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The Women's Movement and Government

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THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND GOVERNMENT
Feminist Fading?

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Abstract Some scholars have suggested that institutionalisation and professionalisation of women's movement organisations leads to 'feminist fading'. This article examines whether such propositions hold true for the Australian women's movement. It maps changes in the women's movement that had emerged by the 1990s, including increased diversity and increased national and international networking as well as increased institutionalisation. It finds that loss of political influence has less to do with institutionalisation than with a changed discursive environment that constructed the welfare state and women's reliance on it as a problem. Nonetheless, women's movement institutions have continued to sustain feminist values and engage in differently organised but effective campaigns. A case study of the women's health movement in Victoria shows how it succeeded in having abortion removed from the criminal code in 2008. Repertoire had changed since the 1970s but the goal remained the same.

As in many western countries, the women's movement became less visible in Australia from the 1990s onwards and governments lost interest in responding to its demands. Some social movement scholars (and social movement activists) blamed this loss of influence on entanglement in the state. They claimed that institutionalisation had led to co-option at worst or 'feminist fading' at best. In this article we explore the trajectory taken by the women's movement in Australia over the past 40 years, with particular reference to the women's health strand of the movement, to assess whether the idea of feminist fading holds true in this country.

By 'women's movement' we are referring to the mobilising of a collective identity as women, the sustaining of women-centred discourses and making claims on behalf of women that challenge the gender order in some way (Sawer 2013a, 2). Thus defined, a women's movement can be found on the streets, on the Internet, in women's organisations and services and within mainstream institutions where there are structures with a mandate to advance women's claims or meet their needs. Furthermore, a women's movement understood this way existed in Australia from at least the 1880s (see Quartly and Smart 2014). It involves attempts to mobilise collective identity and shared meanings across diverse groups of women; coalition-building is one of its most characteristic modes of operation.

Much social movement theory, however, dates from the 1960s and is based on male-dominated movements and their repertoire of action. It often differentiates between social movements and other political actors on the grounds that social movements are non-institutionalised and characterised by contestation and disruptive action. In contrast,

empirical studies of women's movements have found their repertoire to be much broader: for example, a study covering the UK, France and Germany 1980–2007 found that only two per cent of overall activities were protest-related or disruptive (Poloni-Staudinger and Ortbals 2011). If we consistently applied the definition of social movements as based on non-institutionalised protest activity, we would have to conclude that the campaign for the vote in Australia and New Zealand did not involve women's movements, which is clearly wrong. Those who accept non-institutionalised action as the key feature of social movements tend to see both institutionalisation and entanglement in the state in highly negative terms, resulting in co-option and displacement of goals. In other words, institutionalisation leads to that exchange of ideological commitment for institutional power originally identified by Robert Michels (1915). Some feminist scholars have analysed the women's movement from this perspective. Sabine Lang, for example, has written that in Germany there has been a shift away from movement activism to institutionalisation inside and outside the state, bringing with it a focus on funding issues and obtaining state resources. Lang sees 'NGOization' as having brought about increased specialisation and professionalisation on the part of women's movement organisations but also 'the trading of relative autonomy for increasing dependence on the state and possible reduction of feminist constituencies to professional "expert publics"' (Lang 1997, 115). Lang's concept of 'NGOization' struck a chord and has been taken up around the world, particularly in Latin America. Many have shared Lang's dismay at the way activist energy and critical insight can become lost among organisational concerns.

Working with government has also been blamed for depleting the energies of the modern women's movement in Australia and for de-radicalising it. The process of negotiation and compromise required by state-focused strategies has been seen as contributing both to the dilution of feminism and its loss of visibility (Maddison and Jung 2008). As early as 1976, one prominent member of Women's Liberation complained that 'The women's movement in Canberra seemed to have shrivelled into an informal branch of the federal bureaucracy' (Eade 1977, 8).

