the government ‘retreats’ from gender reform, and the under-achieving boy is monopolising the ‘gender reform stage’ (Kenway & Willis, 1997:47), in 2000 there is no clear evidence that a comprehensive, systemic equity strategy still exists in Victoria (Davies & Kronemann, 1998:11). Jane Kenway and Sue Willis (1997:xvi) acknowledge the difficulty of initiating and sustaining gender reform. They note:

... as schools come increasingly under siege as a result of government cutbacks, the tightening of government controls, the narrowing view of the purposes of education, the intensification and trivialisation of teachers’ work, the push of market forces and the retreat from social justice policies, they were increasingly disinclined to support gender reform.

Jane Kenway & Sue Willis (ibid:209)

The declining support for gender reform does not only involve programs for educational equity for girls: it is also reflected in the direction of policy which promotes the recognition and advancement of women within the teaching service. In current educational theory, there appears to be a tendency to argue that the objective of employment equity for women has been achieved and is therefore no longer a priority issue. The advancement of some women is presented as evidence that bias and discrimination have been eradicated, creating an environment which values and rewards women and men similarly. Some critics argue that the ‘pendulum’ of affirmative action has actually swung too far causing male teachers to ‘abandon government schools across the nation’ (e.g. Barron, 1999) while others declare that teacher status would ‘automatically, and miraculously’ benefit from a higher percentage of male teachers (quoted in Ms Muffet, 1998:6).
5.13: INSTITUTIONAL RESTRUCTURING AND POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION

The system of public education in the post-compulsory sector is included within the Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEET], and this area has been subjected to a raft of changes during the past two decades. In Victoria, tertiary students have suffered from a substantial reduction in resources provided by successive federal governments, accompanied by increased fees, as tertiary institutions have continued to veer towards private provision. The TAFE system is ‘embattled and struggling’ against a reform process which promotes an ideologically driven market focus and has ignored the foreseeable negative effects (Forward, 1999:3). The Kennett government legislated for TAFE college autonomy in 1993, but as Pat Forward observes:

Had the TAFE experience of self governance been more genuine, perhaps some of the issues implicit in it . . . could have been dealt with at the workplace level . . . Self governance has merely been a cloak for reducing government funds to vocational education and training, and forcing TAFE institutions to manage that agenda.

(idem)

Uncertainty and instability for students and staff appears to be characteristic of the culture for both strands of post-compulsory education, with serious consequences for what are frequently only fledgling equity programs in the tertiary education sector.

As an example, an area in which some research has been evident is the rapidly growing, fee-paying post graduate education ‘market’. The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations [CAPA] has provided for a review of this sector over the period from 1991 to 1994. The initial reports indicated very serious concerns regarding the quality of profit oriented courses and also noted that marketing of higher education appeared inconsistent with equity objectives. The fourth report for CAPA, presented by Margaret Heagney and Mary Stead (1994:8) concluded that

[P]ostgraduate students are caught in a system that is profit oriented and concerned only with short term goals, where postgraduate
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[Postgraduate students are caught in a system that is profit oriented and concerned only with short term goals, where postgraduate
students are financially exploitable and potential postgraduate students without financial resources are expendable.

Of particular concern is that postgraduate studies are often pursued by women endeavouring to re-enter the paid workforce after a significant absence, but the imposition of up-front fees has a deterrent effect. Such fees are a regressive form of taxation which unfairly discriminates against potential students based on income - or more specifically - lack of income. I have indicated in Chapter 4 the discrepancy between female and male earning capacity, and statistical data highlights that the disparity in gendered incomes for university qualified workers is even greater, yet fees for courses are the same despite income levels of the students (ibid: 9). Additionally, after completing postgraduate studies, as Table 5.3 illustrates, women’s incomes will still compare very unfavourably with men’s. “For many women a higher degree means a ‘private loss’ - a perverse application of the glass ceiling” (idem).

**Table 5.3: Income by qualification, by gender (1992)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$0-30 000</th>
<th>$30-50 000</th>
<th>over $50 000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIGHER DEGREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>10 094</td>
<td>28 219</td>
<td>39 782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>8 552</td>
<td>12 833</td>
<td>5 585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POST-GRADUATE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>8 777</td>
<td>24 927</td>
<td>7 963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>30 154</td>
<td>29 293</td>
<td>2 344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BACHELOR DEGREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>85 602</td>
<td>152 030</td>
<td>102 328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>13 288</td>
<td>102 642</td>
<td>15 884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Heagney & Stead (1994:8)

Robert Jansen (1996: 4) argues that the inadequacy of institutional response to issues of equity begins with ‘confused concepts’ which render the implementation of appropriate initiatives ‘accidental and haphazard’. In his research project he identifies equity as ‘a political understanding of institutional discrimination’, as it applies to women among a number of specific groups, and an
issue which must be addressed by higher education institutions in their equity plans. Jansen observes that

... the institutions are compelled to include issues of equity in postgraduate fee-paying courses ... Remarkably, some universities have not written an Equity Plan. There also appears to be an extraordinary disparity between institutions on the provisions for participation in fee-paying postgraduate courses.

Robert Jansen (ibid: 13)

These findings, five years after equity plans became mandatory, reflect poorly on the intent of institutions generally to acknowledge the problem and move beyond liberal ideas of access to actually changing the cultural environment which designates student equity as a management responsibility. Academic staff have limited participation in planning decisions relating to student equity and "... there is a perception that equity is an administrative issue which does not relate to teaching and learning" (ibid: 8). Again, legislative imperatives which encompass neither substantial 'rewards' nor 'penalties' are apparently regarded as 'peripheral activity' (idem). Against this backdrop of a postgraduate model 'designed and maintained by masculine aspirations and benchmarks' the resulting gender effects are not unexpected (Williams, 1994: 28).

The direction of postgraduate funding has implications not only for women who intend developing their 'marketable value', but for the future of feminist studies in general. Jan Williams (idem) indicates that women are confronted with 'attempting to integrate competing philosophies to the detriment of women-centred philosophies' within systemic malestream policy and practices. This is compounded by a labour market which discriminates against, and inadequately rewards, women with higher education qualifications. What results is an interesting paradox: proportionately education costs are higher for women and yet their continued participation in institutional education has contributed positively 'to improving their economic well-being and social mobility' (Rapson, 1997: 67). How women respond at both the graduate and postgraduate level will need vigilant monitoring. The focus on outcome-based funding, in response to corporate demands, makes some areas of research extremely problematic: women's studies would appear to be potentially
disadvantaged by funding models which do not recognise 'the full gamut of valuable research being done in universities' (Wells, 1995:11).

Jane Kenway and Diana Langmead (1999: 193) contend that despite a 'welter of policy rhetoric', which I argue includes numerous state missives regarding 'equity principles', universities are being compelled to become increasingly cost effective while responding more readily to state and market forces: 'a triumph of economics over university education'. Discussing the future for feminism in the contemporary university these two researchers maintain that

... policies of reprivatisation are likely to intensify the emotional labour of feminists in the academy and elsewhere, as they struggle to undertake feminist work in conditions that are both increasingly hostile to it and increasing the need for it.

Jane Kenway & Diana Langmead (ibid, 198)

5.14: SUMMARY

A 'woman's place' is in education, and increasingly women are participating in education as students, teachers and parents. However, as this chapter has detailed, while women's presence in education in greater numbers is undeniable, their exclusion from decision making processes - tacitly or by default - persists. Discussions in education still locate women on the periphery, as add-ons to the mainstream, male system, with only minor acknowledgement of gender difference. I have considered the circumstances of state educational provision and used case studies from the three educational sectors to illustrate how effectively policy disengages and discounts the rights of girls and women. These case studies have included an analysis of the negative impact of 'crisis' funding and the regressive nature of policy changes incorporated within economic rationalist discourse, and they describe how 'the system' permits - and even promotes - gender disadvantage.

In the chapter that follows, I examine aspects of health policy, to demonstrate the persistence of gendered discrimination and the reluctance of governments to pursue socially just systemic change. How effectively they might
promote women's rights through policy and legislative measures will be an issue
taken up in greater detail in the final chapter
CHAPTER 6: WOMEN AND HEALTH

6.1: INTRODUCTION

Health care has never been simply the rational application of biomedical science or technology to the problems of the human body. It is also a negotiated arrangement for providing personal services that are appropriate by providers, consumers, insurers, policymakers and others.

Carol Weisman (1998:4)

This statement introduces the underlying complexity of any discussion of health policy and provision: the range of participants is extensive and each is connected differentially to aspects of ‘health’. Merely naming the main stakeholders provides no perception of the inter-relationships which have evolved among the three tiers of government in Australia, nor does it encapsulate the inequality in power and influence each group commands in ‘negotiated agreements’.

This consideration is certainly as important to the health discussion as to any other area of welfare provision. Historically the intervention of government in health care has resulted from the inability of competitive market forces to cater adequately for perceived universal needs. In western democracies like Australia, it became increasingly apparent that the market model for health provision allocates services based on factors such as income, gender and geographical location, among others, rather than on the needs of the potential users (Thwaites & Refshauge, 1996:101). While ‘the market’ may frequently be presumed as the most effective distributor of goods and services in some areas, I would argue that it is inappropriate to view health care as part of a ‘reward system’ based on individual financial resources (Ashton, 1992:147).

In the contemporary context, access to basic health care is perceived as one aspect of the state’s contribution towards maintaining and improving the health status of its citizens. The World Health Organisation promotes the responsibility of governments in ‘the provision of adequate health and social measures’ (Salmond, 1992: 11) and this may be interpreted as a right for care within the capacity of the state. Jocelyn Keith, a lecturer in public health in New Zealand,
promotes the view that "... there is a strong argument for a legal right to health care, at least to a decent minimum, that hinges not on a moral right but on what constitutes a decent and humane society" (1992:19). How this is implemented in policy and practice within a health care system varies markedly even amongst western countries (e.g. see Palmer & Short, 1994), and the balance between public and private provision remains an area of contention which impacts directly on the structure of the health care system.

In Victoria, Australia, critical public reaction to issues like the nursing home 'scandal' and the burgeoning surgery waiting lists\(^1\) would suggest that there is community demand for the optimal health and welfare of all Victorians, an objective which is unlikely to be achieved by a free and minimally-controlled health care market. However, as health economist Guy Scott stresses:

> This does not mean that the state should necessarily be the dominant provider of health care, but it is essential that the state should play a major role in coordinating, regulating and providing funding for those individuals unable to pay for essential health care. An unregulated market will not result in an economically efficient or socially equitable provision of health care.

Guy Scott (1992:17)

As I intend to illustrate in this chapter, governments at all levels continue to formulate policy and create budgets which abrogate their responsibilities in the area of health care, through the implementation of economic rationalist principles. The restructuring which has occurred in health provisions over the past two decades mirrors the restructuring evident in other welfare sectors, including:

- stimulating the private for-profit providers
- promoting the concept of 'user pays'
- tightening eligibility criteria
- introducing market measures into health provision
- encouraging traditional family roles

(from Hancock, 1999:287). It must be acknowledged that while changes in policy direction have universal impact, the effect is experienced differently according to

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\(^1\) Both these issues were evident in the last decade of the twentieth century, and will be discussed in greater detail in later sections of the chapter.
such factors as disability, cultural background, socio-economic status, and, most particularly, gender.

The importance of gender as a defining factor will be explored in section two of this chapter, but its mention here gives some indication of the rationale for including the area of health in this thesis. Participation in both the public and private spheres is profoundly influenced by health status and well-being, and the pursuit of economic solutions to social and health policy places identifiable constraints on the possibility of women's equitable participation. If, as reported in a government inquiry in 1992 (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1992:12),

[Government policy and practice is of itself an important indicator of the extent to which women are recognised as full participants in society enjoying a complete range of life options and opportunities...]

the perpetuation of restrictive - even regressive - health measures which discount the specificity of women's needs are problematic.

Indeed it would be inconceivable to attempt an assessment of women's general status within the community without analysing the influence of contemporary health provision and the direction of health reform, as women's social, economic and political status can be directly linked to government health policy. The interconnectedness of these two elements - government policy and women's subordination - are basic to the arguments in this chapter. Through a consideration of some of the contemporary issues in the field of health care, I will demonstrate the covert and overt bias inherent in policy design and implementation, and challenge the political and economic factors which are deemed to make change inevitable.

As with previous areas of discussion in this work, the focus will be on the position of Victorian women, but it will also contribute to an understanding of how the fragmented local/state/federal system continues to render invisible the interests of women. I contend that despite the apparent proliferation of 'targeting' specific groups and gender specific policies, some of which will be featured in later sections of this chapter, implementation is inconsistent and constantly threatened by political ideology and insititutionalised opportunism. Health models which are evolving,
especially the tandem public/private provision, are not only deleterious to the welfare of women and other disadvantaged groups, but the rapidity of change threatens to eliminate the modest gains achieved by feminist activism.

6.2: THE HEALTH CONCERNS OF WOMEN

We [women] have unique health problems because of our biology as well as unique problems that are a result of social, economic and political culture pressures that differ from those of men.

Marion Crook (1995:6)

This statement is not included to imply an essentialism which removes women from (male) mainstream health care needs, but to emphasise that despite the diversity of women’s backgrounds they have many common concerns in the field of health and well-being. I think it is important to iterate this point, as critics of gender-specific programs consistently query ‘Why women’s health?’ The Women’s Health, Information, Resource and Crisis Centres Association [WHIRCCA] outlines the rationale for promoting women’s health issues in their Manual of Standards for Women’s Health Centres, published in 1995. This document indicates the ‘multiplicity of factors’ – cultural, biological, social, environmental and economic – which frame women’s health status and indicates the basis for ‘appropriate’ services (WHIRCCA, 1995:ix). Obviously, women’s unique biological needs are implicit in gendered service requirements, but too frequently these are the only needs identified by male-dominated decision makers (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy and menopause). Critiques of medical services highlight “... the ambivalence associated with women’s bodies within the medical model, where men’s experiences of health are viewed as the norm and women’s unique health experiences are viewed as deviant” (Rogers-Clark, 1998:4). As I have indicated in the previous discussions surrounding employment and education, women’s experiences do differ from those of men and their needs are rarely satisfied by ostensibly gender-neutral policy and implementation practices, an argument I will clarify in later sections of this chapter.

The prevailing medical model in Australia perpetuates gender stereotyping of women, based on their ‘reproductive capacities’ which significantly influences the role of governments in public health policy (Moss, 1996:2). Kary Moss (ibid:1)
argues that obvious bias against women may be readily identified, while important differences among women receive minimal attention. Without intending to compound this neglect, the scope of my research precludes a detailed analysis of specific areas of women’s health care needs. Nevertheless, as Cath Rogers-Clark (1998:6) emphasises:

Within the Women’s Health Movement, the recognition of differences amongst women is fundamental to the development of health services based on the needs of the community being served.

However, outside the women’s health movement, the direction of policy and the change it precipitates appears to be moving away from the woman-centred principles which had steadily evolved since the 1970s and regressing towards a hierarchical, male-defined provision. Alison Bashford (1998:225) acknowledges that constant reference to the masculine bias of medical authority is problematic, and may contribute to reinforcement of a patriarchal system. She adds moreover, that ‘gendered structures of power’ persist in health care and ‘unquestionably still shape all sorts of encounters’ (idem).

The ‘gendered structures’ she alludes to remain evident in many layers or strands of health care: at each level of government, through hierarchical administrative structures in medical institutions, through medical advisory bodies, and even at the local community level. The relentless pursuit of economic solutions to health care problems, couched in the dialogue of economic rationalism, has significantly contributed to the medicalisation of women’s lives, for example through extensive and lucrative breast and cervical cancer screening programs, without comparable development in primary health care aimed at identifying and preventing illness. Peggy Foster (1996:104) demonstrates the assumption by ‘providers’ that the key to improving women’s health is inextricably linked to ‘persuading women to avail themselves of health care services’, with what I believe are unacceptable consequences:

-it promotes a stereotype of women as pathologically ‘ill’;
-it provides an illusory impression that women’s health is funded favourably in comparison to men’s needs;
-it leaves unquestioned and invisible the underlying causes of women's apparently 'inferior' health, including relative poverty, social disadvantage and male-defined health needs.

In addition to other considerations, the feminisation of poverty in the modern state remains central, as "... income still determines quantity and quality of health care" (Mahowald, 1993:220). Charlotte Muller (1990:49) agrees that income and other economic considerations are central to any discussion of the health care system. She comments:

The gender-related problems in health care that are most significant today lie in the socioeconomic and political context of health services. They derive from the economic status of women, the sexual division of family roles, and the maladaptation of financial systems, both private and government, to women's needs.

Charlotte Muller (1990:222)

The health care industry has been identified as an area critical to the welfare of women, as they are:

i) disproportionately greater consumers of services personally;

ii) disproportionately represented as the providers of health care, albeit concentrated at the lowest levels;

and

iii) disproportionately responsible as carers, for the health and well-being of others.

How effectively these roles and needs of women are considered and satisfied through state policy initiatives and budgetary considerations will be analysed in the following sections of this chapter. For "... despite the cliché 'women and children first', the reality is that women and children tend to be last rather than first in health care" (Mahowald, 1993:255).

6.3: WOMEN AS CONSUMERS OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES

In concrete terms the problems which women have faced in their contact with mainstream health services have included the medicalization of the natural process of pregnancy and childbirth, the trivialization of their health problems, the treatment of social
and emotional problems with medical solutions such as tranquilizers, patronising attitudes of doctors, and the mismanagement of women’s mental health problems.

Lynne Hunt (1994:389)

This comment provides a comprehensive glimpse of the mammoth task confronting women at the forefront of women’s health promotion, by naming some of the prevailing injustices institutionalised in the contemporary medical system. In this section, I will provide a brief historical perspective of the development of women’s health services in Victoria, trace state response to feminist demands, and identify some of the areas of current concern for women as consumers. Areas for focus will analyse policy in the context of women’s experiences, incorporating aspects of childbirth and maternal care, mental health, health insurance, wellness, access to hospital care and aged care.

a) The Women’s Health Movement: The State Responds

Women in Victoria, as in Australia generally, have a lengthy history of activism in the area of health provision. The ‘second wave’ decades of the 1960s and 1970s were characterised by women dissatisfied with the inadequacies of mainstream services in accommodating their needs. Initially, this impetus resulted in the establishment of a range of women’s health centres, which eventually gained federal funding in the early 1970s (Broom, 1991:9). In Victoria, preliminary services including ‘Women Against Rape’ and the ‘Women’s Health Resource Collective’, provided a feminist model of women helping women through networking and ‘volunteerism’ with only limited state funding. However, by the 1980s the demand for women-centred health services was reflected by an increase in state funding for the expansion of many existing services. The contradictory nature of state intervention for women’s health initiatives can be readily identified through the inability of policy and legislation to effect structural change: women’s gains cannot be discounted, but the gender sensitive state has not achieved the level of social justices for which activists hoped (Weeks, 1994:59). The consequences of this ambivalent situation will be further analysed in the concluding chapter.

