

Preface

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Making the Link: Affirmative Action and Employment Relations 17 brings together papers from the 2005 Women, Management and Employment Relations Conference. As usual, the back section of appendices presents further papers reflecting on current issues in the broad debate on equal employment opportunity.

Angie Knox and Ed Davis, from the Division of Economic and Financial Studies at Macquarie University, focus in Chapter One on the newly implemented WorkChoices legislation and the implications for women at work. The act has attracted a great deal of attention. The Australian Labor Party and unions have been vociferous in their denunciations of the measures. Very large advertising campaigns have been mounted by the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the federal government to influence the middle ground of Australian opinion. Jenny Macklin, deputy leader of the federal opposition, notes her concerns in Chapter Two, stressing that there is a considerable distance to travel before women are appropriately paid and represented in forums such as the Australian parliament.

In Chapter Three, Director of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Anna McPhee, points to some encouraging signs of progress. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of managers that are female and more women are taking on leadership roles in business. The path to pay equity remains troubled and there is an urgent need to explore how organisations can best assist staff to balance their work and life responsibilities.

Pru Goward, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner, argues in Chapter Four that more needs to be done to engage and enlist men in pursuit of equal opportunity. Of particular concern is the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work with implications for the time women have for paid work. More needs to be done to ensure that women's contribution to paid work is encouraged and not deterred.

Chapter Five continues the debate on pay equity. Patricia Todd and Joan Eveline, University of Western Australia, address the barriers to progress in achieving pay equity and in particular the failure by employers and governments to take steps to hasten progress.

Philippa Smith, CEO of the Australian Superannuation Funds Association, looks in Chapter Six at how women are faring in the current superannuation regime. Her concern is that many women face poverty in retirement; their prospects are relatively stark. This is influenced by the profile of women in the workforce. A significant proportion of women still continue to be employed in low-paid, part-time and casual work with consequences for their retirement. Some recent government initiatives have provided some assistance.

New Zealand's EEO Commissioner, Judy McGregor, explores in Chapter Seven a fascinating disconnect in her country's experience. There are significant numbers of women in government and in senior posts. Most obviously, in Helen Clark New Zealand has a tough and highly respected prime minister. Yet women are much more scarce in board and senior management roles in the private sector.

Kate Jenkins, a partner at Freehills, identifies in Chapter Eight the barriers women staff face in law firms. Many women will find that their opportunity to take up senior posts coincides with the period when they are having children or in the years following childbirth. The culture of law firms can be unsympathetic to family considerations. Nonetheless, some law firms have taken significant measures to assist their female staff in the belief that this is both the right thing to do and good for business.

Katie Ellard, a specialist in gastroenterology, in Chapter Nine, continues the exploration of the challenges facing women in professions. She has watched the proportion of women in her profession grow from very small to around 18 percent. Very good childcare and flexible hours assisted her to balance her work and family responsibilities.

The 2005 conference presented a session on mentoring. Lisa Miguel, a manager at IAG, has been involved in a mentoring program and in Chapter Ten she shared her thoughts and feelings on the experience.

The final three chapters explore the views of three young women on women and work. In Chapter Eleven, Hannah Temby at Sydney Girls' High School, recounts that her contemporaries combine confidence about their future careers with little knowledge of what might be ahead. Gabe Kavanagh is a student at Sydney University. In Chapter Twelve she charts her growing awareness of the challenges facing women and the need for women to exercise choice in regard to their approach to work and life issues. Her hope is that her contemporaries will continue to seek fulfilling careers which improve the world environmentally, economically and socially. Christie Underwood, a junior warfare officer in the Royal Australian Navy, reflects in Chapter Thirteen on the challenges facing women in the Navy.

The back section of the book contains six appendices. In Appendix One Juliet Bourke presents the findings of the 2005 Australasian Diversity and Equity Survey. Appendix Two contains data on women at work drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Appendix Three is by Marian Baird and Patricia Todd on the impact of the new WorkChoices bill. Appendix Four by Jawad Sayed and Peter Murray explores the participation of women in multi-disciplinary action teams. Appendix Five is by Dominique Beck and Ed Davis. It explores the effectiveness of the 1984 *Sex*

Discrimination Act (Cth). Appendix Six is by Sarah Levin and Ed Davis. It presents a long-run case study of the career progress of women academics at Macquarie University.

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Ed Davis and Valerie Pratt

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