In the USA, a similar but more nuanced argument has been developed by Benita Roth. She suggests that the term co-option, often used in relation to movement activists who enter government, does not take into account the gender dynamics of moving into male-dominated institutions, which may result in marginalisation and continuing outsider status rather than co-option. Roth argues that theories of co-option also mistake structural factors for voluntary deradicalisation, when what is happening may be more complicated. Feminists need to forge institutional alliances in order to be effective in promoting feminist goals and this requires substituting institutional lines of accountability for ties to the women's movement (Roth 2006, 165). Over time, generational change also occurs: feminist activists who went into women's units in bureaucracies are replaced by new recruits who do not come from the women's movement or have a background in feminist activism. Roth calls the combined effects of these shifts 'feminist fading' or the waning over time of a feminist agenda.

Can Feminist Agendas Survive Entanglement with Government?

Clearly, the issue of how feminist agendas can be sustained is a major one, given that such agendas require both large-scale resources and more than one generation of activists. The goals of the movement must be institutionalised in a way that will persist

beyond any given cohort of activists. In Australia, second-wave organisations such as the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), and various women's health organisations, followed local social movement traditions of 'looking to the state' and sought to institutionalise feminist agendas within government (see Andrew 2014; Sawer 2008; Gray Jamieson 2012). WEL played an important role in the development of Australia's wheel model of women's policy machinery (with the hub in the chief policy co-ordinating agency of government and the spokes in line departments) and in its dissemination to other levels of government and further afield. The women's health movement sought to influence policy at both national and subnational levels and was instrumental in having women's health policy machinery set up in Commonwealth, State and Territory bureaucracies. In addition to advice on the gender impact of policy, women's policy machinery provided internal advocacy for government funding of women's services in the community, which were expanding rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s.

The story of the relationship of the women's movement to government in Australia is about more than setting up women's policy structures, moving into them, and sustaining community-based women's services. For the past 40 years, there has also been a history of government funding for community-based advocacy. In the 1970s, the Coombs Commission found that business and professional groups were much better represented in the policy process than other sections of the community and that producer groups were much better represented than consumers (Matthews 1976). From that period, Australian governments at federal, State and Territory levels have provided public funding for non-profit advocacy groups. These groups represent sections of the community strongly affected by policy changes but with relatively weak voices in policy processes. From at least the 1980s, women's equality-seeking groups were encouraged to develop peak bodies that could engage in consultation and provide a channel of communication with government.

These new bodies enabled groups previously marginalised in public decision-making, including immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities, single mothers, intravenous drug users or other stigmatised or disadvantaged groups, to be represented in ways not possible through majoritarian political institutions (Sawer 2002). By the 1990s, however, governments discomfited by criticism or incon-venienced by a multiplicity of voices, sought to exercise greater control over how peak bodies operated, for example, by insisting on the merger of bodies representing different homeless or childcare constituencies, limiting the capacity for independent voice.

Reinforcing the trend towards greater control over funded advocacy bodies was neoliberalism, which had a negative rather than a positive view of the role of non-government organisations (NGOs) in policy processes. Neoliberal public choice theory, for example, warned that providing NGOs with access to government would lead to 'agency capture' by groups with a vested interest in increased public expenditure (Sawer 2002).

Both the constraints of corporatism (discussed below) and the growing influence of neoliberal discourses contributed to movement organisations becoming less effective as a political base for feminist initiatives in government (Sawer 2006). Moreover, the women's movement was no longer 'news': there was a loss of media interest even while large street events were still occurring (Strong and McLaren 2013, 60–61).

The policy impact created in the 1970s by the combination of a visible women's movement, receptive political parties and effective women's policy agencies within government had largely dissipated by the mid-1990s. Political parties no longer produced

high-profile women's policies for elections. Women's policy hubs were moved out of their central locations in Premiers' Departments by both conservative and Labor governments and into line departments dealing with families or community services. In the 1990s, many of the existing women's policy structures at different levels of government, as well as the intergovernmental level, were severely downgraded or abolished altogether. With them were lost arrangements for the routine assessment of the gender impact of policy, including women's budget programmes. While around Australia there was little difference in attrition rates under conservative or Labor governments, at the Commonwealth level the Howard government was responsible for a particularly high rate of 'end events' for women's policy machinery (Andrew 2013, 93).