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2 This era, with a resurgence of feminist activism is frequently referred to as ‘the second wave’.
A report from the Victorian Ministerial Women’s Health Policy Working Party, a group established by David White (then Labor Minister for Health) in 1985, endorsed the importance of supporting women’s health services financially, which it suggested had been ‘on the political agenda for ten years’ (Ministerial Working Party, 1987: iv). In the opinion of the working party, there was a ‘lack of understanding’ of women’s health experiences, ‘partly due to the dominance of male ideology that is considered neutral’ and women’s concerns were trivialised or ‘ignored by a health system directed by men’ (ibid: 2). The Report promoted strategies to strengthen the range of services provided ‘by women for women’, including a priority for information services and the establishment of an Office of Women’s Health (ibid: viii, xii). In the context of policy, this document was strategically important, as it clearly placed structural change in the forefront of the policy agenda (Palmer & Short, 1994: 253). The Victorian State Budget for June 1992 (Women’s Policy Coordination Unit, 1992) exemplifies the range of funding directed towards women’s health policy and identifies the responsibility of the Women’s Health Unit to:

...contribute[s] to the development of policy within the [Health] Department and provide[s] advice and information on women’s health issues. In addition it ensures that health policy/planning and service delivery take account of the needs for women.

Additionally, the Women’s Health Unit provided a pivotal role working with its federal counterpart, in the development and implementation of the National Women’s Health Policy. However, the relative optimism of the 1980s and early 1990s was not destined to last. As subsequent Women’s Budgets indicate, the direction of funding for women’s services in Victoria gradually eroded with the electoral success of the Kennett government in 1992, and the Women’s Health Unit was actually defunded and abolished in 1992 (Palmer & Short, 1994: 253).

At the federal level, a statutory authority ‘The National Health and Medical Research Council’ [NHMRC] within the portfolio of the Commonwealth Minister for Human Services and Health of the Labor Government, had agreed to ‘undertake the development of a women’s health strategy and implementation plan’ to ensure
‘an equitable approach to the use of health resources generally’ and address ‘some of
the issues raised in the NWH Policy . . . ’(NHMRC, 1994:1). It reports.

The involvement of the NHMRC in ensuring an equitable approach
to the use of health resources generally, including involvement in
the implementation of the National Women’s Health Policy, is
crucial given its role in promoting high quality health care practice
and research in Australia.

Membership of the Working Party on the development of the Women’s Health
Strategy was almost exclusively female, but in general, the gender composition of
NHMRC committees demonstrated a preponderance of men. Some committees
represented extreme gender imbalance in their structure: for example, the Working
Party on Suicide has one female and eight males; the Working Party on Guidelines of
Diagnosed Breast Cancer has five females and sixteen males; the Public Health
Committee has seven females and seventeen males.3 There were relatively few
examples of committees with gender balance or female majority, and only a small
minority of chairpersons were women. These statistics do not preclude the
possibility of the Women’s Health Committee providing direction for NHMRC
strategies, but experience has indicated the fragility of ‘adding on’ women to policy
groups without changing the underlying masculinist structures.

b) Childbirth and maternal health

Women’s experiences of pregnancy and childbirth were certainly central to
the political lobbying for change in the health care arena. Pamela Griffiths (1994:18)
illustrates how the ‘progressive historical medicalisation of birth since the early
1900s’ reinforced the patriarchal model of powerful professionals dominating the
medical and social process of birthing. Detailed study of modern obstetric practices
highlights how the escalation of active intervention, with advances in technology and
medication, had compounded controversy in regard to childbirth. The reality is that
childbirth is “. . . the single most important reason for hospitalisation and accounts
for the highest number of occupied bed days” (Senate Community Affairs Reference
Committee, 1991:1) and,

3 These figures represent the composition of committees in 1994.
... while women acknowledge the contribution of the medical profession to Australia's low mortality rates they are generally concerned by the extent to which childbirth has been medicalised. This has led to a significant increase in the level of intervention and consequent morbidity, and in the disempowerment of the women giving birth.

Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee (1991:2)

While the objective of maximum safety for mother and child during pregnancy and childbirth is undeniably valid, the emphasis on 'natural birthing' has precipitated a rise in unsatisfactory and distressing experiences for women who 'fail', particularly in the family birth centres. Libby Lester points to the unresolved issues for women with high expectations, who are transferred out of birth centres - at a rate of thirty-five to fifty per cent - because of perceived difficulties ('The failed parent', The Age, 28/8/1999). She maintains that: "Research into birth centres in Australia is growing but still inadequate. It does show that women are significantly happier with birth centre care than standard care, but the effects of transfer have yet to be investigated".

The contentious nature of birthing centres is not restricted to issues of transfer, but also of valid choice. Most women using the pre-natal and post-natal services of birthing centres are middle-class, educated and considered low-risk cases. This model of maternal care, and childbirth in private hospitals, generally receives the most positive ratings from users; shared care and public clinic models, the subject of more negative ratings, are the 'choice' of women who are 'most socially disadvantaged and in need of greater support from caregivers' (Brown & Lumley, 1997:25). Additionally, the use of birthing centres is closely related to users who have a private health insurance to minimalise the personal cost of these specialised facilities, a factor which obviously narrows the perception of 'choice'.

The 1999 Senate Report Rocking the Cradle, indicates that despite the model of maternal care, twenty-two per cent of Australian women have labour induction, which is more than double the World Health Organisation's target ('Hospitals induce pregnant smokers', The Age, 7/5/2000:2). This report details how almost ninety per cent of births in Australia include some form of intervention, with the higher rates
often linked to women with private health insurance (idem), and while a uniform rate of intervention is not universally established, "... there are no obvious clinical reasons for intervention rates to be higher in private than in public patients" (Roberts et al., 2000). Additionally, the rate of caesarian sections continues to increase, according to Health Department figures ('Caesarians on the rise', Sunday Herald Sun, 3/8/1997), exposing women perhaps unnecessarily to the complications of major surgery. Although higher rates of obstetric intervention in the private sector reflected more instrumental deliveries than higher caesarian sections (Roberts et al., 2000) Caroline de Costa (1999), expert in the areas of obstetrics and gynecology, clearly defines the need to monitor and assess the caesarian section [CS] rates, as current data indicates that Australia ranks highly in the use of this intervention. She argues that:

We must remember that providing full, unbiased information about birth and CS is not merely to enable health administrators [or governments] to reach arbitrary targets, but to allow women to make a considered choice...

The urgency of policy and practice review, which recognises that women with private insurance are more likely to receive, for example, 'epidural anaesthesia, episiotomy, induced labor, caesarian section, or delivery assisted by forceps or vaccum' (Roberts et al., 2000) is clearly indicated by Federal Government measures to 'encourage' extending drastically the number of Australians with private health insurance. The impact of this change in patient status and funding policy, and how it may relate to obstetric intervention, has apparently not been considered.

The state and federal governments' propensity for collating figures, conducting reviews and publishing reports in the area of childbirth is admirable but ineffectual if woman-friendly policy development does not ensue. As an example, professional concern for high rates of caesarian section have been prevalent for more than a decade, as highlighted by the National Health and Medical Research Council report Options for Effective Care in Childbirth (1996:5). The later Senate report (Rocking the Cradle, 1999:1) also emphasises the depth of state and national reports of childbirth services, but concludes that while these reports presented a range of recommendations, almost without exception they have not formed the basis for future policy. The link between health insurance and rates of caesarian section may
be tenuous, with "... no direct financial incentive for Caesarian section in the arrangements of private health funds" (ibid, 161), but an indirect link can be established between government funding arrangements and the caesarian section rate.

In the current situation, where an obstetrician is paid the same for a delivery, regardless of whether it is a vaginal birth or by Caesarian section, it is in the obstetrician's financial interest to opt for the Caesarian and get it over with quickly rather than waiting for hours through a natural birth to obtain the same financial reward. While financial considerations do not necessarily affect clinical decisions... current arrangements are unsatisfactory, both for the women concerned and for the obstetrician.

Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee (1999: 162)

It might be timely to ponder this statement in the context of evidence which indicates that options in maternity care may relate more to the status and requirements of professional groups, "... instead of concentrating on the needs of childbearing women" (NHMRC, 1996: 11). How the interests of women in the area of maternal health will be defined under the new funding initiatives of 'lifetime health insurance' remains unnervingly uncertain and poorly researched.

In January 2000, the Women's Electoral Lobby expressed its concern to the federal government at the continuing definition of pregnancy in pathological terms, and lamented the level of intervention with a consequent 'cascading effect of problems during childbirth' (WEL Media Release, 10/1/2000). In their submission, they queried the efficacy of funding routine ultrasound screening for women which introduces 'a very large proportion of pregnant women into the intervention cycle unnecessarily' and recommended a national childbirth education program (ibid). The federal government responded selectively by reducing the subsidised refund for ultrasound tests, which indicate fetal abnormalities, for women in the first seventeen weeks of pregnancy. Cait Calcutt, the coordinator of the Children by Choice Association, expresses concern that this reaction reduces women's access to earlier - and therefore safer and cheaper - termination (ausfed-polnet, 10/1/2000), a potentially critical delay if chromosomal abnormalities are eventually detected. Some obstetricians "... accuse the Federal Government of creating a system in
which only the healthy can afford to check the health of their babies’ (Herald
Sun, 10/1/2000) and of proscribing maternal ‘choice’. The situation was exacerbated
by ‘sources’ who declared the government’s intention ‘... to stop doctors from
providing happy snaps of fetuses for no medical reason’ (ibid). What this entire
unfortunate discussion highlights is not only the paternal attitude of decision-makers,
whether medical or government, but how deftly they create ‘policy-on-the-run’: it is
extremely representative of the opportunism of policy decisions regarding women’s
health which are not preceded by rigorous research or consultation. There is no
evidence of analysis by expert, woman-dedicated policy units, to ensure the
feasibility and equity of funding changes, an observation which continually recurs in
relation to women’s health care provision. This is exemplified by the revision in
policy and practice regarding the duration of hospitalisation for childbirth and its
possible relationship to post-natal depression and mental health problems, a
consideration to which I turn next.

c) Mental health issues

A statewide conference in 1998 summarised the objectives for women’s
health in Victoria emphasising that

...the most common health theme raised and addressed by women
from all categories was that of emotional and mental health. Achieving
a balance and managing the stress and pressure arising from modern
society and the demands of daily life, such as work, family and inner
emotions, was seen as the platform from which other health issues
flowed.

Health Sharing Women (1998:24)

This observation gives credence to arguments for empowering women in their
decision-making, by providing not only appropriate services, but ensuring that
women are adequately informed of their options. The basis for women developing
personal health strategies, and exercising diverse options must necessarily be
prefaced on well-researched and accessible information. As the following case-study
of childbirth hospitalisation indicates, what appears necessary - and what actually
prevails - may not coincide.

described a cultural norm in Victoria for a post-natal stay of 5-7 days which had
gradually declined since the early 1980s. In 1982, only thirteen per cent of new mothers were discharged from hospital within four days; this had increased to twenty-four per cent by 1988 and six years later, in 1994, this had doubled to forty-eight per cent (idem). Undoubtedly there is some ambivalence at the impetus for this social change. Initially, it may be considered as a positive response to feminist demands to 'demedicalise' a natural life event, acknowledging that pregnancy is not an illness. However such a perception is illusory.

The media criticised the motives of hospitals whom they accused of 'forcing' new mothers home prematurely, to ensure appropriate state government funding ('New mothers forced home', Herald Sun, 30/9/1997). Claims by midwife, Patricia Scott, indicated the pressure for early discharge of mothers and babies was evident in public hospitals, a statement challenged by Marie Tehan, the Minister for Health at the time. Tehan assured the public that "[T]here was no policy, proposal or budget cost measures to get mothers out of hospital early" (idem). Yet, as early as 1994, a study by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Gilley, 1993:23) had indicated the concern of new mothers who believed they were 'kicked out' during periods of critical demand for maternity beds. The implementation of a 'casemix' funding system for public beds, provided reimbursement to hospitals for each maternity patient, based on a stay of 4.5 days; no extra funding was provided for maternity patients who exceeded this period, forcing hospitals to 'make up the shortfall' ('New mothers forced home', Herald Sun, 30/9/1997:2). Although major maternity hospitals denied decision-making based on economic consideration, stringent monitoring is essential to ensure the welfare of new mothers and babies is the focus of discharge policy. Anne Buist, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Austin Repatriation and Medical centre in Melbourne observes:

One of the more unfortunate consequences of casemix funding has been the promotion of cost-effectiveness at the expense of choice... public [maternity] patients had an average stay of 3.9 days, compared with 5.7 days for private patients... [and] this significant difference suggests that when the choice is more open the stay is likely to be longer.

Anne Buist (1997:236)

1 A more detailed explanation of 'casemix' will be presented in the section focusing on funding policy.
While the imperative to decrease the length of hospital stay for maternity patients was less emphatic for private patients, the possibility for 'drive-through births' was mooted by the Australian Medical Association [AMA] based on private health insurance 'packages' ('Drive through birth warning', Herald Sun, 5/11/1997: 25). The AMA warned that a range of similar health insurance packages in the USA had resulted in some states enacting legislation to prevent "... funds throwing mothers and babies out of hospital too soon" (idem). Federal Health Minister, Dr Michael Woolridge defended the motives of insurance companies, suggesting that despite 'two or three funds... negotiating with obstetricians for those packages... it's a decision for the consumer...'
(idem)

The disturbing nature of these conflicts is compounded by the paucity of research (and the inconclusive results) examining the consequences of early discharge, and its connection with post-natal depression. In its report on the health status of Victorians (Department of Human Services, 1995) the Public Health Division noted that post-natal depression was a 'common' mental health disorder, which had the potential to interfere with mother/child bonding and impinge 'adversely on the mother's relationship with other members of the family'. They cite how 'little information' is available, but mention a Victorian survey which provided indicators for potential sufferers. This study, by Stephanie Brown and Judith Lumley, cautiously suggested that the correlation between post-natal depression and maternal anxiety was not compounded by early discharge (1997:157), an issue queried by Anne Buist in her summation of available data (1997:236). Buist's discussion focuses on a more detailed analysis which indicated that "... early discharge was associated with an increased risk of developing the disorder [post-natal depression]...", a disorder characterised by "... impaired mother-infant relationships, as well as a higher risk of cognitive and behavioural difficulties in children" (idem). The study itself, Early discharge and risk for postnatal depression, concluded that "[W]omen planning early discharge after childbirth should be carefully assessed before discharge and follow-up should be rigorous" (Hickey et al., 1997:244).
Two years later, in an editorial comment in a similar journal, Judith Lumley poses the question again in evaluating the consequences of policy "what are the effects of early hospital discharge after birth?" (2000:524). She quotes a more recent study in which 'the message is reversed' and argues that this is 'no trivial disagreement'. The study, conducted in the ACT, concluded that women participating in early discharge did "... not have an increased risk of developing symptoms of postnatal depression during the following six months" (Thompson et al., 2000:532), although it was conceded that 'few women in the study were discharged early without home support'. In their discussion, the researchers maintain that: "[T]he postnatal stay has become shorter without being properly evaluated in randomised controlled trials", and without due consideration given to personal choice and appropriate support structures (idem).

It is difficult to provide a definitive answer to the impact of early discharge and its relationship to women's mental health. However, this lengthy but essential description emphasises what I consider are a range of extremely salient factors, not only vital to this discussion but relevant to a more general consideration of women's health issues. These factors include:

i) The invisibility of women. Although women are central to the discussion, their 'well-being' is virtually ignored: the discussion is couched in consideration of the mother/child relationship or interaction with other family members. In most of the literature, the personal impact of post-natal depression for women themselves is neglected - their health, their rights, their feelings, their responses: their lives.

ii) Change in social policy without adequate research or reliable indicators. Alteration to funding policy, and therefore the length of post-natal hospital periods, preceded any valid or reliable research to assess potential disadventage for women. If 'struggling depressed mothers are often undiagnosed and unsupported', the direction of any change should have been clearly prefaced on patterns of health care delivery which do not contribute to morbidity (Buist, 1997). It might be valuable to analyse the impact of shortened
hospitalisation on the subsequent identification of women with post-natal depression and the provision of adequate support services.

iii) The tenuous link between health care provision and state promotion of cost-effectiveness. Despite Ministerial assertions that services in Victoria will ‘put people first, rather than institutions or systems’ and ‘obtain value for taxpayer’s funds’ (Tehan, 1993:iii), the introduction of casemix funding for hospitals has promoted a system which seriously limits maternal choice. According to Anne Buist (1997:236)

[T]he cost of economic rationalism may not just be at the expense of choice but of long-term outcomes... Cuts to maternal and child health services have significantly reduced their availability to new mothers, other maternal supports are patchy, psychiatric services are directed to the seriously mentally ill...

The trend for women to elect early discharge has coincided with financial constraints and policy change introduced by the Kennett government. In the short-term, health services may reduce obstetric costs by a policy of early discharge, but when this is associated with a diminution of public health support provisions, as in the introduction of limited access to maternal and child health centres, the long-term consequences “... could lead to escalating health care costs” (Hickey et al., 1997).

iv) Cost-shifting between responsible government authorities. In the case of early discharge, the state government effectively reduces their expenditure, but imposes increased pressure on local government resources for the funding of maternal and child health centres. Additionally, the privatisation of hospital facilities threatened the existence of ‘the nation’s only unit for postnatal depression’ (‘Mercy postnatal unit faces the axe’, The Age, 18/3/1998:6). As Kay O’Sullivan suggests (Herald Sun, 30/3/1998:20), the State Government insists that the limited number of beds designated for treatment - eighteen for the entire state - is not threatened by a tender process which may result in the transfer of the eight bed Mercy Hospital Unit to a psychiatric facility. Nevertheless she concludes that a general psychiatric hospital is an unsuitable setting for both depressed mothers and their babies, and she raises conjecture “... of how the stigma of being admitted to a psychiatric hospital will cause women to shy away from seeking help” (idem).
Barbara Minto, the Unit manager, suggested that "... the safety of infants could be compromised if mothers and children were admitted to a psychiatric hospital" and she emphasised that the Unit always has capacity occupation rates, with a waiting list of six weeks, even for critical cases ('Fears over mother and baby unit', Herald Sun, 18/3/1998).  

The discussion paper on Victorian reform to psychiatric services excluded any mention of post-natal depression (Department of Health and Community Services, 1993), so the basis for radical policy change in hospitalisation and support services is not readily evident. In a working party report on post-natal care, the National Health and Medical Research Council (1996:29) was 'dismayed' by the trend, particularly in Victoria, "... to reduce the length of stay as a simple cost saving or shifting exercise", before adequate domiciliary care had been considered. Further, the NHMRC argued that women with unresolved breastfeeding problems should not be routinely discharged "... unless they are securely linked to an ongoing source of assistance" (idem), something which was not forthcoming in the user-pays Victoria of the 1990s.

d) Ageing as a health issue for women

Older women are the majority within the ageing population... Gender, plus social and economic factors have a profound impact on how people age and what options are available to them... Statistical evidence shows that most older women have experienced disadvantages in the past which have significant effects on their later years - effects which for many are ongoing.

Older Women's Network (1999:21)

Issues of ageing are gaining increasing urgency in Victoria, and Australia generally, with the 'greying' of our population. Statistical data from the last Women's Year Book published, in 1997, indicate that the median age for females has increased 5.7 years in the two decades from 1976 to 1996, and that the total population aged 65 years and over will almost double from twelve per cent of the population in 1996 to a projected twenty-three per cent by 2051 (Women's Year Book, 1997:4). The change in demographic spread is immediately discernible in the summary graphs of

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5 Ultimately in 1999 public pressure resulted in retention of the Unit to provide specialised services for mothers and babies together, but the question remains as to why its future was ever jeopardised.
population structure in 1996 compared to the projected population structure in 2051 (ibid 2) [Figure 6.1].

