Still working for the man?
Women’s employment experiences since 1950

Professor Glenda Strachan

Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing

The Good Life Conference
12 February 2009
3 Generations: Women in 1950s, 1970s and today: Mothers, daughters and grand-daughters

- The 1950s: The male breadwinner model
  - 1950s: Women’s Work
  - Gender segregation in occupations, industries
  - Women cared for others: nurses, teachers, secretaries, domestic workers, producers of domestic goods such as canning food and dressmaking
  - Women rarely managed other workers
  - Most women earned 75% of the male rate of pay
The Marriage Bar

• Married women could not be permanent employees in the public service
• Large numbers of women were forced out of permanent positions - 2,000 annually in the Australian Public Service in the 1960s

➢ On 18 November 1966 the Public Service Act was amended to permit married women to be appointed as permanent officers and to allow female officers to retain their permanent status after marriage.
1960s: The changing workforce

(15 years & over)

- PERCENT of Working Married Females in Working Female Population:
  - 1947: 20%
  - 1954: 31%
  - 1961: 39%

- PERCENT of Unmarried Working Females in Working Female Population:
  - 1947: 80%
  - 1954: 68%
  - 1961: 61%
• The fight for equal pay: Mothers and daughters agitate!

• Equal Pay cases of 1969 and 1972 grant women equal pay for work of equal value – $1\frac{1}{2}$ million women benefit
Women’s fight for equality: Many areas of action

• For example, women’s lack of representation within union structures. The women’s magazine *Cleo* ran an article in 1977 titled ‘Women in trade unions: THE BATTLE’S ON.

The picket lines are drawn. Women workers at last are fighting back at the attitudes which have kept them out of union leadership and forced them to leave the running of their working lives to men.

Women want more power in unions. They have the numbers and motivation. All they lack is status. If 500 women were appointed tomorrow to make decisions on behalf of the entire Australian workforce, there would be an outcry. Yet the same situation exists in reverse and is widely accepted and maintained.’
Trade unions today

ACTU president Sharan Burrow
Characteristics of Women Workers Today

- Labour force - 45% women
- Labour force participation rate – 58% women in labour force
- 45% women work part-time
- 2/3 women work in clerical or sales and service
- 25% of full-time Managers and Administrators are women
Legislation

- **Sex Discrimination Act 1984** – no discrimination on grounds of sex of employee
- **Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999** (replaced 1986 Act) – large organisations have proactive plans for equal opportunity
- ‘To ensure that we can attract and retain the best staff we have put in place strategies that allow us to provide career paths and training pathways as well as flexible and family friendly working conditions to enable women with family responsibilities to participate fully in the workplace and also be able to fulfil their family role.’
Women in management

2008 Australia

- ASX200 chairs: 2.0% women
- ASX200 CEOs: 2.0% women
- ASX200 board directors: 8.3% women
- ASX200 exec. managers: 10.7% women
- Managers & professionals: 45.5% women

Source: 2008 EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership
Why are women not represented in senior ranks?

• Way work is organised
• Lack of equitable chances for advancement
• Subtle yet tenacious forms of disadvantage embedded in organisational culture
• Gendered processes operate on many institutional levels: through cultural representations and meanings, people build their understandings of the gendered structure of work and opportunities.
Accommodating the multiple breadwinner model

- Unpaid parental leave available to permanent & some casual workers
- Paid maternity or primary carer leave: available in 49% of organisations with more than 100 employees
- But not all workers have equal chances of getting this – 83% of organisations in education and training; compared with 15% in retail trade
- Small accounting firms fewer than 9% - and shorter duration.
Key trends in the Labour Market Today

- Decline in the standard working week
- Longer working hours for full-time workers
- Dispersion of working times
- Longer days
- More work at unsociable hours
- Work intensification
- Job insecurity increased - more casual workers
What is the world of work for the grand-daughters of the 1950s women?

- More highly educated than men
- Will spend longer in the paid workforce than their grandmothers
- The multiple breadwinner model – both partners in the workforce
- Take major responsibility within the home for caring
- Possible to enter any occupation or industry and expect equal pay with their male colleagues
- Less likely than men to achieve senior and managerial positions
- Choices may be constrained by a hostile work environment
- Unlikely to achieve comparable earnings with men over a lifetime
- ??????
Still working for the man?