Were these effects the consequence of the women's movement's 'entanglement with the state'? We argue here that they resulted from a number of factors, including the changed discursive environment, which constructed the state and women's reliance on it as a problem. While feminist structures in government proved precarious and governments tended to draw the line at vocal criticism by funded organisations, the relationship between the women's movement and government was never simply one of co-option. As we shall see, this was true even of the shifts away from collectivist organisational styles in women's services, often cited as a prime example of the negative effects of government funding (Macdonald 1993, 3–6). Other pressures owed more to the neoliberal introduction of business models and compulsory competitive tendering than to a relationship with government per se. Moreover, workers in women's services, including women's health services, successfully resisted the pressure to become simply providers of individual services and insisted on a continued role as agents of social change.

Changes in the Characteristics of Women's Movement Organisations, 1970s–1990s

In the 1970s, both radical and more 'reformist' groups such as WEL aimed to empower women through providing an alternative to both masculine hierarchies and the masculine expertise that took little account of women's lived experience. Instead of organising on the conventional basis of experts, leaders and followers, women would empower themselves by taking responsibility for decisions reached through consensus. There were important debates over how to organise so that women could work without hierarchy through collectives and networks (Sawer 2008).

By the 1990s, this kind of organisational philosophy had moved into the background; younger women, less convinced of the need for collectivist organisation, came into women's services at the same time as governments were insisting on greater accountability. The shifts from collectivism were not only associated with generational change and accountability and but also with increased professionalisation, emphasising expert knowledge and skills rather than simply life experience. Professionalisation of advocacy as well as service organisations was encouraged by the increased governmental demand for expert policy knowledge (Scala, Montpetit, and Fortier 2005). Provision of expert policy advice to government with the help of paid executive officers differed significantly from the feminist organisational philosophy of the 1970s.

New feminist organisations like the Australasian Council of Women and Policing (ACWAP) appear not to have had a debate about how they should organise. Other new organisations, like Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), accepted from the

beginning that formal governance structures were the price of government funding, and funding was essential to survival, given the poverty and additional costs associated with disability (see Table 1). While no longer agonising over collectivism or consensus decision-making, feminist organisations retained a distinctive approach to organising and leadership, taking more care to ensure opportunities for all voices to be heard and with more recognition of the emotion work required to maintain organisations.

Government funding enabled some women to acquire a national voice for the first time. New funding programmes, many initiated by femocrats, helped new groups of women to achieve their own peak bodies. In the 1980s, seed funding was provided for the establishment of a short-lived Federation of Aboriginal and Islander Women, as well as for the Association of Non-English Speaking Background Women of Australia (Sawer 1990, 118). While the latter did not survive defunding by the Howard government, a return to Labor government brought funding for new national peaks for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and refugee and immigrant women.

The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed increased specialisation of women's advocacy: bodies such as women's legal services, women's emergency services, sexual assault services and women's health services all developed their own peak advocacy bodies at Commonwealth, State and Territory levels. Some of these, such as the Women's Emergency Services Network and the National Association of Services against Sexual Violence (NASASV), represented large numbers of services (around 300 and 150, respectively).

In the 1990s, vocational bodies were becoming increasingly important, both older organisations such as those representing women lawyers and newer ones such as EMILY's List (supporting feminist Labor MPs, established 1996). New bodies appeared supporting women in non-traditional areas of employment including ACWAP (already mentioned), the National Association of Women in Construction (established 1995), the Women's Industry Seafood Community (established 1998) and Women and Firefighting Australasia (established 2007). These vocational bodies often had broader feminist objectives; for example,

TABLE 1
Women's NGOs: Changing organisational features

Organisation	Date founded	Org. style	Govt. funding	International affiliation or relationship	Member national women's peak body
Women's liberation groups	1969–1970	Collective	No	No	No
WEL in 1970s	1972	Hybrid	No	No	No
WEL in 1990s	1972	Hybrid/ some formal features	Yes	International alliance of women	Yes
WWDA	1995	Formal governance	Yes	International network of women with disabilities	Yes
ACWAP	1997	Formal governance	Project/ event funding	International association of women police	Yes

ACWAP aims included improving the quality of policing for women in the community, particularly on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. Another group that became highly visible in the 1990s were women in agriculture. While mobilising later than city-based women, they were quickly successful in achieving rural women's policy machinery and advisory bodies (Pini, Panelli, and Sawer 2008). Unlike the long-established Country Women's Association, the new women in agriculture movement was based firmly on women who identified as farmers rather than as farmers' wives.