**Figure 6.1 : Population Structure : Australia a) 1996 and b) 2051 (projected)**

*a) 1996*

```
MALES  FEMALES

millions

0 to 9  10 to 19  20 to 29  30 to 39  40 to 49  50 to 59  60 to 69  70 to 79  80+
```

*b) Projected 2051*

```
MALES  FEMALES

millions

0 to 9  10 to 19  20 to 29  30 to 39  40 to 49  50 to 59  60 to 69  70 to 79  80+
```

Source : Australian Women's Year Book, 1997
During the past twenty years, a combination of low fertility rates and declining mortality rates has resulted in a significant change in the composition of the population. The distinct ageing of the population is projected to increase, with women predominating in the cohort of 65+ (fifty-six per cent of those aged 65+ in 1996 and 2051).

The trend in Victoria mirrors these statistics, with the age and sex distribution indicating the number of older women compared to older men [Figure 6.2].

Figure 6.2: Age and sex distribution of the Victorian population, 1993

Source: Victoria's Health - Second Report on the Health Status of Victorians

As the Older Women's Network paper explains (1999,21), this has serious implications for policy makers, especially in the health sector. It notes that (among other things):

- the majority of older women live on low incomes hand have few assets, and are reliant on a pension as their sole income;
- more older women live alone which increases the need for formal services: at 50 years fewer than five per cent of women are widowed, but this figure doubles for
each decade, so that by age 80 years, eighty per cent of women are widowed (See Figure 6.3),

- fewer older women than older men own their own accommodation,
- more older women live in social and/or rural isolation. they are more likely not to drive and are dependent on family/friends/public transport,

and

- more older women require Home and Community Care and other similar services due to their longevity.

(Adapted from: Older Women’s Network, 1999:21-24)

Figure 6.3 : Proportion of people living without a partner, Victoria 1991

![Graph showing proportion of people living without a partner by age group.]

Source: Victoria’s Health - Second Report on the Health Status of Victorians

Sara Arber (1998:60) outlined the impact of a gender discrepancy in income - which controls access to adequate diet, heating, appropriate housing as well as health care - and a gender difference in life expectancy on the health status of women. The combination of background factors results in women being over-represented in residential settings, and “[T]he gender differential in disability means that older women are more likely to require both informal health care and state health and welfare services” (Arber, 1998:65). This is reflected in the Australian data indicating age and sex profiles of both hostel residents (Figure 6.4) and nursing home
residents (Figure 6.5). These are expressed as percentages at each age cohort because women are more numerous at the older levels, their presence in both types of residential settings - or in need of special accommodation - significantly outnumbers men.

**Figure 6.4 :** Age and sex profile of hostel residents, Australia 1996

**Figure 6.5 :** Age and sex profile of nursing home residents, Australia 1996

Source: Redress 1999 v8 n2

The statistical details outlined above have consequences for the ageing population overall, but they are particularly significant for women in the older population age
groups. The system for welfare support in Australia, based on a targeted, means-tested payment scale, encourages 'more affluent and politically active groups' to pursue private provision for unemployment, ageing and associated social 'risks' (Jones, 1996:4). The groups who remain reliant on the state, including the aged, thus have minimal power to influence the direction of social policy. Michael Jones (idem) reasons that:

Despite their expanding numbers in an ageing society, the Australia aged and near-aged accept demeaning and intrusive tightening of means tests, pressures for early retirement and paternalistic policies to minimise the costs of care when they become fragile.

As I have emphasised, financial constraint on aged care by the state is extremely deleterious to the quality of life of older Victorian women, with the impact even greater for women who need care in special settings. A brief consideration of the composition of federal government outlay in the health portfolio, from 1983-84 to 1997-98, illustrates that despite the impact of 'ageing' the percentage of the health budget allocated to nursing homes has continued to decline (Figure 6.6).

**Figure 6.6 : Health composition, percentage of total health outlays, Australia 1983-84 to 1997-98**

![Health Composition Graph]

Source: Women's Audit Project, University Of Melbourne, 1999

Federal government responsibility for the health care of 'ageing' Australians was first introduced in 1951, and developed through a raft of legislation to encompass a range of supportive, but often 'confusing and overlapping' subsidies,
schemes and services (Dickey, 1987:153). In a consultation paper prepared by the Victorian Association of Health and Extended Care [VAHEC] (2000:3) growth in the number of nursing homes is linked to federal government 'encouragement', with funding options and intervention resulting in a doubling of nursing home beds (per 1000 of the population aged over 65) between 1963 and 1985.

Subsequent inquiries highlighted the 'haphazard manner' in which many programs and policies had been implemented and were critical of the lack of coordination of various levels of government (VAHEC,2000:4). As with other areas of welfare provision, this has tended to be evidenced by cost-shifting - and blame-shifting - principally between the state and federal governments. The present structure focuses on both residential and community care and reflects a "... mixed service provider sector - private, religious/charitable, local government and state government providers" (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 1999:4). The concept of service provision designed to counteract the "... excessive concentration on institutional accommodation rather than the development of comprehensive home and community care programs" (VAHEC,2000:4) is a positive approach. However, the concern persists that, to contain financial obligations, the move to reduce residential care will proceed before adequate structures are developed to provide essential support in home settings.

The information relating to policy and budgets in Victoria in the past two decades portrays this point quite graphically. Table 6.1 indicates comparative data on bed availability for nursing homes and hostels, for all Australian states and territories. Rates per 1000 are calculated using the population aged seventy and over and underline the restricted facilities available for aged care special accommodation. In 1991-92, Victoria had the second lowest rate for nursing home beds and the third lowest rate for hostel beds - both substantially below the Australian average (AIHC, 1994:158).
Table 6.1: Aged care bed rates, by state and type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution type</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUST</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged nursing homes</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostels</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AIHC, 1994

The apparent disadvantageous position for women in Victoria was compounded by the direction of health funding implemented by the Kennett Liberal government elected in 1992. The Health Minister at that time, Marie Tehan, was extremely critical of the federal government's 'acrimonious negotiations' for funding (1993:1), and specifically in the area of aged care, and accused her federal counterpart of "... turning off the tap and forcing the State to cover the cost of ever-increasing demand". Minister Tehan continued her discussion, commenting on combining a 'purchaser/provider split' with 'managed care' and open 'contestability' to provide 'choice', which she contended "... will provide a revolution in the economy and quality of health, welfare and aged care services in Victoria" (Tehan,1993:12).

Stirring stuff - if you can negotiate the rationalist language, but hardly reinforced by the findings of Linda Hancock and Sally Cowling in the Women's Audit Project (1999). Commenting on the shifts in public policy and the role of government in Victoria, they highlight:

... the dominance of market values and economic efficiency at the expense of other values such as access, social equity ... quality of services catering for the diversity of need, longer term sustainability and democratic participation in an open and accountable system.

Using data from the Commonwealth Grants Commission (1999), they portray a Victorian health system that trails significantly the expenditure levels in other states. After a marked initial reduction in real per capita expenditure on health in Victoria in the 1993-94 period, the level of expenditure has stabilised, but persists at a level vastly inferior to Australian states generally (Figure 6.7).
Figure 6.7: Real per capita expenditure on health 1993/94 to 1997/98

Source: Women's Audit Project, University of Melbourne 1999

The implications of this austerity is still more evident in the project's summary of real pre capita expenditure by sub-group (Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8: Real per capita expenditure on health by sub-group; 5 year growth rate 1993/4 to 1997/8

Source: Women's Audit Project, University of Melbourne 1999
This indicates a negative growth in nursing home per capita expenditure in the period under consideration of more than sixty per cent in Victoria. Despite the transfer of some aspects of aged care to the community health budget, this change is inadequate to compensate for the reduction in funding and, ultimately, service provision. The strategy of privatisation of publicly owned nursing home and hostel beds was criticised by the Australian Nursing Federation, who cited the closing of 120 aged care beds - in a system already struggling to provide adequate residential aged care facilities - as evidence of how 'inadequate funding was affecting public health services' ('More aged care beds go under privatisation plans', The Age, 11/7/1998:7).

In 1997, in response to a decrease in the Commonwealth aged care budget, the Victorian government proceeded with the deregulation of nurse/patient ratios in nursing homes. In a media report ('Elderly care crisis', Herald Sun, 1/6/1997:4) Belinda Morrieson, state secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation, claimed:

> In 1993, before the industry was deregulated by the Kennett Government, 10 per cent of staff were unqualified but it had now jumped to 50 per cent . . . [unqualified staff] are bathing and feeding our elderly who are in nursing homes . . . There's no doubt it's compromising patient care and it has the potential to endanger patients' lives.

This assertion was contested by a 'spokeswoman' for Rob Knowles, who had succeeded Marie Tehan as Minister for Health, who declared in the same article that "... Victoria had very high standards of care in nursing homes and hostels and intended to keep it that way" (idem). Yet, as The Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency reported in 1999, the worst nursing homes in the country were located in Victoria ('Shame of our homes', Herald Sun, 16/7/1999:1). Nursing homes were ranked in the areas of health and personal care, resident lifestyle and environment and safety. Of six homes receiving the lowest ranking in all three categories, five were Victorian; those homes identified as a serious risk in one or two categories were also concentrated in Victoria (idem). The apparent decline in care for elderly patients culminated in the distressing maltreatment of residents at Riverside Nursing Home - elderly patients were bathed in kerosene ('Riverside

Judith Healy (1998) queries the efficiency and effectiveness of privatised health services and uses the for-profit sector of aged care to focus on a range of considerations. Her research outlines the source of nursing homes beds in 1992; the government provided eighteen per cent, the voluntary sector thirty-five per cent and the largest stakeholder, the corporate sector, forty-seven per cent (Healy, 1998:43). The implementation of substantial government subsidies to private sector providers ensured the recognition of nursing homes as a desirable investment option and “... their proprietors became a strong lobby group who biased government policy towards residential rather than community services” (idem). Nevertheless, the system continued with some positive outcomes through the stringently regulated Labor years in the 1980s. The Liberal governments of the 1990s, federally and at the Victorian level, have implemented the language of economic rationalism and promoted ‘competition’ as the indicator of nursing home performance. Government impetus for deregulation, and the promotion of self-regulation, have resulted in an industry responsive to shareholders, but seemingly oblivious to the inadequacies of nursing home accreditation practices (‘Crisis in nursing homes’, *COTA*, 3/3/2000).

This coincided with the development of a federal government planning ratio late in the 1980s to address the over reliance on nursing home care by encouraging greater use of community care (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 1999:6), a transition which appears to be only marginally supported by budgetary decisions. The Howard government made substantial reductions to aged care funding in its first budget, including the implementation of ‘up-front’ payments to enter nursing homes in an extension of user-pays principles, increased pharmaceutical costs for pensioners and rises in fees for respite care and domiciliary services (‘Up-front fee for aged care’, *Herald Sun*, 21/8/1996:5). Comparison of data for 1985 and 1998 identifies a significant reduction in nursing home beds, which is only minimally offset by access to more hostel beds and community care packages and services (‘Aged care at home pays’, *Australian Financial Review*, 13/5/1998:14; Commonwealth of Australia, 1999).
The continuing marginalisation of services for particular sectors of the older group will be exposed as the rate of the increase in that population accelerates... [and]... is likely to be evident in respect for services for those people (predominantly women) in the age group 80 years and over, which has seen, and is projected to see, the largest percentage increase in population.

Alan Petersen (1994:87)

The position for women in Victoria, affected by the intersection of state and federal constraint in aged care, is ominous: a shortage of Commonwealth nursing home and hostel beds is already restricting older patients to 'inappropriately waiting in hospital wards for up to two months' (Thwaites, 2000:1). The Bracks Labor government, elected to office in Victoria in 1999, identifies ageing as one of the significant factors contributing to an increased reliance on the public health system, and affirms its commitment to provide an accessible, adequately funded and gender responsive health system (Office of Women's Policy, 2000:30). The well-being of many older Victorian women relies on it.

e) Breasts: myths and mixed messages

One aspect of women's health which presents a confusing and conflicting array of government input is breasts. Some of the issues which emerge are not necessarily directly linked to economic constraint or originate exclusively within government decision-making. Rather, there is a conglomeration of policy - or lack of policy - combined with mainstream beliefs, vested medical interests and social imperatives which impact negatively on women in relation to their mammary glands. Brigid McConville explains this clearly in the introduction to her research on the 'mixed messages' about breasts.

For many women breasts are a battleground, laid claim by men, medics and - occasionally - babies. Advertisers, porn and pin-up merchants, fashion designers, plastic surgeons and artificial milk manufacturers all struggle for control over this female place where the maternal and the erotic collide. But the chief contenders are men.

Brigid McConville (1994:xvi)

To this list of mainly male contenders, I would like to add politicians. Issues surrounding breast-feeding, mammography and breast cancer, cosmetic enhancement and the bared breast of advertising are implicitly political and evoke a range of responses from governments through legislation and funding. Perhaps most
contentious emotionally - and healthwise - is the politicisation of mammography and breast cancer generally.

My intention is neither to advocate for, nor discount, the importance of breast screening through mammograms, but to outline the process which has established screening as ‘politically correct’ and ‘a good way for politicians to show their concern for women’s issues’ (Napoli, quoted in Altman, 1996:128). Prime Minister John Howard, addressing a National Breast Cancer Day fundraiser, promised that the government would consider extending a free mammogram service to under 40s to increase early detection (‘Young breast cancer attack plans’, The Weekend Australian, 28-29/10/2000:13). Yet most research clearly indicates that screening for women under 50 years is anything but an exact science and certainly not cost-effective (The Lancet, 5/6/1999:1996). Further, the ‘enthusiastic promotion’ of screening has encouraged unrealistic expectations of its accuracy (Cancer Weekly, 1/1/1999), and clouds the distinction between ‘prevention’ and ‘diagnosis’ (Curve, 2000:26). Although the levels of radiation used in mammography have continued to decrease, there is an established link between radiation and breast cancer: one researcher argues that “… the breast in premenopausal women is 40 times more sensitive to radiation than the breast in postmenopausal women” (Epstein, quoted in Altman, 1996:78). This indicates that efforts to lower the age at which mammograms are deemed ‘necessary’ may actually place young women at greater risk.

Challenging the extension of screening programs may initially appear to contradict feminist principles of identifying and supporting health issues related to women’s well-being. However, in this discussion it seems relevant to understand that consistently the focus is on diagnosis and treatment rather than prevention. Andrea Wass (1991:59) considers that in contemporary Australian health care delivery, mammography is being actively marketed as the solution to breast cancer, and a perusal of media articles would support this observation. The National Breast Cancer Centre reviewed Australian press coverage of breast cancer for a three month period in 1995 (NBCC information paper, 1995). They located 333 articles, many of which focused on early detection through mammograms and the range of risk factors
period in 1995 (NBCC information paper, 1995). They located 333 articles, many of which focused on early detection through mammograms and the range of risk factors for developing the disease, but with a decided emphasis on young women with breast cancer - the personalised, newsworthy stories (idem). Headlines proclaiming 'Breast cancer a big risk for younger women' (The Age, 23/10/2000:30) provoke anxiety and demonstrate the powerful control structures involved in the entire breast cancer debate. The concern for the 'sexual appearance' of young women is evident.

From this it may follow that "... the way that our breast health problems are treated cannot be separated from the way we think of our breasts - and the way we think of women" (McConville, 1994:255). The perpetuation of an 'obsession with breasts' through the media creates a cultural bias which impacts quite definitively on women's self-image. Diagnosis and subsequent treatment for breast cancer 'injures' the self-esteem of women (Gates, quoted in Altman, 1996:244), and while this may be acknowledged for younger women, the impact of radical surgery may be deemed less traumatic for older women. The negative images which are constantly revealed in breast cancer discourse have the effect of 'rendering symptomless women potential victims' (NBCC discussion paper, 1995), a control mechanism not unlike the 'woman as potential rape victim'.

The people with the power to make decisions about breast care - whether as doctors, health administrators or politicians - are mostly men. But the people with most at stake in breast care are women.

Brigid McConville (1994:254)

Women also have much at stake in other areas of health care. While breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer death for females (7.6) it is a distant third in comparison to other leading causes of female death (See Figure 6.9). While 7.6 per cent of women die from breast cancer, 92.4 per cent die from other causes, and while the 'popularism' of breast cancer has directed public attention to women's health issues, the problem is more complex than 'funding for earlier detection'. Nor

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6 Both Brigid McConville (1994) and Roberta Altman (1996) give excellent and detailed analysis of the arguments concerning screening programs for women under 50 years.
is the rate for breast cancer deaths increasing in comparison to other causes. The rate has remained constant between 1985 and 1995, while the lung cancer death rate for women has increased thirty-seven per cent. In England the lung cancer mortality rate has actually overtaken the breast cancer rate (Ananova website, 6/11/2000).

Figure 6.9: Leading causes of female death, Australia 1995

Source: Australian Women's Year Book, 1997

The significance of this data indicating death rates and health trends is important in the discussion of women's well-being. The concentration of funding and public concern on a single health care issue - albeit a devastating one - restricts the funding available for a broader range of woman-specific services, particularly in primary and preventative care (Short, 1991:73). As Leonie Short describes it:

What is required is a holistic and empowering strategy to meet women's health needs; not a degrading and disease-oriented service. Indeed, some women do not like the effect of having separate parts of their bodies searched regularly for a disease which is synonymous with fear and death... And even some of the successes which have

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7 This is distinct from a small but perceptible increase in the number of women diagnosed with breast cancer. Although Leonie Short (1991:72) suggest that screening also detects 'excess' cancers, i.e. early cancers that are found would not have become clinically apparent in the woman's natural lifetime.
been claimed, for example, the decreased rate of radical mastectomy, may as easily be attributed to social changes such as the feminist movement.

Leonie Short (1991:74)

The latter point is supported by Deborah Altman (1996:169). She is critical of the continuing ‘slash, burn, poison’ treatment for breast cancer, and she argues that the few changes to treatment have impacted only marginally on mortality rates. Women are being empowered to take responsibility for their own health decisions, but need accurate and practical support to make informed choices. Steve Dow asks with some justification (‘Are women being failed by poor breast cancer research?’ The Age, 12/3/2000:9): ‘Where are the advances in breast care?’ He notes that despite talk of ‘breakthroughs’, treatment has advanced only minimally in the past thirty years. While the data does not support a link between socio-economic status and breast cancer (Kricker & Jelfs, 1996:35), poverty would appear to contribute to some risk factors associated with diet, exposure to environmental pollution and other lifestyle factors - factors that government policy is reluctant to address.

In an article in Health Sharing Women (1998), Sue Lockwood and Mavis Tassiker outline some of the problems which confront women with breast cancer: insensitive medical practitioners, poor diagnosis and inadequate information and rural women with limited access to radiotherapy who feel compelled to opt for mastectomy. They indicate the propensity for researchers to concentrate on risk factors over which women are substantially powerless (e.g. age at menarche) as prevention research is ‘too hard’ and decidedly underfunded, and the research agenda is effectively controlled by drug companies (ibid.2). Marcia O’Keefe, the woman behind the Breast Cancer Action Group, warned that “… unless women take action to influence the course of events, they may well find their lives dependent on hormone manipulation by a medical profession that does not respect their

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5 One large study linked a commonly used pesticide as a causal agent for breast cancer. Dieldrin has constituents which mimic estrogen, and this study supports the hypothesis that exposure to manufactured estrogen is a risk factor (Feminist Majority Online, 12/4/1998). Another study demonstrated a link between environmental contaminants produced by petrol and oil combustion and also present in cigarette smoke which caused the growth of cancerous cells and breast tissue damage (ibid. 31/7/2000)

6 Marcia O’Keefe lost her struggle against cancer in 1999, but her support/action group has continued.
womanhood" (ibid, 3), supported by a government prepared to advocate chemical ‘cures’. In a media release (25/10/1998), Federal Health Minister Michael Woolridge has provided some cause for optimism, pledging to provide further funding for research and treatment, with a number of support services targeting women in rural areas.

More problematic is the Minister’s statement that ‘early detection is still the first line of defence against this disease’. In a further press release (30/4/1999) he discussed screening, surgery, radiation and ‘widespread use of tamoxifen’ as positives in ‘the fight to beat breast cancer’. What was noticeably absent was any mention of prevention and preventative research or input from women in the formulation of government policy. It is crucial that women are directly involved in the decision-making process. Through groups like the Breast Cancer Action Group and the Breast Cancer Network Australia, the potential for women to command ‘a seat at the table’ is improved (Lockwood & Tassicker 1998:2). Despite the apparent legitimacy accorded some women’s health issues at the state policy level, this does not necessarily ‘auger well’ for women (Wass, 1991:50).

For, while these developments may have sprung from politicians with the best of intentions, the manner in which they are being implemented may do more to exploit women than empower them.

Andrea Wass (idem)

To paraphrase Michael Woolridge, surely ‘the first line of defence’ against breast cancer is to prevent women getting it at all.

6.4: WOMEN AS HEALTH CARERS: CONSUMERS BY PROXY

Women are seen as primarily responsible for maintaining the health of their families, and as informal, unpaid carers they play a major role in caring for the sick, the disabled, the elderly and other dependent groups.

Pamela Abbott & Claire Wallace (1997:189)

Women’s roles as unpaid carers within the family and the wider community have been an historical feature of the sexual division of labour in Australia, but as Pamela
Abbott and Claire Wallace indicate, assumptions regarding women’s capacity to perform unpaid health care work is simultaneously prefaced on a 'spatial division of labour' also (idem). This identifies the local community as the appropriate setting for routine health care, and women as unpaid health providers, rather than centralised medical institutions: the unrelenting surge towards ‘deinstitutionalisation’ and ‘community care’ increasingly evident in constrained health budgets. Accepting that this has been a traditional task for women does not negate the extent of positive social change in community health services, nor the rapidity with which these gains are being eradicated at all government levels. Maintaining the integrity of comprehensive, targeted health programs appears ideologically incompatible with the promotion of market provision.

Commenting on the revival of health promotion and prevention in the late 1980s, Dorothy Broom (1988) outlined how this reasserted a social control function which appropriated women’s labour and expanded their responsibilities as ‘unpaid domestic workers’. Instead of retaining and expanding the function of the state as health care providers, during periods of economic ‘crises’11 reduced funding reasserts pressure on the ‘community’ - that is women - to assume responsibility for unpaid caring. Janet Finch and Dulcie Groves (1985:224) refer to this as ‘the double equation’, where community care equates to care by the family, but in reality family care assumes care by women. Such policy implements key conservative concepts of both ‘community’ and ‘family’, to mask the voluntary services women provide within the context of the nuclear family. Ominously, the reassertion of women’s caring responsibilities is occurring as women are assuming a more prominent role in the paid workforce, which has serious implications for the capacity for women to pursue employment opportunities.

It is ironic . . . that women are being used as carers by the state to
implement its health policies, with inadequate support services such as childcare and with increasing expectations of care of the frail and handicapped at home, rather than in institutions.

Betsy Wearing (1996: 206)

The closure of antiquated and inappropriate state funded institutional settings has some positive merit. The Liberal government’s commitment to reducing the number of people in institutional care has the reserved support of both the Opposition and the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with a Disability (‘State to close centre for the disabled’, The Age, 8/10/1996) but they expressed extreme concern that such initiatives would flounder without adequate funding and the “... so-called additional funding [by the Government] does not match the cuts they have already made” (idem). The consequences of decisions in the area of disability care were illustrated by a Herald Sun report (‘This is breaking point’, 27/6/1997:19). Strict state guidelines for housing the intellectually disabled has resulted in the closure of many ‘institutional’ units, with residents forced to stay at home or enter community residential units [CRUs]. “The CRUs are in serious short supply and in many areas non-existent ... they will accept only extreme cases, those who have been abused or deserted, or have bad patterns of behaviour” (idem). Some parents, many aged in their 60s, 70s and even 80s, estimate that at the present rate of placements, their children have an average waiting period of 279 years!

However, they are not the only carers to experience the frustration and restrictions resulting from state funding constraints. Kristin Owen, in a media report (“Child aid wait despair”, Herald Sun, 17/3/1998:21) relates how a number of distraught Victorian families “... are considering giving up their disabled children because they have to wait up to 12 months for vital therapy”. Opposition family services spokesperson Christine Campbell revealed that there were lengthy waiting lists for early intervention programs, which provide professional support for disabled children under six years (ibid). This compounded the isolation for many families affected by the closure of information services for the disabled the previous year. Funding cuts by the Kennett government, to encourage “... departments to rigorously assess the priority of all services and to examine ways to achieve similar outcomes in a more effective and efficient manner ...” resulted in the dislocation of
information and support services and the elimination of all state funded advocacy workers in rural Victoria (‘State slashes disabled funds’, The Age, 26/6/1997 A5).

A consultation paper, prepared by Julie Hassard (1995) researched the position of women caring for those with psychiatric illness. It emphasised how carers ‘contribute an enormous amount of themselves’ often to the detriment of their own well-being, and too frequently amidst feelings of ‘loss, shock, grief and loneliness’ and the stigma of mental illness (ibid 7). One aspect considered in the study is vitally important to the discussion of caring, never evident in the formulation of state policy, but one which demonstrates systemic disregard for women’s personal autonomy.

Carers should be given the choice as to whether or not they want to take on the caring role. Too often in all caring situations, it is assumed that the closest relative, usually the wife, mother, sister or daughter, will automatically take on this enormous task.

Julie Hassard (1995:18)

Women who participated in the study by the Victorian Trades Hall Council [VTHC] (1999) gave personal testimony to how the cultural expectations of women-as-carers created a stressful family environment. Frequently, families were reliant on a dual income, so that ‘not working’ was not a realistic economic option (ibid,22). Health funding which resulted in hospital practice of early discharge placed incredible - and usually unacknowledged - responsibility on women attempting to combine paid employment with family caring responsibilities (ibid,24). Routinely, the reduction in the length of hospital stay and a concomitant need for home care demands an increase in government support services not evident in budgetary decision-making (Hogg, 1990:20). Survey findings which indicated that carers ‘run an increased risk of premature death’ and suffer ‘physical and mental illnesses’ (‘Caring for the sick can shorten life, says study’, The Age, 30/3/2000:10) appear a predictable consequence of the increasing reliance on ‘community care’ to compensate for the shortfall in government services and support.

This issue is expanded by Michael Jones (1996:5) who identifies women’s vested interest in the welfare state “... because they provide most of the caring services, especially for children, the aged, the sick and the disabled” It seems that
initial forays into socialised caring in these areas, are being diminished by 'significant' government resistance to the high levels of state expenditure necessary for full implementation of appropriate services.

High costs of state caring mean a search for solutions... Carers are offered a poverty line 'carer's pension' to provide care at a fraction of the cost incurred by state care. Bureaucratic structures and careers for women are sacrificed, as governments favour informal family-based systems...

Michael Jones (idem)

The Australian federal government has paid a minimal care's pension since 1973, a benefit deemed as 'a recognition rather than a payment', the value of which has eroded substantially, despite the activism of carer groups (Healy, 1998:79). In 1998, there was in fact an increase in funding of approximately $4 billion over four years for services and income support to enable aged and disabled people to remain within the community ('Extra funding for at-home support', The Age, 13/5/1998:6), however there is the notion that community care programs are exploitative rather than supportive of carers (Healy, 1998:80). Carers Taskforce Australia (2000) estimates that the government/taxpayer saves $16.6 billion annually through appropriation of the unpaid labour of carers who are predominately female, and voluntary support agencies. Respondents to a survey by the Australian Council of Social Services [ACOSS] were critical of an emerging trend for cost-shifting of welfare services from government to users of those services.

This latest survey... shows a 3.5% increase in the percentage of income that agencies derive from fees charged to their clients, at the same time there is a 4% decrease in the percentage of their income derived from the government.

ACOSS (Media release, 2000)

The consequences for carers, reliant on services provided by volunteer agencies, remains unspecified and invisible.

6.5: WOMEN AS HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS: THE REALITY OF WORKPLACE REFORM

...women are under medical dominance and control in the medical division of labour, whether they are paid workers in the public sphere or unpaid workers in the domestic one.

Pamela Abbott & Claire Wallace (1997:190)
a) The Medical Division of Labour

To comprehend the relevance of policy-making in health care as it relates to those employed in the sector, it is essential to understand the existing structure of the 'health' workplace. Women are the major providers of labour for the health industry, an industry second only to the retail industry in the employment of women in Australia. Deborah Saltman (1991:55) notes that women may constitute the majority of workers in health care, but they continue to be grossly under-represented at the decision-making and management levels. This may be partly explained by the location of women within the health care workforce: men dominate in the 'high prestige area' of medicine in an extremely gendered industry (Petersen, 1994:30). Women dominate in nursing and while nurses account for almost seventy per cent of all those in the health care industry, health organisations severely restrict the opportunity for non-medical staff to actively contribute to the policy process (Keleher, 1994:370). The following statistics indicate the emphatic sexual division of labour so prevalent in health care in Australia and they support a viewpoint that consequently social and economic change in public health policy may be experienced quite differently by women and men.

Table 6.2: Persons employed in selected health occupations/proportions by sex in Australia 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Persons (Number)</th>
<th>Females (Per cent)</th>
<th>Males (Per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical practitioners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPs</td>
<td>25 450</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists</td>
<td>13 350</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>39 670</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>139 370</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental nurses</td>
<td>9 950</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>6 720</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Petersen (1994:31)
b) Nursing as a Career

Nursing is today, ninety-four per cent female, and much of its occupational identity is derived from community attitudes towards women. the pattern of remuneration, the limited autonomy, the restricted opportunities for career progression, the limited inclusion of nurses in the determination of professional practice and conditions all reflect community expectations of women’s place within the public arena.

Fay Marles (1989:14)

In her discussion of the politics of nursing in Victoria, Fay Marles (1989) outlined many of the contentious issues that confronted women in the nursing service at the end of the 1980s. What I personally find so challenging about her comments is that they were made prior to the comprehensive restructuring of the health system during the 1990s, in Victoria and Australia-wide. Her observations were eerily prophetic, for many of the points that she emphasised gained even greater substance, particularly in the Kennett years in Victoria.

David White, the Labor Minister for Health in 1988 had pledged state government support for the recommendations of the Study of Professional Issues in Nursing [SPIN], to increase the educational status of the nursing workforce and move towards greater professionalisation (Marles,1989:37). This commitment would demand ‘major government expenditure’ (idem), particularly in the context of the slowed growth in the nursing workforce. The rate of growth in the nursing workforce between 1981 and 1986 had decreased to 14.5%, and between 1986 and 1991 this had been curtailed further to a mere 3.5%¹ (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1994:153), mainly as a result of restructuring in the hospital sector and the transfer of nurse education to tertiary institutions (ibid.152). However, the Labor government was removed from office at the election following the SPIN report, leaving many of the initiatives incomplete and underfunded.

What ensued was described by Belinda Morieson, secretary of the Victorian Branch of the Nursing Federation, as ‘a battle royal between nurses and the Victorian Government’ (Morison,1997:44). Despite pre-election pledges that a Liberal government would retain all award entitlements for nursing staff and permit

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¹ These rates for nursing workforce growth compared unfavourably with the increase in other health professionals, e.g. medical practitioners - 17% and 18.3% for the same periods.
either individual or union negotiation on salary and conditions, the election of the 
Kennett government heralded the introduction of The Employee Relations Act 
(1992) which eradicated the award system in favour of individual or collective 
‘agreements’ (Morieson, 1997:44). Although Victorian nurses were granted the 
Federal Award in December 1992, new corporate and competitive public hospital 
policy resulted in reduced funding, constraints on staffing levels and the introduction 
of ‘more flexible work practices’ (idem).

The position of women in the Victorian nursing service reflected the worst 
aspects of what had already occurred in New Zealand: the devaluation of nursing 
care, wage restraint, individual contracts, growth in part-time and casualised nursing 
positions and difficulty in maintaining quality care for patients (Mackenzie, 1992:33). 
The casual observer might conclude that the New Zealand model provided a 
blueprint for the emerging ‘reform’ in Victoria, although privatisation/ 
corporatisation of health services was gaining credence internationally.

In many parts of the world reductions in public expenditure over 
the last decade have increased the pressure on nurses. Both 
hospitals and community services are often understaffed, so that 
the pace of work is speeded up for individual nurses who feel 
unable to care adequately for their patients.

Lesley Doyal (1994:76)

Australian nurses had ‘buried’ the image of ‘female, middle-class 
conservatism’ during the 1980s, with industrial action to improve career structures 
(Healy, 1998:84), but despite the increased activism, the influence of the nursing 
workforce on government policy was minimal. However, as the 1990s progressed, 
the circumstances for Victorian nurses continued to deteriorate, with hospital 
closures reducing employment opportunities² (‘13 go in a decade of cuts’, Herald 
Sun, 18/10/1996:7). The Victorian branch of the Australian Nursing Federation 
confirmed that up to twenty-three per cent of public hospital nursing positions were 
eliminated between 1992 and 1997, and the patient/nurse ratio had ‘blown out’ from 
6:1 to 10:1 (‘Silent saints no more’, Herald Sun, 6/8/1997:19). Industrial action by

² Between 1987 and 1996 at least thirteen hospitals had been closed. While some of these were in 
smaller, rural settings, they also included Queen Victoria, Brighton Community and Springvale 
nurses and ancillary staff in 1996 and 1997 gained some concessions, limited drastically by the continuity of funding cuts. Evidence also emerged of nurses abandoning the public system, frustrated by the intensification of their roles, the deterioration of equipment and a decline in staff support (idem).

George Palmer and Stephanie Short (1994:158) relate how studies suggest that:

... nursing turnover and job dissatisfaction have been linked with political and organisational problems relating to nursing's under-representation in hospital decision making and management.

Under the broad directives of the Kennett government, the market model with its emphasis on 'efficiency' and 'competition' ignored criticism which identified the increased stress for nurses from work-related reforms where their interests were systematically ignored (Hancock, 1999:53). Alan Petersen (1994:154) highlighted the essential nature of nursing for modern medicine's functioning and supported change strategies which acknowledge and 'make visible' women's real contribution to health care.

To ignore the very real crisis that has evolved in the nursing profession may be at our peril, for the critical shortage of qualified staff and its detrimental impact on patient care appears set to escalate, with nurses "... leaving the system frustrated at not being able to do their job properly or burnt out and fed up with long hours, double shifts and unpaid overtime"3 ('Nursing in crisis', Herald Sun, 6/11/1999:54). A disturbing report indicated that more Victorian nurses have become drug, alcohol or gambling dependent, and the numbers suffering mental illness had also risen ('More nurses turn to drugs: report', The Age, 15/10/2000). A representative of the Australian Nursing Federation commented that "... the increased number of health complaints surprised her only because it was so small" considering the stress imposed on the nursing community (idem). In her occasional column (Herald Sun, 12/8/2000:24), Kay O'Sullivan concluded:

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3 It would be informative to research the negative impact of these changes on recruitment, e.g. are student applications increasing/decreasing?; have tertiary entrance scores of successful student applicants changed?; how many newly qualified nurses are taking their skills 'off-shore' to work overseas?
It is a miracle that we have any nurses left given their pay, their conditions and the lack of rewards and respect the profession has been shown... The signs are ominous...

c) Is medicine a woman-friendly labour market?

The increasing trend towards greater female participation in the Australian medical workforce is of no overall concern to the Working Party, indeed, it is a desirable trend on equity grounds alone, and as one aspect to ensuring that Australians have adequate access to quality medical services and choice in the selection of practitioner.

AMWAC (1996:2).

Historically women had been excluded from the study of medicine and, despite an increase in the number of female clinicians, statistical data indicates that aspects of exclusion within the practice of medicine persist. Women now account for almost twenty-eight per cent of the clinician workforce in 1999 - an increase from twenty-five per cent in 1993 - and as Figure 6.10 illustrates, in contrast to male clinicians, they are concentrated in the field of primary care and hospital non-specialist positions (AMWAC, 1996). Projected figures, based on the proportion of female medical students, predict a rapid rise in the number of female GPs over the next decade, with career paths and employment patterns for women that are 'dramatically different' to their male colleagues (AIHW, 1999).

**Figure 6.10**: Clinicians working in medicine, by job field and sex, 1994

![Bar chart showing distribution of clinicians by job field and gender.]

Source: AMWAC Working Party (1996:45)
As well as an inequitable distribution in job field, there are existing numerical inequities in comparative rates for female and male clinicians. As Figure 6.11 indicates, in the majority of states and territories the female/male ratio is approximately 1:3, which has implications for findings "... that restricted access to female practitioners may affect outcomes ...", especially in the case of young rural women (Bryson & Warner-Smith,1998).

Figure 6.11: Clinicians working in medicine per 100,000 male and female

Source: AMWAC Advisory Committee (1996:46)

However, the relative 'shortage' of female practitioners proscribes the opportunity for health choices for all women, a health care issue not readily identified. Additionally, transforming what Rosemary Pringle (1998:22) identifies as 'direct masculine exclusionary practices' in medicine is problematic when women continue to be under-represented. She specifically rejects the notion that female clinicians display 'advanced feminist consciousness' (ibid 221), but maintains that women do make an identifiable 'difference' to medical policy.

There remains a large gap between the 'feminism' embraced by women doctors and that of women's health activists but the groups are drawing closer together.

Rosemary Pringle (1998:222)
Women in medicine, working from a feminist perspective, are unlikely to feel supported by an institution which overtly retains work patterns and career opportunities based on the male model of medical practice (ibid, 257). The difference in female medical practitioners’ work practices contributed to a perceived need for a national medical workforce advisory committee for informing ‘Governments, Learned Colleges and Tertiary Institutions’ on matters related to supply and demand and workforce planning (AMWAC, 1996: v). This committee indicated a range of ‘potentially negative trends’, some of which they addressed in their report, and suggested that “... the majority of the other issues of concern require the monitoring of current trends and/or further research, rather than a policy response at this time” (ibid: 5). In its concluding remarks the Advisory Committee (AMWAC, 1996:18) iterates a concern for the ‘maldistribution’ of women within the current medical workforce, both geographically and in the field of medicine in which they are employed. For the year in which this data was collated (1994), seventy-nine per cent of female clinicians were located in capital cities, while only sixty-four per cent of females were resident in these areas. As Figure 6.12 demonstrates, for clinicians over twenty-nine years of age, females have a significantly higher proportion in urban settings than their male colleagues.