In the new century, the accessibility of the Internet brought a new kind of feminist organising, very much focused on speaking from personal experience. The appearance of feminist blogs heralded the use of social media, both for fostering affective feminist communities and for campaigning (Shaw 2013). By 2012 this new repertoire was highly effective, as in the response to Alan Jones, a popular talkback radio host, who suggested that women in public life in Australia were 'destroying the joint'. The 'Destroy the Joint' campaign on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube attracted a huge following and persuaded companies to stop advertising on the Jones programme (Caro 2013). Such online consciousness-raising also contributed to the Prime Minister's speech on misogyny 'going viral' and being viewed by two million people in ten days (Sawer 2013b).

Increased International Linkages

Another change observed internationally is the increased number of transnational women's advocacy organisations and the increased international linkages of women's movement organisations in both older democracies and developing democracies (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Outshoorn 2010). The development of cheap, user-friendly communication technologies meant that the organisation of national and international feminist advocacy networks and alliances was easier than ever before. Organisations established in the 1990s tended to have more international partners in their work than those established 20 years earlier (see Table 1). There are a number of possible explanations for this shift: first, the general context of globalisation and its effects on the locus of governance and advocacy; second, the relative success of feminist policy work within transnational bodies; and third, greater government support for gender equality work at regional or international levels than at the domestic level. The increasing ease and reduced costs of new communication technologies facilitated these processes.

Of course, women's movements have always had a strong international dimension and international organisations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) were established in Australia during the first wave, as were National Councils of Women affiliated to the International Council of Women (see Quartly and Smart 2014). Out of the First World War came bodies such as the Sisterhood of International Peace in Melbourne, soon part of the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

It is notable that the NCWs, the YWCA and WILPF still play important roles in the Australian women's movement, as well as being closely linked to their international bodies and hence the UN. This is particularly the case with the YWCA, which has played a major role in helping coordinate gender equality advocacy by women's NGOs since the 1990s. But WILPF also continues its distinctive peace advocacy, promoting implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Even a home-grown

organisation like WEL has been the Australian affiliate of the International Alliance of Women since 1982.

Australian feminists have a long history both of contributing to the development of international norms of gender equality and of using these norms to leverage change at home and abroad. Accordingly, the increased transnational focus of women's organisations founded in the 1990s is more a matter of shifts in the political opportunity structure, than a change from parochial to international concerns.

Corporatisation of Women's Movement Relations with Government

Together with increased specialisation of women's organisations came increased corporatisation of relations with government. In the 1990s, this was through 'ministerial round tables' to which a plurality of women's organisations was invited. Organisations were funded to send representatives, even though some of them were also in receipt of modest levels of operational funding under programmes established by the Hawke Labor Government.

From 1999, however, a more formal corporatist structure was established. The Howard Coalition government abolished the Labor Government's funding for women's advocacy bodies, replacing it with three 'national secretariats'. Loosely, these were to represent young women, older women and businesswomen. National women's organisations objected that this meant:

> a loss of pluralism and diversity in the voices being heard by government. In particular the most disadvantaged groups have the right to autonomy of voice, for example, women from non-English Speaking Backgrounds, Indigenous women and women with special needs. (AWOC 2001)

This view was reiterated in the 2005 NGO Shadow Report on CEDAW implementation (WRANA 2005, 7). Nonetheless, under a Coalition government with a rural partner, the only group successful in their lobbying over lack of representation in the new structure were rural women, who won funding for a fourth secretariat in 2002 and 2005.

While women's NGO access to government was being largely channelled through the new secretariats, some peak bodies were losing their access. This was clear in the areas of family law and violence against women, where the peak bodies representing women's refuges (WESNET) and rape crisis centres (NASASV) were denied operational funding and were no longer wanted at the policy table. In 1999, Senator Jocelyn Newman announced that in order to address the 'gender imbalance in policy development', the government would provide two years operational funding for the Lone Fathers Association Australia, while simultaneously defunding the National Council for Single Mothers and their Children (NCSMC). The defunding of the NCSMC, representing the section of the community most vulnerable to poverty, was only reversed after feminist action and extensive public outcry. Despite the restoration of funding to the single mothers, it was the lone fathers who gained access to government and obtained substantial changes to the Child Support Scheme, the Family Law Act and family tax benefits (Sawer 2007).

Meanwhile, the operational funding for women's secretariats was not intended to give them public voice. There was to be no public comment without prior notice to government and, as was made clear from 2005, neither was any of the money to be spent

on researching the gender impact of government policy. So while women's units in government were being closed down, together with their capacity to commission research, there was also a tightening of control over funded non-government bodies.

Although input into policy processes was being channelled and controlled, the number of national women's organisations recorded by the Office of the Status of Women/Office for Women was continuing to increase, rising from 50 in 1998 to 1992 in 2003, to over 130 in 2011 and to 180 in 2013.[1] Increased diversity and specialisation did not necessarily weaken the movement as women's NGOs undertook new coalition-building activities, assisted by the availability of new communication technologies. The Coalition of Participating Organisations of Women (CAPOW), created in 1992, used the 'transitional technology' of a fortnightly fax-stream to disseminate information. After losing its government funding, it was replaced by the cheaper Pamelas-List, which continues the work of networking national women's organisations by email.

The experience of Working Women's Centres illustrates the control that can be exerted over funded organisations. Three Working Women's Centres had been established in the 1970s to provide work-related support for women, especially immigrant women. An additional four were funded as part of 1993 Labor election policy, in response to concerns over the impact on women of the adoption of enterprise bargaining (rather than industry-wide awards). Under the Howard government, these centres came under funding threat and were forced to curtail their opposition to still further decentralisation of wage bargaining, especially the use of the individualised Australian Workplace Awards (AWAs). In 2005–2006, the NSW and Tasmanian Centres closed their doors rather than accept funding contracts that required promotion of AWAs.

Nonetheless the women's movement emerged from the Howard years 'damaged but determined' to use the words of Merrindahl Andrew and Sarah Maddison (2010). Despite professionalisation, specialisation and corporatisation, it continued to make claims on government. Sometimes there were successes, as with the increased recognition accorded to issues around the intersection of gender and disability. Repertoires had changed in some respects, although the institutional resources of women's services helped sustain annual events, such as Reclaim the Night marches.

The election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007 brought some immediate changes to the relations between NGOs and government. The 'gag clauses' in funding contracts concerning media activity were withdrawn[2] and there were no longer the same constraints on funded NGOs participating in advocacy activities (although some had to relearn the skills). In 2013, the Gillard Labor Government passed the *Not-for-Profit Sector Freedom to Advocate Act* in an attempt to prevent a future conservative government from reintroducing gag clauses.

The Labor Government reviewed the corporate structure for the interaction between women's NGOs and government and introduced reformed Women's Alliance arrangements in 2010. The six funded Alliances at last included the designated representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Immigrant and Refugee Women long sought by the women's movement. The largest of the Alliances is the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA), auspiced by the YWCA. By March 2013, it had over 60 affiliated women's organisations, themselves often federations or umbrella bodies. The manager of ERA believed that the increased number of affiliations 'reflected the reality that many women's organisations had little chance of access to government except through the corporate structure' (Richards 2010).

ERA combined professionalism and expertise with a commitment to process and diversity, particularly in terms of help for newly established Alliances and social media networking for young women. The evaluation framework for the women's Alliances made advocacy a defining principle of their activity and required them to have collaborated with at least one other alliance, promoting coalition-building across difference. In fact, broader collaboration has taken place on issues such as Budget and election priorities. In line with the Labor Government's attempt to shore up their advocacy functions, there was a small increase in the second round of triennial funding for the Alliances in 2013.

The Australian women's movement looked very different in the twenty-first century than 40 years previously. It had adapted and survived with fundamental values intact, particularly a belief in the responsibility of government to ensure that women, regardless of background, were able to achieve their full potential. From time to time this caused collisions with governments increasingly under the sway of market philosophies and impatient with the public regulation and public expenditure involved in creating a 'woman-friendly state'.

We turn now to the example of the Australian women's health movement to test in more detail the main propositions concerning the impact of institutionalisation on social movements. In the final section, a case study of the movement to remove abortion from the criminal code in Victoria will illustrate the complex ways of working developed over four decades by institutionalised women's groups.