Figure 6.12: Percentage of clinicians in capital cities and other major urban areas, by age and sex, 1994

Source: AMWAC Advisory Committee (1996:7)
The combination of factors of urban geographical combination, concentration in primary care and a shorter working week - all characteristics of women in the medical workforce - has already resulted in critical shortages which are projected to intensify with the upward trend of women entering medical schools (Clearihan, 1999). Mainstream argument may dismiss these ‘characteristics’ as evidence of women’s ‘choice’, and in fact there has been criticism of, and resentment towards, women because of their career practices (idem). However, a senior medical educator, Jane Talbot (1997), had warned about limiting the discussion to issues of supply and distribution, while ignoring women’s unique place in medicine and how they interact with existing structures.

The science upon which medicine is based, the values which drive it, the organisational patterns which sustain training and professional development and the reward structures have all been developed on the basis of men’s experiences... there has been little place or recognition of the input of women and in addition to the social pressures women face, there are structural and cultural barriers from within the profession itself.

Jane Talbot (1997)

What appears to be absent in much of this discussion is evidence of comprehensive qualitative research, to unravel and address the complexities of the problem, both as one of supply/demand and as an employment issue for women.

One pilot study, conducted in 1997, focused on gender differences in the recruitment and retention of rural primary care practitioners, and concluded that the difficulties in rural practice were compounded for women (‘Women in rural general practice: conflict and compromise’, eMJA, 2000). The study promoted the need for rural practice ‘to be structured to reflect the ways in which women practise medicine’ (idem). This was supported in a review of women in the medical workforce by Linda Levitt (Online paper, date unknown) which confirmed the perpetuation of the male medical model, and also specifically commented on a working party for Women in Rural Practice [WIRP]. Their policy paper ‘Women in Rural Practice’ (1998) sought positive strategies “... to redress the under supply of

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4 Similar dissent is evident in other western countries: e.g. in England, Tory health spokesman, Philip Hammond claimed that ‘you get less work out of women doctors’ so if the Minister is promising more doctors ‘you need to ask him what gender they are going to be’ (Furore over claim that women doctors work less. The Herald [UK], October 2000).
rural female practitioners by increasing the understanding of the values and experiences that attract women doctors to rural practice” (quoted by Levett, Online paper, undated). Qualitative data supported information which suggested that women were ‘willing to work in rural and remote practice providing they had input into the structure and the culture of the practice’ (idem).5 Rural practice possibly places even greater stress on women attempting to combine the multiple roles of doctors with their responsibility for family care, and all within male-defined medical hierarchies.

Assistance for women to go and remain in rural practice should include support for local and remote networks which provide discussion, support, locums, education and personal support . . . women rural practitioners want specific training in self-care, assertiveness, prioritising commitments, dealing with role conflict, relaxation strategies, and training in how to deal with threatening, difficult and dangerous situations.

Linda Lovett (Online paper, undated)

Despite the limitations of research, there is an obvious urgency for government policy which reflects the reality of current medical workforce composition, and formulates cohesive strategies to accommodate women’s specific needs, to ensure the maintenance of a quality system. However, the response at the federal and state level has been less than reassuring. In 1996, the Liberal federal government proposed legislation to reduce the number of medicare provider numbers to counter a perceived ‘oversupply’ of urban primary care practitioners. Dr Michael Woolridge, the federal Health Minister, was scathing in his dismissal of opposition, contending that budgetary constraints precluded ‘open slather’ of doctors in training accessing provider numbers to ‘moonlight’ as GPs (‘Young doctors join rally’, The Age, 2/11/1996:8). This action, to limit provider numbers, was labelled as an inadequate reaction to healthcare provision and ‘discriminatory’ against female doctors (‘Women to miss out on jobs, says AMA’, The Age, 19/10/1996 4, ‘Female doctors cry foul’, Herald Sun, 2/11/1996: 24), for whom

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5 Positive key elements identified in the discussion included: community control, mainly women on health staff, daily practice is varied and unpredictable; thee importance of special grants and organised locum services (Levett, Online report, undated). The Rural Incentives program, to provide support for GPs in rural areas, remains underfunded (‘Rural health forgotten by Canberra: GPs’, The Age, 28/5/1998:11).
future study may conflict with family responsibilities. There were further concerns that the limitation on ‘urban’ provider numbers might be implemented as a ‘quick fix’ to the shortage in rural localities. Young practitioners might be ‘encouraged’ to accept a rural position, complete with a town-specific provider number rather than no provider number at all. The National Rural Health Alliance (‘Need to focus on integrated policies for rural health shortage’, Media release, 23/2/1999) was critical of policy that would limit or reduce the availability of provider numbers in cities, effectively enforcing compulsory redistribution of medical practitioners. They hinted that while this may prove appealing to rural populations, the situation was complex and general professional opposition resolute.

Controlling the number of practitioners and their location through restriction on provider numbers appears a retrograde scheme as it:
i) impacts differently on prospective employment opportunities for women and men;
ii) does not address the discrepancies in practitioner/population ratios from state to state;
iii) ignores the disadvantageous circumstances which deter practitioners, especially women, from working in rural areas;
iv) is based on undefined and arbitrary perceptions of ‘oversupply’ of primary care practitioners;
v) effectively ignores what research is available and
vi) reflects decision-making based entirely on economic considerations.

It also problematises the supportive response by the Health Minister to a scheme implemented in Victoria for attracting ‘well qualified overseas trained doctors’ to provide services under ‘conditional registration’ in areas of shortage (‘Country Victoria getting the doctors it needs’, Media release, 27/8/1999). The ranking of priority issues by the Inaugural Women in General Practice Conference (2000), with emphasis on flexibility in training and work, mentorship and ‘representation with validity in policy making, education and leadership’ exemplified the divergence in state policy and women’s participation.

Full justice for women requires that they have an equal opportunity for professional success after acceptance to medical school. Women should be able to achieve more equitable representation across the medical profession. Current demographic projections predict that
if professional development and participation by women are not achieved, the workforce as a whole will not fulfil the needs of a well resourced health service.


There is scant evidence to demonstrate any such commitment by governments - state or federal - to tackle the inherent systemic sexual division of labour. As the ensuing section on health care funding proposes, quantity, quality and equity for consumers, carers and providers will be hampered by the burden of poor employment practices - for both nursing and medical staff.

6.6: 'A CRISIS IN HEALTH? NEGOTIATING THE MAZE OF HEALTHCARE FUNDING

A crisis exists when the important policy makers perceive that one exists, that it is a real and threatening crisis, and that failure to act could lead to even more disastrous consequences.

Gill Walt (1994:58)

Crisis theory is the foundation stone of economic rationalism, and this is never more evident than in the area of health care funding. The recurring questions which arise in the debate for increased/decreased budgetary allocation focus on the responsibility of governments in the provision of health care, and whether indeed politics can be separated from policy (Walt, 1994:1). As a research group from the Centre for Health Program Evaluation (1996:62) reasoned:

The conclusion we do reach with confidence is that economists and others with influence in the health care sector are not acting as value free social scientists recommending policies based upon the values and preferences of the society.

A comprehensive account of the evolution of health funding policy, spanning the past two decades, is not the purpose of this research. However, in attempting to negotiate the maze of health care funding, it is important to identify the underlying power and process which shapes policy decisions, and explore the 'incrementalism' or 'muddling through' adjustments which are 'politically safe' and popularly 'expedient' (Palmer & Short, 1994:30). The evolution of many aspects of health care policy gives credence to the persuasive influence of both the medical profession and the corporate sector. It establishes how "... policymaking is inevitably influenced
by the demands of powerful structural interests in the market place” (Palmer & Short, 1994:84) and demonstrates how policy is represented, without question, as gender-neutral (and class-neutral).

The Australian system is fragmented, characterised by a complex historical balance of federal and state responsibility for financing and administering health care provision. Contemporary funding issues have resulted directly from concern about the relationship between public and private sectors and the appropriate role for each level of government (Palmer & Short, 1994:22), and it is these tensions which have been continuously negotiated and contested in the political arena. Jeff Richardson (1998:3) argues that the Australian health sector exemplifies cost and blame shifting between state and federal governments, more concerned with ‘financial objectives’ than providing an egalitarian system of health care. This appears to have contributed to substantial pressure for the free market provision of economic rationalist ideology.

In Victoria, The Institute of Public Affairs prepared a report (1992) extremely critical of government ‘overspending’ on ‘excessive staffing levels’ and ‘inefficient work practices’. Promoting an enhanced ‘corporatisation program’, the report concluded that Victorian expenditure, which was above the standardised expenditure of other states, probably reflected ‘inefficiency in service delivery’ rather than higher quality service. The solution provided by this think-tank included contracting out to improve efficiency and the establishment of ‘a competitive market in the supply of public health services’ (ibid:7). The Kennett government, elected late in 1992, wasted no time in implementing market policies in a shift away from a redistributive government role and a substantial ‘reform’ of per capita expenditure on health [See Figure 6.7].

The Liberal mini-budget in April 1993 included projected savings in the health portfolio of $381.7m over two years, predominantly through reduced staffing in public hospitals and the closure of ‘inefficient’ hospitals (Harkness, 1999:204).

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6 Diane Horvath (1992) commented that “Australia has just about the most mixed (or mixed up) health care system in the world!”

7 Palmer & Short (1994) and Scotton and Macdonald (1993) both provide detailed accounts of the development of the health service bureaucracy and Australia’s unique system of voluntary/compulsory health insurance.
This appears to contradict the ‘promise’ by Marie Tehan [then Health Minister]: “I can give my unequivocal assurance that neither I nor my Department has any plans to shut any hospitals in Victoria” (Hansard, April 1993, quoted by Thwaites, 1999). However, a range of other health and community services, many specifically provided for women, were also less fortunate. Budgetary ‘constraints’ resulted in reduced funding or defunding for programs and services including:

- thirty-four state day nurseries - defunded
- the Grey Sisters crisis program to support mothers/children - defunded
- Poverty Action Program (twenty-six programs throughout Victoria) - defunded
- Community Health Centres - funding reduced between 2-70 per cent, with inner city/high frequency centres receiving the most substantial cuts
- Nursing Mothers Association of Australia - reduced funding
- Women’s Health Service of the West - thirty per cent funding cut
- Healthsharing Women - reduced funding
- Welcoming Women - 12% reduction
- Women in Industry and Community Health - 8 per cent reduction
- Inner Urban Network of Neighbourhood Houses - defunded
[based on Lewis, 1993]

While Marie Tehan’s commitment to ‘ensuring that all communities get a fair share of these resources across the state’ (1993:23) is certainly positive, the over-representation of women’s services and inner urban/lower socio-economic services on this list appears unlikely to achieve ‘better outcomes for those who need health and welfare services’ (ibid:5). Tracking and comparing specific programs or funding models is complicated by a change in the structure of women’s budget publications: the pre-Kennett budgets are characterised by detailed programs and funding arrangements for a myriad of targeted women’s services, whereas in documents after 1992 this information has been ‘mainstreamed’. Women, while mentioned, are effectively invisible in the distribution of health resources.

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8 The introduction and implementation of the Casemix model for hospital funding presented problems for many hospitals. For some small rural settings, their capacity to ‘compete’ was limited, and this resulted finally in their demise. Aspects of Casemix will be considered later in this chapter.
There are many aspects to the policy underlying health care funding and it is my intention to focus on two controversial elements - one state and one federal - which illustrate the impact of the market approach. While neither has been identified as a ‘women’s issue’ it is immediately apparent that inherent bias in policy has the potential to maintain and extend the patriarchal gender order. Carol Weisman (1998:189) states the case with singular clarity:

In the case of health care policy, because both access to health care and health care delivery have gendered structure, policy inevitably is involved with gender issues, whether it explicitly addresses gender or not.

6.7: THE VICTORIAN EXPERIMENT WITH CASEMIX FUNDING

Before I outline the features of funding acute health services referred to as ‘casemix’ it is important to consider some aspects of funding relevant to health care in Australia. These include the fact that, relatively, the Australian system provides access to a range of efficient and effective services in both medical and hospital care with reasonable costs and satisfactory outcomes (Richardson, 1998:1), and while there may be no particular limit to the amount that may be spent on health’ (ibid:2), successive governments have signalled their intention to decrease public sector spending on acute care. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s the growth in public hospital expenditure was rapid and incidents of hospitals ‘overspending’ budgets, a reasonably common occurrence, were eventually sanctioned by cost-conscious state governments (Palmer & Short, 1994:95). Jeff Richardson (1998) suggests that the length of public hospital ‘queues’ and related budgetary constraints have been a dominant and well publicised problem in all states. In a pre-election document in 1992 the Victorian [Liberal] Opposition commented on the ‘record waiting lists’ which had escalated during the Labor governments of the 1980s (9 000 in 1983 to almost 30 000 in 1991) and proposed an ‘initiative’ to progressively reduce the extent of elective surgery’ lists - casemix funding.

Initially, the Health Department of Victoria researched this ‘initiative’ in the mid-1980s, at the behest of the then Labor government, based on the United States funding system of diagnosis-related groups [DRGs] (Palmer & Short, 1994:95). In the late 1980s the Commonwealth government added its support to a casemix
approach, through the introduction of a Casemix Development Program (idem), which was incorporated in the Medicare agreement between the state and federal governments. Casemix is a funding tool, which reimburses health care networks and public hospitals for the number and type of patients, with a fixed sum for a particular diagnosis. According to an American report,

[T]his method of reimbursement provides hospitals with much-needed incentives to keep their costs down. It has already reduced the length of time patients stay in hospital and thus it is a major step toward economic reform. But it is not without some serious flaws.

Douglas Conrad & Gilbert Omenn (1985)

Almost twenty years after this report, the Kennett government introduced DRGs, or casemix funding, into the Victorian system, with some identifiable progressive improvements. However, the rapidity of reform, with 'narrow policy focus of achieving efficiency gains' has impacted adversely on aspects of quality of patient care (Auditor General, 1998:5), and has replicated a number of the 'serious flaws' evidenced in the USA model.

An extensive number of outcomes were included in the report by the Victorian Auditor-General (1998) on acute health services under casemix funding, with significant conclusions regarding quality of care, equity of access, efficiency gains and secondary impact. Appendix B (ibid) reported on the impact of reform on the quality of care, with negative factors predominating.

Table 6.3: Selected outcomes of casemix funding

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<tr>
<th>POSITIVE OUTCOMES</th>
<th>NEGATIVE OUTCOMES</th>
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<td>Better follow up of complaints</td>
<td>Substantial increase in administrative workload</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved medical records</td>
<td>Increased cancellation and re-scheduling of elective surgery</td>
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<td>Improved pre-admission practices</td>
<td>Deterioration of cleanliness of facilities due to reduced cleaning staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Emergency waiting times increased</td>
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<td>Maintenance of equipment and buildings had declined</td>
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<td>Access to allied health services was reduced</td>
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<td>Rise in unplanned re-admissions</td>
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The report suggested that while the number of non-urgent patients on waiting lists had increased, information provided by the Department of Human Resources indicated that access to elective surgery for urgent and semi-urgent category patients had improved markedly. However, it was critical of implications 'that patients can be admitted on the basis of financial considerations rather than clinical need' and that some admission practices discouraged the 'throughput of a particular class of patient'. Rob Knowles, who had taken the mantle of state Health Minister, admitted problems had been encountered in some hospitals, but refuted claims of reduced patient care under casemix ('Knowles rejects criticism in case-mix report', *The Age*, 13/5/1998).

Initially, the introduction of casemix funding in Victoria proceeded with minimal industrial disputation and substantial reduction in the health budget. Johannes Stoelwinder (1994:S15) observed that casemix funding enabled the government to 'obfuscate budget cuts in complex pricing structures' in a 'not-so-hidden, agenda, while retaining 'ideologically sound concepts of public sector management', and he cautioned that 'concerns are beginning to emerge'. For many rural communities especially, the most immediate consideration was the viability of small, local public hospitals. *The Small Rural Hospitals Task Force Report* (1994) examined the 'performance' of rural hospitals and identified thirty-two of the fifty-seven facilities under review which 'failed' to achieve agreed targets of patient throughput. This compared with thirty per cent which had achieved 'very good health results'. The report maintained that the positive 'financial performance' - or lack of it - identified the necessity of a hospital for the community it served. However, casemix funding appears an unfair measure of the necessity for, rather than the financial viability of, medical facilities and effectively discriminates against small rural communities (Thwaites, 1999:4). In the context of the government's competitiveness and 'efficiency', rural hospitals are unable to conform to 'market rules' and should be summarily closed (Stoelwinder, 1994:S16), but this ignores the vital link they provide in the health network.

In 'State of health?' (*The Age*, 21/6/1997:27) Steve Dow quotes a doctor, formerly employed at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, who observed that the Kennett
government had been ‘politically clever’ in its approach to ‘slashing the health system’.

It has created ‘network’ boards to run Melbourne’s hospitals, from which the Government can stand at a distance and lay industrial and budgetary trouble at the feet of board administrators, who negotiate the level of service to be bought from hospitals, wielding more power over them.

While eight country hospitals had closed, the fate of Dunnolly Hospital, earmarked for closure, was more encouraging. Following a second, specially commissioned consultancy report in response to local protest rallies, there was an ‘about-face’ declaration that Dunnolly was ‘not unviable on current funding models’. Health Minister Rob Knowles explained that ‘the decision... showed that the State government listened to country Victorians’. Perhaps they also ‘heard’ the dissent of country Victorians in the thirteen per cent swing against the Government in the by-election two months earlier for Gippsland West (‘Hospital cry heard’, Herald Sun, 16/4/1997). The reprieve for Dunnolly maintained employment for twenty-five people - an aspect of hospital closure absent from most discussions. Small rural hospitals provide major employment opportunities for local residents, particularly women, and provide social and welfare services not funded within acute care guidelines but essential to community well-being. They also provide this service locally, an issue which has also received scant attention in most evaluation of medical provision. I would argue from personal anecdotal evidence that this is an urgent consideration for many elderly and single-parent women who have no access to public transport and do not/are unable to drive, and are subsequently denied access to appropriate medical facilities for themselves and those in their care.

The future of thirty bush nursing hospitals, a medical model unique to Victoria, is also precarious. Classified as private institutions, they receive no government funding, relying rather on a rapidly dwindling rural population with private health insurance. This has resulted in the possible closure of at least twenty hospitals as ‘many were going broke’ as they ‘could not admit public patients or receive minor work grants’ (‘Another bush battle’, Herald Sun, 28/5/1997:19). Medical reporter Helen Carter emphasises the vital role provided by bush nursing hospitals in rural areas. She writes:
They are a major employer and provide on-the-spot medical services in isolated areas many kilometres from the next hospital. They provide a feeling of security in emergencies. If a patient is transferred to a larger institution, the bush nursing hospital has often provided the initial life-saving treatment.

Helen Carter (idem)

Overtures by bush nursing officials for reclassification from private to community institutions have been dismissed by the Kennett government who claim that it is 'a Federal Government problem of failing to stem the tide of those dropping health insurance' (idem). Nonetheless, they have agreed to short-term funding for capital works, but only as an emergency allocation (Thwaites, 1994:4), which certainly jeopardises the ready access to medical care for the 20,000 patients they treat annually. The stark reality in considering both rural and bush nursing hospitals is that projected change is proceeding despite the lack of research into its efficacy or its impact on the communities involved.