The Australian Women's Health Movement and Institutionalisation

The health strand of the Australian women's movement has been entangled with government since the very early days, when a sympathetic national Labor government provided funding for the health centres, refuges and other support services that grassroots feminists established in each State and Territory. Certainly, services have long been required to abide by imposed requirements and conditions. Conformity, however, has not led to the disappearance of feminist agendas.

The first proposition we examine is whether institutionalisation has led to the disappearance of the movement, *as a movement*. In other words, has deradicalisation taken place? A second question is whether the capacity to protect previous gains has been undermined. The extent to which the institutionalised movement has been able to work for change at the cultural level is then explored. Fourth, we address the big question of whether institutionalised activism can result in radical changes over the longer term. We now explore each of these questions in turn.

Has the Women's Health Movement Disappeared as a Movement? Has It Been De-radicalised?

An answer to this question depends largely on how radicalism and 'movement' are defined. If radicalism comprises a series of extreme (often illegal) actions that regularly make the news, then the movement has become more moderate: women rarely take illegal action in the 2000s. Civil disobedience was never more than a small part of the Australian women's health movement's activism, even in the early days. For the most part, women lobbied, wrote position papers and carried out advocacy at all levels of government much as they do today. What has changed dramatically since the 1970s is

what counts as news: women's activism does not feature nearly as often as it once did, partly because it is no longer 'new'. Women are often asked by journalists to give a 'new' slant on an old issue if the topic is to be pursued; however when 'on the streets' protest action takes place around an issue of high importance to women, like abortion, such activity is often still reported. For example, there were reproductive rights marches and rallies in the ACT in 2002 and in Queensland in 2010. In 2009, more than 3000 women gathered at the national Parliament for the 'mother of all rallies' to protest about maternity care policy as part of a sustained 'conventional' campaign.

If a movement 'as a movement' can be seen as a collection of groups that meet the criteria outlined at the beginning of this article, creating an imagined 'sisterhood', even if through means other than protest action, then the women's health movement is alive and well. At a national level, it continues to challenge the structure of the health system, arguing that health policy needs to be based on a social, gendered perspective that takes into account the conditions of people's lives. This is a radical agenda that challenges the simple medical perspective. At the local level, too, women from health centres and other services are involved in a range of campaigns for social change, often involving local government.

Indeed, far from disappearing, the women's health movement, like the women's movement generally, has proliferated over the decades and continues to do so, with dozens of new specialised groups formed since the 1970s. To identify just a few, organisations have been set up by/for rural women, trafficked women, lesbians, women with disabilities, immigrant women and women suffering from specific disorders. Some of these groups pursue social change agendas; others have more modest aims, sometimes focusing on therapy and support for individual women.

While most of the radical members eventually departed, it is not clear that the movement would be stronger if institutionalisation had not taken place. Had Commonwealth funding been rejected altogether, many and perhaps most centres and services would have disappeared long ago, as in the case of Melbourne's Collingwood Women's Health Centre, which refused funding but was forced to close its doors after only two years.

Has the Capacity to Protect Previous Gains Been Undermined?

Despite varying fortunes, very few of the services that women set up in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s have been dismantled. When the Howard government tried to cut off the Commonwealth's share of funding for the women's health sector in 2004, the movement launched a series of conventional actions and managed to thwart the attempt (Gray Jamieson 2012, 143). One area of repeated rebuffs, however, is the level of funding for services. Straitened circumstances have many untoward effects, including constraints on the size of supporting constituencies. Underfunding is not a side effect of institutionalisation: without public support the sector would almost certainly be very much smaller than it now is and would have even less capacity to meet client needs or build up constituencies.

As with general women's policy machinery, the specialist women's health machinery established in all government bureaucracies in the 1980s has largely been dismantled by governments from both sides of the political divide and at national and subnational levels. The dismantling process appears to be more closely related to factors outside rather than

inside the movement, including loss of media interest, loss of interest by political parties in the 'women's vote' and loss of faith in interventionist government. There is no obvious link between the movement's entanglement with government and the abolition of women's health policy machinery. Indeed, had the Australian women's health movement not become institutionalised, women's health policy machinery would almost certainly not have been established in the first place.

Has the Movement Been Able to Work for Change at the Cultural Level?

Transforming attitudes towards women and changing structures that do not serve women's interests have always been major movement aims, particularly in relation to the many kinds of violence against women. Institutionalised, funded services, along with the Australian and Queensland Women's Health Networks and networks of service providers, continue to retain strong feminist credentials and to work for cultural change. The social health perspective that the movement has promoted for 40 years is now found in many mainstream policy documents. Despite this, policy action based on the social perspective is disappointingly limited, hemmed in by significant political restraints, particularly the opposition of current providers of medical services (Gray Jamieson 2012).

Considerable success has been achieved, however, in relation to changing attitudes about violence against women, despite antifeminist backlash and attempts by various agencies and men's groups, supported federally by the Howard government, to promote violence as a non-gendered issue. Groups such as the Lone Fathers Association argue that men are equally victims of domestic violence. The introduction into policy of gender neutral terms such as 'family violence' is a case in point (Webster 2007). This campaign was turned around to a large extent under the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments, which undertook new initiatives on gender-based violence. The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (National Council), established in 2008, led to a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children covering the period 2010–2022. In 2011, a long campaign by Women's Legal Services bore fruit when changes to the *Family Law Act* were enacted that prioritised safety of children over the shared parenting principle introduced by the Howard government.

For all the problems in current policy arrangements, VicHealth research shows that public attitudes to physical and sexual violence against women and children have improved significantly. A large national survey undertaken in 2009 found that 98% of respondents recognised domestic violence as a crime, an increase of 5% points over 1995. People were more likely to understand that violence takes a variety of forms, including threats of harm and psychological, verbal and economic abuse. Attitudes to rape also improved considerably after 1995 (but have some way to go; VicHealth 2009).

Can Institutionalised Activism Lead to Radical Change Over the Longer Term?

There is no way to confidently predict whether institutionalised activism can lead to radical change. Many analysts of public policy argue that incremental change can amount to radical change over time and, further, that incrementalism is the surest and best approach to adopt when working for major reforms (Anderson 2012, 129–131).

Achieving optimal conditions for women's health would require massive social and economic change, as well as structural changes within the hospital and medical systems.

This is because good health is closely linked to economic and status equality. The recent work of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) demonstrates that countries with the biggest gaps between rich and poor have the poorest health outcomes, including higher rates of mental illness, more drug and alcohol problems, more obesity, higher teenage pregnancy rates, more homicides and so on. The huge reforms necessary to eliminate socially produced health inequalities are unlikely to be achieved anytime soon. Enhancement of the conditions in which women (people) work and live is possible and health outcomes can thereby be improved, especially the health outcomes of the most disadvantaged. In attempting to move forward, it is almost certainly necessary to adopt an incremental approach: the circumstances in which radical reforms might be achieved quickly are very difficult to envisage. In the meantime, the Australian women's health movement continues to work towards changing attitudes, seizing opportunities when they appear, creating them where possible.

We conclude with a short case study which illustrates the complex ways that an institutionalised movement can work to achieve change in the 2000s. The study shows the relatively invisible but multifaceted and interlocking methods used by the Victorian women's health movement.

Pro-choice women's groups in Victoria conducted a long, carefully planned, collaborative campaign as a response to the threats to women's reproductive rights posed by the pronouncements of senior ministers in the Howard government. In addition, Victorian doctors wanted clarification of the legal situation. A new State-based coalition, the Association for the Legal Right to Abortion (ALRA), was formed in 2005 after women's groups agreed to work proactively for as long as necessary to have abortion removed from the Victorian criminal code. The main approach adopted was quiet and unobtrusive: the aim was to educate and gain the support of politicians, the media and members of the community. Evidence-based resources were produced, distributed widely and placed on websites. Position papers were written in response to issues as they emerged, including 'What MPs Need to Know about Termination of Pregnancy'. Efforts were made to enlist the support of health professionals and health-focused organisations, while campaign teams met with all Victorian politicians. A table of parliamentarians and their voting intentions was drawn up as a means of monitoring the possibility of legislative success. Media and communications expertise was obtained and group members given media training. Extensive efforts were made to promote community participation in the work of the ALRA, including networks to monitor anti-choice activities.