Evidence indicates that urban and regional public hospitals also experienced major disruption from the implementation of casemix funding. Media articles in Melbourne newspapers reported, with monotonous and repetitive examples, the distressing experiences of Victorians reliant on public medical services. They included personal testimony by a woman whose elderly grandfather was discharged unexpectedly twenty-four hours after prostate surgery as his bed was 'needed'. Unable to contact his family he endured a tram trip and lengthy walk in torrential rain, to arrive home to an empty house ('Case-mix: a study in public shame', The Age, 26/6/1997:A16). Emotive comment, but a glimpse of the personal face underlying persistent critical headlines which allude to underfunding, declining resources and burgeoning waiting lists.

A positive evaluation of the Victorian initiative identified how the scheme had enabled substantial budget cuts while increasing throughput and achieving an 'astonishing decline' in waiting list numbers (Stoelwinder, 1994:S16). Earlier in 1994 an analysis of casemix funding by Dr David Campbell, chairman [sic] of the Victorian Casemix Advisory Committee, appeared in The Age ('Raising the quality of care by cutting costs', 14/4/1994:18). Dr Campbell rated casemix as 'the most
fundamental reform in hospital financing in Australia this century' and commented that '[I]t does not appear to be linked to any particular ideology'. His article poses a number of questions regarding the future of the Victorian health service:

- Will casemix see Victorian public hospitals degenerate into a competitive rabble?
- Will the patient be further alienated and allowed to fall through the cracks?
- Are health professionals going to walk away from the system and their patients?

In each case his response is an emphatic 'No', but the evidence which continues to surface contradicts his euphoric appraisal of this 'key financial reform'.

Media articles spanning the past ten years reveal the level of disruption and community distress experienced as a result of the government's commitment to frame social policy in economic terms. This is exemplified by the decline in staff and staff morale ('Doctors say morale at new low over cuts', The Age, 21/6/1997:A1); the crisis in hospital resources and conditions ('Third world care at the Western Hospital', The Age, 2/4/2000:3), emergency patients in casualty who faced extended periods on trolleys waiting for hospital beds ('Hospital queues double', The Age, 9/9/1996:1); elective surgery lists which continued to grow ('Waiting lists at record levels', The Age, 4/1/1997:A1); and stressed hospital administrators coerced into 'adjusting' surgery waiting lists to avoid financial penalties ('Hospital malady', Herald Sun, 16/7/1998:18). Yet despite the litany of negative feedback from health professionals, patients and carers, budgetary cutbacks are compounded (e.g. 'Hospital cuts planned', Herald Sun, 4/4/1998:15).

Carolyn Atkins and Jean McCaughhey (1999) present the findings of The People Together Project, documenting women's experiences as a result of government reform during the 1990s. On a rating continuum, they conclude that the Kennett government has achieved poor levels of social justice in the area of health care\textsuperscript{10}, and that the introduction of casemix had had adverse impact on the

\textsuperscript{9} For each of these situations I have referred to a single media article. I could have included literally dozens of articles/reports/letters etc to challenge each of the comments Dr Campbell made.

\textsuperscript{10} The continuum they adopted ranges from 1-6, with 1=excellent achievement of social justice outcomes for all groups of women and 6=Very poor levels of social justice outcomes achieved. In the area of health, the Kennett policy rated as 5, ie Poor levels of social justice outcomes achieved.
community health sector (ibid:13). As a result of casemix, early discharge/reduced length of stay has proven especially disadvantageous for women.

It is evident that planning and funding has not followed the practice of early discharge from hospital into community services ... The long-term health impacts of the pressure on women, particularly older women, to pick up the ongoing care as a result of early hospital discharges are yet to be systematically examined.

Carolyn Atkins & Jean McCaughey (1999:130)

Despite the adverse observations and the lack of systematic research the casemix model, based on the flawed and discriminatory Victorian model, has been introduced into most Australian states and territories (Hanson,1998). Rather a case of leading from behind.

6.8: PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE - THE THIRTY PER CENT REBATE AND LIFETIME COVER

In 1975 a from of national health insurance - Medibank - was implemented in Australia by the Whitlam Labor government after a protracted struggle (Scotton & Macdonald, 1993:1).

Medibank was primarily designed to improve the equity of the health care system in two ways: first, to extend to the whole population basic levels of financial protection from health care costs and access to a defined range of hospital and medical services and secondly, to distribute the costs of such health services in accordance with capacity to pay. In this respect it was far from a radical program ... Both the government and Medibank were destined to be short-lived.11 Late in 1975 the Coalition [Liberal/National] government, under the leadership of Malcolm Fraser, was elected and by 1981 had abandoned the objective of a publicly administered universal health coverage, opting instead for a return to a two-tier provision which promoted a private health insurance structure in addition to a basic public system (Scotton & Macdonald, 1993:259; Browning,1992:194). This represented a supportive response to powerful voices among medical providers and the private health insurance sector. However, again the ‘fluidity’ of health funding policy was reinforced by the election of a Labor government and a return in 1984 to

11 Scotton & Macdonald (1993) provide an extremely detailed account of the politics and the protagonists in the battle to introduce a universal system of health insurance.
a 'revised' form of Medibank - referred to as Medicare. Its objectives were ‘... to provide universal cover regardless of age, income or disability ...’ and it incorporated ‘... an income-linked levy [which] means that people pay in line with their ability to do so’ (Health Issues Centre, 1987:5).

Despite Medicare’s reasonably widespread public acceptance critics continued to question the state income redistribution which resulted from ‘universalisation of the insurance and social objectives through a public insurance system ...’ (National Health Strategy, 1991:9). In brief, free market advocates objected vigorously to what they perceived as the incremental nationalisation of health care supported by ‘academics imbued with an irrational hatred of private enterprise’ (Brassil,1984:54) and promoted by ‘socialist’ governments determined to gain ‘control’ of the health care system (ibid:1). However, this newer form of universal health cover was actually an important feature of social wage provision encompassed by the Prices and Incomes Accord [See Chapter 4], to ensure adequate basic hospital and medical cover (Health Issues Centre, 1987:12). A follow-up study measuring the impact of the ‘social’ factors in the Accord indicated that:

... while gains in living standards have been moderate for most groups, and slightly negative for others, the major gains have gone to those on lower incomes. Significant improvements in living standards were recorded for people... on the age pension (8%) or a supporting parent benefit (6%).

Health Issues Centre (1987:13)

A substantial element of this positive adjustment in living standard was attributed to the public insurance system and its more equitable financial base. The groups who gained from the initiative - low-income, aged pensioners and single parent families - are statistically predominantly female, and women probably comprised a significant proportion of the two million Australians who were previously without any health cover (ibid:14). However both the Liberal Opposition and members of the medical profession remained unconvinced that Medicare was the most appropriate system for health care provision. Consequently, reform of the Medicare system which resulted from yet another change of government in 1996, with the election of the Howard Liberal/National Coalition, was not entirely unexpected (e.g. Health Issues Centre,1987:38; Coalition Health Policy,c1995). The debate, over the past two
decades, between increasing/decreasing government intervention and control of medical resources reflects a destabilised and complex system characterised by a 'tinkering, piecemeal approach' to state policy (Lewis, 1997) which has resulted in at least two questionable policy measures: the thirty per cent rebate on taxpayer payments for private health insurance and 'lifetime' health cover.

These two federal policy initiatives undermine Prime Minister Howard's stated commitment to retaining Medicare and have the potential to impact negatively on many Australians, especially women. Although they represent two separate decisions, in reality they are a significant factor in increasing privatisation, ensuring the income of medical professionals and maintaining the profit margins for private health insurance companies. At best these policies represent an unfounded lack of confidence in the efficiency of the universal scheme and at worst will actually promote residualisation, similar to the system in the USA. In a media release, Australian Council of Social Services' [ACOSS] President Michael Raper (8/12/1998) argued that the rebate would disadvantage low-income earners.

The rebate is a poorly targeted health measure which in the future may be used to undermine Medicare's greatest strength, its universality. The universality of Medicare both contains costs and ensures access to health care is based on clinical need.

Michael Raper (idem)

Despite the extent of the rebate, lower-income families and individuals are not in the position to 'buy' insurance coverage, but the diversion of quite substantial funding to private sector providers will continue what appears as a deliberate under-funding of health care by both state and federal governments (Nurses Health Lobby, 1996). In an article in support of Medicare, the Nurses Health Lobby dismiss the myth of 'soaring' health costs, supporting their case with data that indicates that Medicare expenditure has remained stable at around 8.5% of Gross Domestic Product [GDP] for a universal system, while the seventy per cent of USA residents covered by a private system account for 'the equivalent of 14.5% of the GDP in 1995 and [it is] rapidly rising' (idem). More recent statistical data, from 1999, indicates that a third of all women in the USA have no insurance and a further third are under-insured (Lewis, ausfem-polnet, 2000).
Such a consequence appears inevitable as the Australian system retreats from universal cover, and Medicare is increasingly regarded as a safety net for those unable to afford private health cover premiums.

Putting public money into private health insurance and speaking of Medicare as a safety net is a double error - fiscal and moral. It is economically ill-conceived and breaks faith with the community who voted for Medicare to be maintained.

Stephen Leeder (1999)

The extent of public money redirected to those purchasing health insurance was certainly substantial (estimated between $1.4-$2.2 billion) and propels consumers and providers towards the recognition of health services as market commodities (Medicare is sustainable', The Australian, 10/3/1999). The capacity to purchase health insurance is directly related to economic well-being, and it seems probable that many from the most advantaged groups would gain the greatest 'rebate' from this system. George Palmer (2000:413) observes that issues of equity are 'complicated by the positive association between private health insurance and income' and propping up the private sector - insurance or hospitals - is not cost-effective.¹² The Women's Electoral Lobby [WEL] (Media release, 23/9.1998) regards the rebate as "... a windfall gain for those with private insurance - a gift largely from people on low incomes to those on high incomes", without producing 'a single extra health service'.

The implementation of the private health cover rebate, an incentive to encourage consumers to rejoin private insurance providers, failed to make 'inroads', with the proportion of Australians with private cover remaining stagnant at twenty-nine per cent (Morgan Poll, 1999). This prompted the second phase of the Coalition governments' strategy to introduce a 'Lifetime Health Cover'.

Lifetime health cover replaces the current system of community rating in which all policyholders are charged the same regardless of age, or risk. Under the new system, customers will have to pay a 2% loading for each year they are aged over 30 if they miss the deadline.

Christopher Zinn (2000:10)

This is a none-too-subtle 'stick and carrot policy' to 'encourage' more affluent and younger consumers to participate in private health cover, to subsidise the
older/higher users who had retained their policies. The Doctors Reform Society (quoted in Zinn, 2000:10), a group which lobbies in support of Medicare, assert that "... many people are being driven to join the funds through fear that Medicare ... will be wound up". That the tactics were successful is indicated by an increase in private health insurance memberships to more than forty-one per cent of the population, and increasing (Kerin, 2000).

Both the Australian Nursing Federation (11/5/1999) and the Shadow Minister for Health, Jenny Macklin (12/7/2000) predict the 'clawback' of public hospital funds under the existing Australian Health Care Funding Agreement. This provides for a reduction in federal funding for public health, in correlation to the increase in private health insurance, despite indications that public hospital demand will not diminish. States will be expected to maintain the same or similar levels of service with reduced funds (Australian Nursing Federation, 11/5/1999). International evidence contradicts the possibility that private health insurance can achieve universal access and equity, and yet this appears to be the model towards which the Howard government gravitates (Friends of Medicare, 1999). Any doubt regarding precisely which community sectors may welcome these government initiatives is clearly resolved by a report in the Financial Review ('Market marks up health sector', 13/5/1999), noting that:

[T]he health sector returned to favor with investors ... in the wake of the Federal Budget’s measures designed to boost private health insurance coverage ... [one] analyst said 2000/1 revenues would be boosted by between 2 and 4 per cent [and] ... private hospitals would be looking to have a 'substantial amount' of the benefits the Government measures will provide to health funds, passed on to health care providers.

It seems that the benefits were not passed on to members: in the first six months of the thirty per cent rebate, premiums rose at twice the rate of inflation (ABC Online, 2/6/1999), although this was the first increase in twelve months.

The position for women is somewhat ambiguous, as certainly some will be advantaged by the rebate/lifetime cover package, particularly if they are in a two-

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12 This standpoint is supported by a 1996-97 study which suggests that private hospitals may be less efficient than comparative public facilities (Palmer, 2000:413).
parent/dual income family structure. The Howard model for lifetime cover is firmly
based on the nuclear family, and the male work experience. Women whose
employment is characterised by periods in and out of the paid labour market and
part-time employment will be penalised for similarly leaving and re-entering
insurance schemes, with renewed waiting periods and higher premiums (Bridge,
18/5/2000). Also, because women have fewer economic resources they may opt for
minimum cover plans [. . .] which may not cover their most pressing health care
needs, when they need it" (Lewis, 19/5/2000) Julieanne Lewis 'suspects' that the
government is progressing towards an American style concept represented by:

... fully privatised health care systems based on user-pays, with public
funding going only to maintaining a run-down third-world style
clinic/hospital system for the poor . . .

The consequences for numerous groups of women, already disadvantaged in the
mainstream medical system, remains outside the discussion and absent from policy
considerations. Prognosis? Negative.

6.9. SUMMARY

In the preceding section, I was inclined to write 'Terminal' as the prognosis
for Medicare and issues of women's health care generally, as the future looks
alarmingly bleak. In this chapter I have tried to convey the reality of health policy
decision-making, through analysing a number of broader issues like Medicare and
Casemix funding - as well as more specific case studies - through a feminist lens.
While women have probably made peripheral gains in service provision,
overwhelmingly policy is devised, planned, implemented and resourced seemingly
devoid of any substantial concerns for the welfare of women. The dismantling of
much of the women's health policy machinery has contributed to the demise of some
targeted programs, for example in family planning and substance abuse, and
permitted a resurgence of supposedly 'gender-neutral principles in almost all areas of
health care provision. Consistently, perusal of government budgets and policy
documents evoked the same question: what will be the impact on women? And
resulted in the same response: undisclosed/ignored/overlooked/neglected/
disregarded/undefined/etc. The most difficult aspect of this chapter was limiting the
selection of issues for discussion, and I acknowledge that other relevant areas of women's health continue to be 'neutralised' - domestic violence; dental health; sexual assault; psychiatric health; medical research; breast feeding, community health centres; reproductive issues; lesbian health; women with disabilities; medical training; the private/public debate and probably many more which I have overlooked.

Without adopting a simplistic stance, it seems likely that Labor governments at both state and federal level appear to be potentially more woman-friendly, although the divergence between the two major parties is narrowing in these economically constrained times. Victorian women may have the opportunity to evaluate this theory, with the election of the Bracks government in 1999 [see Chapter 7].
CHAPTER 7: TREADING WATER - IT'S BETTER THAN DROWNING

7.1: WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

In an address to Women in the Workplace\(^1\) in December 2000, Susan Halliday, the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, reflected on the social changes she has witnessed, especially over the three years of her appointment (1998-2000). She observed that despite the anti-discrimination legislation, despite the perseverance of many committed women and despite the on-going need, too frequently issues of women's rights are peripheral to the 'real business' of governments. In the contemporary political climate of state conservatism and economic austerity, the Commissioner urged women to maintain the momentum for change: as she argued we may currently be 'treading water' with few apparent gains, but 'it's better than drowning' and relinquishing the progress we have achieved. The unresolved question implicit in her address was how effectively women can initiate, promote and accomplish change using male-constructed institutions, including the political system.

In Australia, this question has been the focus of extensive feminist dialogue and is a notion which I introduced in Chapter 3. The viewpoint which is supported by the research in this thesis is how state policy and legislation may enable greater equity for women, although this is restricted by the prevailing political climate and the activism of women. Alleged political and/or economic necessity has been consistently used in the past two decades to marginalise women, overtly and covertly. The dominant feature of the political landscape is the persistent relegation of women's interests, no matter the political persuasion of the elected government over the past two decades. There may have been differences of degree or slight ideological shifts, but despite the rhetoric - of which there is an abundance - women are not at the forefront of consideration in policy formulation.

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\(^1\) This is an informal network of women in the workforce, located on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. It is promoted by local government and largely sponsored by a local newspaper group. Susan Halliday addressed this group on 6th December, 2000.
In Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, many feminists were involved in an exploration of ‘the state’ as an avenue for advancing women’s status and rights within the public sphere. During this time, much feminist analysis focused on whether it was possible to develop feminist theory/theories about the state, and an evaluation of whether this would contribute positively to developing woman-friendly policy. The extent of discussion was diverse² but provided a significant contribution to how political theory culturally marks ‘the state’ as a masculinist realm in both structural and practical terms: it provides gendered social power through the way it is constituted and also by the ‘systematic patterning of personnel’ (Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989: 7-8).

The reason theories of the state must deal with gender, at least implicitly, is simply that gender is as a matter of fact a major feature of the state and sexual politics is in fact a major sphere of its operations. (ibid: 6, authors’ emphasis)

An understanding of this gender construct of the state necessitates developing ‘gender as a dimension of the analysis’ (Sainsbury, 1999: 1), and recognising that feminist negotiation with the state is inevitable.

This was the strategic approach adopted by the femocrats⁴, that group of usually liberal women who identified with the feminist movement and the interests of women as a gender class, and sought to promote women’s status through ‘paid advocacy’ within the bureaucracy (Yeatman, 1990: 61). Femocrats worked internally within institutionalised power structures to alter the character, and subsequently the policy, of the state, a strategy which proved relatively effective in Australia with its well-defined interventionist welfare system. Sara Dowse (1983: 220) speculated on the positive impact of feminist ideas as they permeated the institutions of society while simultaneously exposing gender biased inequities to the wider community. U.S. feminist Hester Eisenstein (1991: 30), who worked in Australia for a number of years, encapsulates a recurrent theme in describing her experiences. She states:

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² For further discussion of the complexity of recent feminist approaches to women’s relationship with the state see e.g. Eisenstein (1995); Kenway (1990); MacKinnon (1989); Sawyer (1990); Watson (1990); Yeatman, 1990.

⁴ Hester Eisenstein (1996: 68) suggests this term was a derisory label first used in print by right wing anti-feminist Babette Francis. Anna Yeatman (1990: 64) recognised the term as an Australian/New Zealand neologism, from a combination of feminist and bureaucrat. It is often used by the opponents of feminism as an accusation of elitism (Sawyer, 1996).
From my experience with the Australian women's movement, I have a strong impression that the impact of feminist reforms on government has a deep relationship to the traditions of the welfare state in Australia... The Australian femocrat experience may have much to teach feminist scholars in other countries... about the implementation of feminist reforms through government action, and more broadly about the relations between gender systems and the welfare state.