In true institutionalised mode, an agreement was made with the Premier that ALRA would not make decriminalisation an issue for the 2006 State election, except to provide strong support for pro-choice candidates. Immediately after the election, the campaign resumed. Another group, the Abortion Law Reform Women's Health Services Campaign Organising Group, was established. It wrote letters, issued media releases, created copy for newsletters, met with parliamentarians, kept a list of supporters and facilitated local electorate activity. The work was coordinated by Women's Health Victoria. The following year, yet another group, Pro Choice Victoria, was formed. It conducted a full range of lobbying activities, including staging rallies with higher levels of visibility. The main strategy remained to make quiet approaches to parliamentarians, to enlist the support of as many allies as possible and to encourage active community participation.

Feminist work continued throughout 2007. In 2008, Premier Brumby, arguing that the law must reflect community standards, asked the Victorian Law Reform Commission

(VLRC) to provide advice on legislative options. After the VLRC report was tabled in Parliament and amidst intense public debate, the Minister for Women's Affairs, Maxine Morand, introduced the *Abortion Law Reform Bill* 2008 into Parliament. More than 40 amendments were moved in the Lower House and over 70 in the Upper House. The Bill eventually passed unamended in the Lower House in late September and in the Upper House in October, when the Bill became law.

The strategies chosen to achieve major reform were entirely different from those of the 1970s. To some extent, this type of campaign was made possible by changes in communication technologies: websites, inexpensive teleconferences and the capacity to contact women and stakeholders cheaply and effectively through email facilitated action. The relatively quiet but effective campaign conducted over almost four years would have been very much more difficult to conduct without an institutionalised base from which to work, a base provided by the network of funded women's services. The decriminalisation of abortion in Victoria can be seen as an example of 'institutionalised incrementalism'.

Conclusion

There has been an element of 'feminist fading' in Australia, perhaps less so in the women's health movement than in the wider women's movement. Ironically, in terms of social movement theory predictions, this may be because the women's health strand of the movement has had the longest and strongest engagement with government. The women's movement as a whole is less visible than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Women take to the streets less frequently and governments and political parties no longer produce high-profile women's policies. Some of the achievements of the movement, such as a national programme of community-based children's services, have been jeopardised by the withdrawal of operational subsidies and government encouragement of a for-profit childcare industry. Sections of the feminist movement have become de-radicalised if the comparison is with those groups in the 1970s whose aim was to 'smash patriarchy by Christmas'. This was never, however, the stance taken by the vast majority of Australian feminists.

Major social, technological and economic changes since the 1970s and radical changes in the ideas that dominate western political systems have altered political opportunity structures. As in all areas of public policy, multiple forces are at work and it is very difficult to identify causal links with confidence. In the case of the Australian women's movement, it is impossible to disentangle the impact of engagement with government from all the other forces that have led to changes within the movement and in the political context within which it operates. Some of the newer feminist groups are comfortable with conventional organisational structures and, as noted, some of the recently formed health groups are less concerned with societal change than with service provision and support for individual women.

On the whole, women working in women's services have not become depoliticised. As Kirsty McLaren and Merrindahl Andrew have observed, 'the spontaneity and apparent disorder of protest is not the only marker of radicalism'. Institutions may embody radical visions for social change in their very existence and purpose (Andrew and McLaren 2012). Despite the delegitimation of interventionist government, the reporting requirements that come with government funding and the pressures introduced by compulsory competitive tendering, feminist credentials have been retained as women continue to work for

structural and attitudinal change in a wide variety of spaces. The new ways of operating are not obviously less effective than the old in terms of getting issues onto political agendas or influencing public policy.

The structures that women set up outside but not inside government have mostly survived and feminist principles have been sustained through to the second and third generation of activists. The study of the decriminalisation of abortion in Victoria demonstrates how women's groups, even when closely entangled with government, can work within a channelled and controlled environment to achieve their aims. We would have to say, however, that most of the achievements of the movement have been on the terms set by the governments involved, which is, after all, how representative democracies are supposed to operate.

NOTES

1. The number of national women's organisations is recorded in the successive editions of *Australian Women Working Together* first published by the Office of the Status of Women in 1997, and more recently on the website of the Office for Women under the heading 'Engaging with Women's Organisations'.
2. See for example, the letter sent by Minister Jenny Macklin to Women with Disabilities Australia on 4 April 2008.

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