I believe this is an extremely important understanding. The relevance of femocrats, and their activism through the state resulted from the context of the Australian political fabric at that specific point in time: these initiatives made substantial gains for women because they were appropriate and timely. The problems of co-option, the uneasy relationship between the 'grass-root' movement and the women's policy machinery and the vulnerability of social change achieved through special women's units have all provoked discussion amongst feminists in the past two decades⁴. The question is how effective women can be in the face of 'globalisation' and 'economic rationalism' which have provided "... a major attack on welfare ideology and a downgrading of women's interests on a very broad front" (Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989:45). The pace of conservative 'reform' demands an assertive and sustained response by feminists to ensure policy formulation and implementation that is pro-women and does not contribute further to regressive gender relations. The femocrats' 'quiet revolution' (Sawer, 1990:xvii) may have had some application to the Australian political process in the 1970s and 1980s, but how relevant and how potentially successful will it be in the new millennium? Marian Sawer insists that

[A]t no time is it more important to hold governments to account for impact on women than at a time of economic restructuring.
Marian Sawer (1990:253)

This research project has shown the pertinence of her observation: what strategies should feminists adopt to not only hold their ground [tread water without drowning] but to continue to advance the economic and social status and rights of women?

⁴ A comprehensive consideration of the debate around 'state feminism' is beyond the bounds of this research. The contentious nature of the discussion may be pursued in, for example, Curthoys (1996); Marshall (1994); Pateman (1988); Sawer (1995 and 1999); and Watson (1990).
7.2 WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

In 1999, Carol Lee Bacchi offered a fresh approach to considering state policy, using the phrase ‘What’s the problem?’,

... to provoke an analysis which begins with asking of any particular policy proposal or policy the questions what is the ‘problem’ to be; what presuppositions are implied or taken for granted in the problem representation which is offered, and what effects are connected to this representation of the ‘problem’?

Carol Lee Bacchi (1999:2)

This approach moves the discussion from examining ‘presumed social problems to an interrogation of the construction of the problem’ (ibid blurb). In a generally very positive review of Bacchi’s work, Elisabeth Porter (2000.71) provides enthusiastic appraisal of the process of policy analysis although she is somewhat critical of how the author gives ‘insight into policy problems’ without pursuing how this analysis will result in ‘better policies’. There may be some substance to this criticism, but Bacchi’s insight into the power of those who define the problem is very relevant to the discussion in this thesis. Consistently, the reduction in welfare budgets and supportive programs is constructed as an economic problem: the state struggling with a deficit is compelled to cut budgets, abandon programs, reduce funding, dispose of public assets - in short absolve its responsibility to ensuring the welfare of all its citizens. The economic spin-doctors use the jargon of economics to define ‘the problem’ and usually provide a solution embedded in the hyperbole of essentialist [i.e. it has to be done] reform. Rosie Scott (1995.18) considers that

[R]eform is used to describe policies which advocate among other measures; legislation to weaken unions; the closing of schools, psychiatric hospitals and institutions for the care of adolescents and the homeless... If you take an overview of the context, it is clear that the meaning of reform has mutated to something like ‘the process of returning to the social practice of 19th Century England’.

To argue policy decisions based on economic ‘reform’ permits the reformers to define the terms of discussion and ignores ideological assumptions implicit in the framework of economic rationalism. While economic considerations in state decision-making are important, they are only one element in a very complex structure.
Framing policy analysis in a ‘What’s the problem?’ form acknowledges that women’s reality is inevitably shaped by how policy problems are constructed, and that feminists necessarily must ‘engage’ with the state and other ‘extra-state institutions’ [e.g. the medical profession and educational institutions]. Examining who is defining the problem, deciding the boundaries of discussion and controlling the language of debate is the first step in ‘identifying what needs to be contested’ (Bacchi, 1999:202). Throughout this research I have provided numerous examples of how ‘the problem’ has been represented to routinely restrict feminist activism and resistance: the promotion of issues in education for girls and women is labelled as discriminatory and sexist; the introduction of equal pay legislation in a labour market that is still far from equal; the creation of a universal superannuation model based on men’s labour force experiences which is an ineffective and irrelevant system for the financial security of many women; the reassertion of community care principles that translate to care by women; and the implementation of a medical model based on pathology rather than wellness, to name just a few. If “[T]he state is the central institutionalisation of social power...” (Franzway, Court & Connell, 1989:52), then state policy makers are inextricably involved in gendering that social power through the naming and defining of ‘problems’.

7.3: THE ‘PROBLEM’ OF WOMEN’S INEQUALITY

The advance of free market, corporate government in Australia generally has seriously challenged the few tenuous but significant gains women achieved in the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout this project the specific policy decisions concerning Victorian women, at both the state and federal levels, have provided a focus for analytical evaluation of the ‘woman-friendly’ state. ‘Legal’ equality, promoted by the state through legislative and administrative resolution in the 1970s and 1980s had resulted in the development of women’s policy units within the political bureaucracy. While this has benefited some individual women ‘who were already relatively advantaged to start with’ (Bryson, 1992: 224), the existence of women’s policies cannot be presumed as a reliable marker that women have
achieved ‘equality’. Marian Simms (1994:361) reached a similar conclusion in her assessment of the interaction between women and the state. She claimed:

Women’s experience with Liberal/National Federal Governments had made them aware also that the dominant ideology of economic rationalism would make women’s services, along with welfare spending more generally, ready targets for waste-watch enthusiasts.

The combination of the Kennett government at the state level, and the Howard government federally, ensured that the plight of Victorian women would become increasingly onerous. The ‘surface ripples of restructuring’ (Pocock, 1995:96) in the 1980s became the choppy waves of the 1990s.

Apart from some patronising platitudes in pre-election dialogue, neither of these political leaders had indicated any tangible support for the advancement of women. Following his state electoral success in 1992, Kennett’s haste in dismantling women’s policy units, eliminating the role of Equal Opportunity Commissioner and transferring - downgrading - women’s issues to the Department of Justice, clearly signalled his intent, although the Victorian Minister for Women’s Affairs during much of the past decade made some admirable attempts to retain ‘a forward looking vision’ for women (Office of Women’s Affairs, 1998:4).5 Unfortunately, what was inevitably absent was any significant support from the Premier and Cabinet. This exclusion of women from political dialogue was outlined by speakers at the Women’s Audit Symposium in Melbourne in April 1998, including Mary Crooks from the Purple Sage Project; Jean McCaughey from The People Together Project and Ellen Kleimaker, a researcher with the ACTU. The symposium was part of a broader project conducted by feminist social policy analyst Linda Hancock to “... stem the tide of loss, erosion and backlash that threatens to undermine women’s partial and hard won ‘gains’...” through political change that is “... subtle, indirect, multifaceted and difficult to chart directly” (Hancock, 1999:3,5,).

The reactionary agenda of the mainstream institutions - the backlash - was not a new phenomenon when it was popularised by U.S. media analyst Susan Faludi (1992). In 1984 Robyn Rowland had already described the cyclic nature of women’s

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activism, and concluded that "[1]t is inevitable that a reaction or backlash should arise against a movement which is struggling for wide social change and having success in some areas" (Rowland, 1984: 17). Resistance to change is not unique to feminism; it appears as a constant in the change process, where those who perceive some personal and/or group disadvantage in what is being proposed, organise - formally or informally - for restrictive action. Anti-feminist pressure is reactionary and this counter attack becomes obvious whenever 'women loosen their corsets' (Gibbs & McDowell, 1982:37). It exposes the dominant ideology's power relationships in social institutions and cultural systems in an extremely visible manner. Just as the feminist movement is neither co-ordinated nor homogenous, the opposition it engenders is not monolithic in its structure and organisation (Klatch, 1987:4), nor united in sharing a single set of beliefs or values (Eisenstein, 1983: 741). It is important to emphasise that conservative neo-liberal policy is not an orchestrated, organised reaction, but frequently gains credence by asserting that women's rights have been achieved and further 'favoritism' is no longer necessary. This conversation has moved from equity to efficiency, from redistributive to residualist (Hancock, 1999:6). Marilyn French (1992:6) suggests the feminist challenge to patriarchy - in which I would include the free marketeers and economic rationalists - results in reactionary policy "... aimed at reasserting or tightening men's control over female bodies, especially their sexual and reproductive capacities, and women's labor", while Susan Faludi (1992:4) would agree with Robyn Rowland (above) that the anti-feminist backlash has not been activated by women's achievement of equality, but by the increased possibility of its actualisation.

In the light of these statements, is backlash theory relevant to Victorian women? I would argue that it exists, but is subtle, non-confrontational and further, that it is especially well served by the popular media. Rather than perpetuate the image of 'woman-as-victim' which eventuated from theories of feminist backlash, I would label this more 'normalist', seemingly reasoned attack the diversionary principle which follows a line similar to the discourse in the previous section. I use the term 'diversionary principle' to describe the penchant for business and industry to move the discussion away from the real issue being debated, to focus on a popularist diversion. This response to criticism - diverting the debate away from the
real issue - is an approach which has been honed and refined by all governments. The discussion is framed in the language and context of reason, the boundaries defined by conservative viewpoints and the attention is diverted from the 'real' topic. Consequently, women's rights are routinely relegated, or removed from the discussion. Pro-family groups decry the declining birth rate based on the 'hedonism' of 'selfish' women, and mourn the 'breakdown' in family structures (Stewart, 2000:17), yet family-friendly work policies, maternity leave and the status of unpaid carers are rejected by the government and employers ('The value of mothers' labour', The Age, 17/4/2000; 'Women's groups slam Reith over attack on women workers', WEL Media release, 20/5/1999; 'Equal pay is just a lie', Herald Sun, 14/5/2000). A cartoonist in The Age pursues an accusatory attack on women in the paid workforce who neglect their maternal duties - especially the 'educated' ones ('More thoughts from the creche', The Age, 7/4/2000:14; 'Infantile statistics poem', The Age, 23/3/2000:16), and 'reformed feminist' Bettina Arndt continues the guilt-induction of mothers in the paid workforce ('Careful he might need you', The Age, 3/6/2000:Extra 1), while childcare funding and provision is consistently destabilised. While the director of the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria is warning of 'a severe shortage of emergency housing' ('Refuge head warns of home violence crisis', The Age, 7/11/2000:4), Michael Barnard quotes social science research which indicates that "... Australian female and male partners [are] assaulting each other with about equal frequency" ('This feminism has no clothes', Herald Sun, 12/9/1999). Throughout this thesis, I have included many examples of the diversionary principle, and demonstrated the difficulty confronted by feminists who advocate altering the context of discussion. The neo-liberal agenda is aimed explicitly at stifling discussion and revalidating the public/private dichotomy through reprivatising all areas of social public intervention, and the restitution of 'motherhood as destiny' (Petchesky, 1981: 223).

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6 In Victoria the most widely circulated daily newspaper, the Herald Sun, provides generous column-space to anti-feminist/misogynist journalists, including Roger Hampson (now deceased), Andrew Bolt, Michael Barnard, Jon Anderson. Hampson once referred to feminists as "the jack-booted sock brigade" (18/4/1993). This group (and a number of occasional writers) use tactics ranging from biased commentary; trivialisation of issues; attacks on the personality, integrity and sexuality of feminist activists; and appeals based on the evidence of carefully selected 'experts'. 
7.4: VICTORIAN WOMEN: SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE?

This research project has touched on only a sample of the policy developments which have impacted on women in Victoria over the past two decades. As I outlined in Chapter 3, the Australian system of government is based on three tiers - federal, state and local - and I would contend that the effects of economic restraint and restructuring is evident at each level, to varying degrees. The extent to which economic 'reform' has been accompanied by a perceptible shift in ideology generally reflects the political structure of the government involved, and the extent of their electoral support. The state, through the direction and scope of its interventionist stance, has a powerful influence which pervades all areas of women's lives. Traditional political theory which perpetuates gender-neutral policy explicitly contributes to the construction of unequal gender relations, an aspect very evident in the 'areas' of women's lives which this research analyses. Thus disadvantage for Victorian women was compounded by the cumulative effect of an 'exemplary' free market state government and the restrictive agenda of a conservative, family-centred federal government - the Kennett/Howard package. The optimism that had been aroused by the Labor governments of the 1980s, while somewhat cautious, was severely dented by the intersection of Liberal federal/state governments in the 1990s which gradually eroded structures for gender accountability and "... reconstituted women as a 'special interest group'..." (Sawer, 1999:50).

In 1998, the Kennett government published a policy document Women on the Move: Two Year Action Plan for Women. In the words of the government, this document "... builds on the work undertaken to ensure that the status and quality of life of Victorian women continues to improve" (Office of Women's Affairs, 1998:48). However such a viewpoint is hard to reconcile with what has been presented throughout this thesis, or the summation by barrister Felicity Hampel of the Kennett government's social policy reform, which she suggests is

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7 Perhaps this period might be described as 'woman-friendlier' - women were encouraged at state and federal levels by the development of women's policy units; the introduction and strengthening of equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation; some improvement in representation in government, although still well below the level in other English speaking democracies; and tacit recognition of the importance of social policy.
a "... shameful indictment on a society which prides itself of fairness, equality of opportunity and access, to see women's basic human rights so affected" (People Together Project, 1999:iv). These observations identify the urgency to rethink the future and pursue a comprehensive and sustained feminist response which validates the diversity of women's experiences and influences the formulation of socially just policy.

The range of strategies feminists might consider was a priority for Anne Edwards and Susan Magarey (1995:14). They claimed that women need to

... use all available channels for influencing government policy,

which include political parties, professional associations, trade unions, community agencies, women's organisations, special interest groups and the media.

In the remainder of this section, I will examine in greater detail some of the potential avenues for women's agency and activism in response to repressive state policy.

a) Women and political parties

In her advice for resisting corporate rule, New Zealand economist Jane Kelsey (1996) advocates against 'clinging' to political parties which have been captured by 'right-wing zealots'. The enthusiasm of both major parties in Australia for neo-liberal economics, and their duopoly, makes participation through political party affiliation a questionable practice. Federally, very few women have a profile with significant status to impact on Cabinet decisions. Australia has a solid history of exclusively male Prime Ministers, Deputy Prime Ministers and Treasurers. The paucity of 'elite' women is very readily indicated by the familiarity with which they are identified - Carmen, Bronwyn, Cheryl, Meg, Natasha and Jocelyn - no surnames necessary. 

At the state level, the most recent election in 1999 resulted in electoral success for thirty-three women, the highest number for a Victorian Parliament, now comprising almost twenty-four per cent of the lower house members. 

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8 Carmen Lawrence (ALP); Bronwyn Bishop (Lib); Meg Lues (Democrat); Cheryl Kernot (ALP); Jocelyn Newman (Lib); Natasha Stott-Despoja (Democrat). While all these women have a high profile for promotional purposes, their impact on policy is questionable, perhaps with the exception of Jocelyn Newman, and she has indicated an extremely negative attitude to feminist concerns, in her role as Minister for the Status of Women (see later).

9 This is still well behind the impressive statistics for South Australia, where the 1997 Lower House comprised 46% women.
Crooks, executive director of the Victorian Women's Trust, and an avid advocate for social justice, is hopeful that women in government will reach 'a critical mass' to positively influence the direction of governance ('Mary's people power', The Age, 8/3/2000:15). Female state politicians express a similar sentiment, and some believe that '... they are close to having a critical mass that will enable them to make a difference to both the style of state politics and its agenda' ('We are women ... with numbers too big to ignore ...', The Age, 11/3/2000:16). Post-Compulsory Education, Training and Employment Minister Lynne Kosky, who had been told by a Liberal opponent in 1999 to 'have a Bex and a lie down' if she found the rigours of the House too difficult, identified an increased participation in debate by women, and a growing intolerance for 'conservative, patriarchal views' as very positive features of 'a new culture' (idem). The long-term consequences of a greater numerical presence of women in the government is yet to be ascertained, but the presence of eight women in Cabinet - the most influential area of decision-making - is potentially valuable.

However, it is crucial to recognise that the presence of more women is no guarantee of a more gender-sensitive political structure. Again, the questions are: Which women? What are their roles? Have they the influence necessary to challenge masculinist policy? The Australian Labor Party has attempted to increase the number of women through the imposition of targets and affirmative action principles. Joan Kirner, former premier and co-ordinator of 'Emily's List' a support group for feminist candidates in the Labor party, is pessimistic regarding the Party's 'will to achieve' established targets, and pre-selection factional bargaining which effectively undermines women's opportunities ('How my party has let down women', The Age, 21/4/2000:11). The Liberal Party has not adopted any specific gender inclusive approach or systemic organisation to enhance the electoral opportunities for women, although the current deputy opposition leader, Louise Asher, is supportive of calls for increased representation of women in the state chambers ('We are women ... with numbers too big to ignore', The Age, 11/3/2000:16). Diane Sainsbury (1999:269) agrees that

... women's entry into all parties can have an impact on policy proposals and party politics ... Women's presence in the parties
puts pressure on them to adopt policy proposals that are
advantageous to women, and that are formulated by women.

There is no decisive conclusion regarding the difference women might make to the
policy process within the House, but in the present circumstances, it is an issue
worthy of further research.

b) Trade Unions.

The prominence of unions in the history of labour is an important feature of the
Australian workplace. In Chapter 4 I indicated the importance of unions in securing
some of the more basic conditions for women in the workplace. While the union
structure is not specifically supportive of women, the existence of an influential
labour movement is nonetheless critical to women’s conditions of employment. As
with the state, women’s relationships with the trade union movement are marginal
and ambiguous: it may be the site of women’s oppression with the promotion of
sexist agreements, discriminatory work practices and a male defined agenda, but it
has also been a site for the protection of women’s limited rights. More recently in
Australia, the viability of unions has become more dependent on women’s
membership, and while the proportion of employees with membership continues to
decline, the gap between female/male membership continues to narrow. In the
decade from 1986 to 1996, the rate for men has decreased from forty-nine to thirty-
four per cent, while for women the 1986 rate of thirty-nine per cent has declined to
twenty-eight per cent (Australian Women’s Year Book, 1997). Trade union
structures mirror those of many in mainstream institutions, where the higher the level
of power and influence, the lower the representation of women. Sheila
Rowbotham’s (1989) discussion of women’s ‘place’ in the United Kingdom union
movement details the complexity of cultural understandings which have limited
feminist influence in the organised labour movement, but emphasises that

[T]he capacity of a democratic trade unionism to survive, expand
and overcome the new economic and social divisions created among

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10 See, for example, Carmel Shute (1994); Hester Eisenstein (1996); and Sheila Rowbotham (1989),
for a brief account of the background to, and issues for, women’s participation in the union
movement.
workers by economic restructuring is inseparable from the issues of inequality raised by women in the unions and in the women's movement.

Sheila Rowbotham (1989:241)

The appointment of two consecutive female presidents of the ACTU (Jennie George and Sharan Burrow) indicates strong support for issues of equity and equal opportunity. In the words of the current president Sharan Burrow, "... sex balance at the top is needed to keep the union movement relevant across the workforce" ('Pedigree for power', Herald Sun, 1/4/2000:25). This view was reinforced by the adoption of affirmative action policies by the ACTU, which provides for fifty percent of the executive level appointees to be women ('ACTU executive now comprises 50% women', The Age, 30/10/2000:5). The opportunity for feminists to provide leadership and encourage community understanding of issues earlier dismissed as 'women's issues', while challenging the dominance of male control of the union movement, is self-evident. The willingness of women to be more actively involved in organised industrial groups is crucial, particularly with a swing back towards community support for unions ('Unions in from the cold', The Age, 22/10/2000:6). At the end of the year 2000, unions have a membership base of almost two million workers ('Pedigree for power', Herald Sun, 1/4/2000:25) - quite a formidable 'interest group'. It is now essential that women are encouraged to actively participate and contribute to the dialogue, to eliminate exclusionary practices, protect existing conditions, and regain lost ground. The unprecedented attacks on organised labour has ensured that for women, historically not well served by unions, the union movement is perhaps more relevant than ever. This is illustrated by, for example, the Howard federal government Workplace Relations Act and the Kennett state government's moves to deregulation and enterprise bargaining.

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11 As an example, the number of those who believe that unions have 'too much power' has almost halved in the past fifteen years, from 82 to 43%, and 53 per cent approve of union performance. Approval rating with younger respondents had increased markedly, perhaps as a result of more proactive marketing aimed at this sector of the workforce ('Unions in from the cold', The Age, 22/10/2000:6).

12 See Chapter 4 for more detailed analysis of the impact of state legislation on union membership and negotiation.
c) Women’s organisations

Feminists lobbying for social change through formal and informal organisation have a rich and colourful history in Australia. More recent [non-party] political groups have included the Women’s Electoral Lobby [WEL]; the National Women’s Justice Coalition [NWJC]; the Victorian Women’s Coalition; the Women’s Action Alliance [WAA] and to a large extent, the Purple Sage Project. It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive analysis of the structure or direction of women’s activism, but to consider a number of issues which arise from women’s organised political lobbying. Foremost for many ‘grassroots’ groups are the financial resources required to maintain networks agitating to achieve ‘social, economic, educational, political and sexual equality for women’ (WEL, Home page). Traditionally, women’s economic status precludes substantial subscriptions, which left many organisations dependent on government or philanthropic support, and consequently rendered them susceptible to a ‘hostile’ government. For example, in 1996, the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the status of women, Jocelyn Newman signalled the intent of the Howard government to revise funding policy for women’s groups. While promising funding to a ‘core’ group of national women’s organisations, she stressed that there were ‘no guarantees’ and that is was ‘time for women to come out of the sandpit and into the big game’ (‘Women’s groups in funding setback’, The Age, 6/12/1996:5). In October 1999, substantial preliminary grants were announced for three women’s National Secretariats, but more ‘controversial’ groups which had been critical of government policies (like WEL) were excluded. Almost as an afterthought, following considerable criticism, a ‘second round’ of minor grants was announced funding a range of extremely valuable service providers (‘Women’s group funding second round grants’ Media release, Senator Jocelyn Newman, 14/10/1999). WEL, and a number of other peak bodies, were apparently ‘punished’ for their dissent, by being completely defunded.

At the state level, some feminist groups had enjoyed a co-operative relationship with the Kirner Labor government (for about eighteen months until her defeat in 1992) through representation on the Victorian Women’s Consultative

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13 See, for example, Marilyn Lake’s book Getting Equal: the History of Australian Feminism (1999)
The Council was 'replaced' in 1992 by the Victorian Women's Council, in an attempt to make the advisory body more 'representative' of all women (Jan Wade, personal correspondence, 1993). By disbanding the original body, and reconstituting it under a slightly varied name, the government successfully discarded the critical voice of feminist activists. How successful women are in maintaining their powerful lobbying voice is uncertain, but Beatrice Faust introduces a further issue which is potentially challenging for feminist groups - the apparent disinterested of young women ('Daughters in the dark', The Weekend Australian, 15-16/3/1997:23). Joy Damousi ('How far have we come?', The Age, 8/3/2000:Supplement 9) coordinator of women's studies at Melbourne University says

... women must rally because public discussions of feminism have disappeared. People... believe society is living in a post-feminist era that doesn't need feminism any more... this attitude is fuelled by the perception that women can do anything now. It is a perception rather than a reality which has basically rendered feminism invisible.

The need for sustained struggle is seen as less relevant in the lives of young women (e.g. Walker,1998; Leiter,1996), particularly with the creeping individualism of the post-modern era and the 'recidivism' created by the 'economic onslaught' ('How far have we come?', The Age, 8/3/2000:Supplement 9). It seems essential that feminist organisations critically review the pertinence of their agenda to the interests and needs of younger women, and actively create an inclusive climate which ensures continued feminist engagement with the state. Discriminatory state restructuring and policy reform may inadvertently provide the catalyst for renewed collective alliances and actions to influence the political agenda. What is urgently required is 'a strategic analysis' which adequately addresses the 'political struggle' of the economic rationalist state and establishes "...links and connections between the numerous and varied points of resistance" (Watson,1990:242).

The strategic analysis which feminists adopt needs to be contextually appropriate. While the suggestion to use 'all available channels' (Edwards & Magarey, 1995:14 - see above) is certainly valid and the discussion so far has indicated muted optimism, the difficulty confronting women is whether endeavouring to influence the state through existing structures is possible. There is scant evidence
to substantiate the contention that political processes, or policy formulation, have somehow become more woman-friendly. The myth - of the woman-friendly state - is perpetuated by concessions and gestures 'granted' by governments, usually for explicit reasons or in response to electoral pressure. Activism through political parties, trade unions or even women's organisations, confronts a similar reality with which all feminists have historically had to contend: the patriarchal nature of the state. It seems instantly apparent that the welfare of women at the beginning of the new millenium hinges on how effectively they are able to challenge dominant ideology and reconstitute the political and economic discussion, and the viability of pursuing this challenge through existing systems. Researcher Barbara Marshall (1994:144) contends that the relationship between women and the state remains a 'complex' political discourse. She encourages an exploration of

... the degree to which 'public' spaces can engender resistance, and [promotes] the necessity of critically examining the manner in which claims for 'citizenship', 'rights' and 'equality' are pressed in modern welfare states ... the role of feminist discursive communities ... is crucial to the ongoing re-examination of such concepts as community, resistance and identity ... A revitalized sense of public life must not be premised on the erasure of difference, but on its revaluation as the grounds for new forms of solidarity.

Political participation by women and an empowerment process which validates their right to equality, appears as no more likely to result from state restructuring of the past two decades than it has for the past two centuries. The state is infinitely patriarchal, the public/private dichotomy persists, and the advances women make are represented as gratuitous. What this research has indicated is that what the state 'grants' is easily rescinded. I am mindful of Ann Curthoys' admonishment of feminist 'fence-sitting', where contradictory debate prevails and indecision results. She perceives that feminist political theory

is at a crossroads, looking for a way to combine a postmodernist awareness of difference, ambivalence and fragmentation with a coherent philosophy capable of sustaining the important political struggles yet to come.

Ann Curthoys (1996:160)

The pursuit of important feminist struggles - political or otherwise - will demand a resolve no less committed than in previous 'waves. Negotiation with the state may
result in enabling legislation through coercion by what remains of the women’s policy machinery and the ‘critical mass’ of female politicians (Mazur & Stetson, 1995:290). However, real reform, for the advancement of women’s normative right to social justice and an acceptance of the specific demands for women’s welfare as relevant to mainstream institutions, is unlikely unless radical and feminist politics prevails both within and outside the state. Until that time, women will continue to ‘tread water’.
POSTSCRIPT: THE BRACKS GOVERNMENT ONE YEAR ON

As I indicated in the introduction, this research project is a 'work in progress', by which I mean that the circumstances I am analysing are in continual flux. In Victoria, in September 1999 there was an 'unexpected' change of government, with the Kennett Liberal government being subjected to a most substantial swing in favour of Steve Bracks and his Labor colleagues. According to Gallup poll findings (Morgan, 1999: No.3231), conducted on election day (18/9/1999), the anticipated result was electoral success for the Liberal/National coalition with a reduced majority, but by the declaration of the polls the Labor Party assumed government with the support of three Independent Members, and a dramatically increased representation of women ('The Bracks line-up', The Age, 21/10/1999). Nevertheless despite a new Cabinet that was an impressive forty-five per cent female, the four most senior ministerial positions would become occupied by men (idem)

I do not intend to develop a comprehensive review of the progress of the Bracks Labor government in these final pages nor to compare its performance with previous governments. However, twelve months after the Labor government assumed office seems an opportune time to consider any perceptible change in process or practice to date. In a pre-electoral response to the Women's Electoral Lobby ('WEL election rating', 1999), the Labor Party made a commitment to (re)building the women's policy machinery and 'monitoring and coordinating a whole of government approach to women's issues' (idem). A year later a number of projected initiatives have indeed been implemented, including the relocation of the Office of Women's Policy to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and the development of quite an extensive program of women's forums (Garbutt, 2000:1). There was an inaugural women's summit, at which the Premier confirmed that

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1 In this Morgan Poll (1999), a 'remarkably large portion' (84%) of the electorate expected a return of the Kennett government. A mere 6% considered that the Labor Party had a chance of victory.

2 The relevance of 'community consultation' is seemingly challenged by the sheer volume of reviews, reports and consultations over the past year. Altogether there have been 330 reports. Sherryl Garbutt, the Minister responsible for the environment and women, has prompted at least 48 in her portfolios ('Year of inquiries', Herald Sun, 27/10/2000:13).
"... all government plans will be audited by the Office of Women's Policy and their impact on women assessed before they are considered by Cabinet" ('Women win greater say in state affairs', The Age, 18/5/2000:4). What this actually means and how it is interpreted in the context of decision-making remains unclear, although the Women's Unit has developed a number of glossy, well-designed and trendy policy documents. Valuing Victoria's Women: Policy Statement 2000 (2000:3) eulogises:

Concrete programs are required, new approaches must be implemented, and new targets for achievement set. The Bracks Government is determined to achieve a community in which women's contribution is valued and where women see value in what the Government is doing for them and their families.

Will the theory translate into practice? More importantly, what is the potential for real change from policy which ignores structural impediments to women's advancement? As my research has clearly illustrated, peripheral change or 'concessions' to women are subject to the vagaries of incumbent governments, and subject to constant 'reform'. What is present in the objectives of this government that would indicate their decision-making will be more profoundly equitable and enduring for women?

These are early days, but perhaps what is already evident is the enormity of the task facing the present government. After almost a decade of state 'reduction', reversing, or even merely halting, the process is extraordinarily challenging despite the expressed commitment of the government 'to create real improvement in the lives of the people in Victoria' (Bracks, quoted in Office of Women's Policy, 2000:iii). Many of the policies in the forward plan for women (ibid:5-23) released in July 2000 are clearly identified with strategies, timelines and performance measures, and we await the presentation of the first annual report. In the meantime, another important factor becomes apparent: the absence of a plainly articulated means of funding these policies. In response to the WEL election rating questions (1999) the Labor Party responded positively when asked about their commitment to re-introduce a Women's Budget process, to ensure government accountability on

women's policy interests. As WEL indicated, women's budgets ensure regular monitoring of policies and programs for their effect on women; they provide documented 'ready reference' for women and their organisations, and they serve as an annual public statement of the progress achieved by a government in the preceding twelve months (WEL Election Rating, 1999). Exemplary policy plans have limited value if unsupported by appropriate funding, an issue which does not appear to have been satisfactorily resolved at the beginning of 2001.

However, it is possible to comment briefly on some instances of action - and inaction - by the present Labor government as a preliminary evaluation of its first year performance. These include education where conflicting responses to the issues confronting education and educationalists has resulted in 'rumbles in the blackboard jungle' (The Age, 3/6/2000:5). The reduction in class sizes at the primary level ('Primary class sizes fall', Herald Sun, 6/4/2000:11) have not been replicated in the secondary sector, and the planned reduction in face-to-face teaching hours is seriously jeopardised by an increasing shortage of teachers. Teaching has become increasingly less attractive as a career option in Victoria, with salary levels substantially below the national level and the level in other developed countries ('Why teachers need fairer pay', Education Age, 12/6/2000:5). Combined with heavier workloads, these lower salaries act as a deterrent. Recent salary increases are a significant start, although nine per cent over three years measured against this year's 5+ per cent CPI rise are marginal and lack of a reintroduction of a real career structure makes the retention of quality teachers problematic ('Rumbles in the blackboard jungle', The Age, 3/6/2000:5; 'Teacher pay rises are smart policy', The Age, 4/10/2000:18; 'Brumby reveals teacher pay limit', The Age, 11/10/2000:8).

Without addressing the 'pendulum effect' of changes in government to the professionalism of the education sector, lasting improvement seems as far distant as ever. Additionally, the status of teaching is unlikely to be positively enhanced by suggestions that scholarships be used to 'lure' men into teaching ('Teaching lure for men', Herald Sun, 10/5/2000:29). This has not been embraced as state policy but neither has the minister vetoed the concept. Coincidental concerns for 'boys in education' may underlie an apparent unwillingness for the reintroduction of funding and policies specifically targeting girls/women in education. These initiatives are
currently ‘under review’ (Valuing Victoria’s Women: Forward Plan, 2000:22-23), and hopefully a positive response is imminent.

Unfortunately, a positive response appears unlikely in the kindergarten debate. The government may be prepared to support the attendance of all four year olds in kindergarten programs (Valuing Victoria’s Women: Policy Statement, 2000:7) but it is evidently less prepared to ensure that they will have a kindergarten to attend. No capital works allocation for new or replacement kindergartens was considered by the government as ‘the construction of kindergarten buildings was the primary responsibility of local councils’. This has been the situation in recent history in Victoria, but the previous Labor government did provide some financial assistance for capital works in needy circumstances (‘No money for new kinders: minister’, The Age, 10/8/2000:7). More critically, there is an urgent need for the state government to address the issue of staffing kindergartens. According to a recent media report (‘Kinders in crisis as teachers quit’, Herald Sun, 30/10/2000:4):

Victorian kindergartens are in crisis, with fees soaring, class sizes ballooning and teachers fleeing the system . . . They [teachers] claim they are being treated as baby-sitters instead of university-educated professionals . . . kindergartens would close unless something was done to stop the flow of teachers leaving the profession.

Parents have indicated a preference for traditional kindergartens (see page 148), but the reluctance of the government to adequately support teachers in this system may result in a decline in the traditional model.4 No doubt, the transfer of pre-school children to private sector childcare facilities or private school pre-prep units represents an enormous saving for the state government, and an impressive gain for the ‘market’. How this translates into parental choice or systemic equity appears entirely coincidental, and the state’s example of female employment practices remains problematic.

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4 The plight of early intervention pre-school centres continues to be urgent, with ‘hundreds’ of children being denied access to appropriate settings (‘Autistic kids missing out’, Herald Sun, 15/11/2000:24).
More promising is the government stance on the images of women in society created through media and advertising. Their policy statement (Valuing Victoria's Women: Policy Statement, 2000:4) acknowledges that the government lacks the capacity to regulate the media, but expresses a commitment to 'investigate ways to prevent exploitation of women by the media for the purpose of advertising'. A document from the Office of Women's Policy outlines the terms of reference of a committee established to review advertising standards, an action applauded by the Federal Sex Discrimination Officer, Susan Halliday and tentatively supported by the Shadow Minister for Women's Affairs, Leonie Burke ('Call for bans on billboards', Herald Sun, 3/1/2001). Experience has indicated that self-regulation is ineffective, so it will be interesting to analyse the government response if the review committee recommends legislative control.

Another area where self-regulation had been ineffective, with disastrous social consequences, is gambling. The possibility of legislative control of gambling was mooted by the Labor Party pre-election [1999] in Responsible Gaming Policy. This committed a Labor government to 'measuring the social and economic impact of pokie machines in country Victoria' and implementing regional and statewide 'caps' on the number of machines, as well as restrictions on '24-hour pokie venues' ('Studies to gauge impact of pokies', The Age, 21/10/1999). Christine Campbell, the Victorian Minister for Community Services, argued for a 'powerful campaign' to address problem gambling because the 'Kennett's soft approach failed'. She outlined that government action was 'combating the problem on several fronts', which included investment by the Community Support Fund\(^5\) to 'fight problem gambling' ('Bringing home the misery of gambling', The Age, 15/11/2000:21). However more recent reports suggest that the state government has 'backed away from key reforms' (Backdown on pokies', Herald Sun, 9/1/2001:1). Editorial comment in the Herald Sun (9/1/2001:4) was critical of the government's apparent inaction.

The Bracks Government led Victorians to believe it would get tough to reduce the social harm done by poker machines... While Premier Bracks and his team bow to pressure groups..., pokies continue to

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\(^5\) Money is allocated to this Fund from the revenue collected from gaming machines.
wreck social havoc. Gaming Minister, John Pandazopoulos says our pokies addiction is ‘a nightmare’. But it is his government’s lack of action that is the bad dream. It’s time to wake up.

The Office of Women’s Policy has indicated ‘funding of direct services such as counselling, as well as conducting research into the needs of women with gambling problems’ (Valuing Victoria’s Women: Forward Plan, 2000:41) forms part of their strategy for community strengthening. Addressing the problem at its source should also be part of the strategy.

In the context of this brief review, it is impossible to analyse the efforts of the Bracks’ government in its first year in the area of health care. The Valuing Victoria’s Women (see above) series of policy documents outline a range of valuable provisions and specific performance indicators, but most of these programs are at the initial stages and effective evaluation is limited. The absence of a Women’s Budget, as mentioned earlier in this postscript, tends to result in mainstreaming where the specific needs of women are routinely ‘overlooked’. Media reports indicate that the dismantling and privatisation of the health care system during the Kennett years continues to impact on the provision of services in Victoria. This has resulted in ‘the worst bed shortage’ in hospitals, which has necessitated ‘repeated’ ambulance bypass (‘Major hospitals on ambulance bypass’, The Age, 7/9/2000:1). State government figures show that ‘the number of Victorians turned away from hospitals has rocketed in the past year’, and ‘a shortage of nurses and nursing home beds fuelled delays at over-stretched emergency departments’ (‘Hospitals triple bypass numbers’, Herald Sun, 9/12/2000:2) This ‘crisis’ will be exacerbated by a predicted and ‘unprecedented number of consumers with private health insurance . . . demanding treatment in private hospitals’ when those encouraged by federal policy to insure privately [Chapter 6.9] have completed the twelve month waiting period (‘The health of Victoria: our hospitals’, Herald Sun, 19/11/2000:4). Despite measures to attract qualified and experienced staff to return to health care (e.g. ‘We want you back, Labor tells nurses’, The Age, 20/10/2000:7) health professionals continue to misuse

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6 The ‘Break Even Service counselled almost 3,000 people in the period 1998-99 regarding problem gambling. Women made up 52% of the total. Of those attending with concerns about the gambling of another person, 69% were women. During this time, the G-Line Service [problem gambling help] received almost 11,000 calls, 56% of them women.
alcohol and other drugs in increasing numbers to deal with work-related stress ('Doctors, nurses losing to strain', Herald Sun, 29/11/2000:15). If the efforts at recruitment are not successful, the pressure on nursing staff may escalate with the introduction of new nurse-patient ratios in December 2000, although the decision, by the Industrial Relations Commission was 'intended to relieve stress on nurses and improve patient care' ('Bid to lure nurses back', Herald Sun, 20/10/2000:23). The position for women - as patients, carers and providers - needs constant scrutiny to ensure it complies with government objectives to provide 'health care services in gender-sensitive and gender-specific environments' (Valuing Victoria's Women Policy Statement, 2000:8).

The past twelve months may have been 'Labor's year of learning to govern', and a year highlighted by 'indecision, policy review and of conservative financial settings' (Hayward, The Age, 17/10/2000:17), but the learners' permit has expired. The momentum to listen to women and direct change which acknowledges their needs has hardly been startling. Maybe it's time for the Labor government to fulfil it's promise of valuing women in all their diversity, and address sustainable, systemic change. Feminists must actively ensure the gender is kept on the agenda, to ensure that structural change is the focus for sustained discussion and action.
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