

What Difference Does Writing Make?

Leading Writers on Writing

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Hear Her Roar

By Zoe Ferguson

Whether it is in the workplace, the home or in everyday life, women suffer from entrenched discrimination. Since the early days of the colony, men have vastly outnumbered women. A woman had one of two roles; a wife or a prostitute. If she retained some freedom in the former and avoided the latter, the woman's role would be in the performance of domestic services. However, if a woman married, she was regarded as *Unita Cara* with her husband and this in turn assimilated her identity to that of her husband upon marriage. It is debatable whether a modern-day woman would rather be a "home-maker" or a "bread-winner". Clean the house, cook the husband's meals and wipe clean the misery of her domestic serviced life, or be an independent woman. This antithesis of roles still permeates throughout today's society, albeit in a far subtler manner, shattering the contemporary conception that women are all equal under a regime of egalitarian governments. The governmental bodies have already passed 24 *Acts* to support the rights of the women protesting for their rights, however, there are conventions that are still being breached. Despite these reforms, it is still a "man's world" and it's now time to kick off the high heels and get dirty, ladies.

"No-one is above the law and everyone is treated equally." This is the rule of law and it sounds good in theory, but it is arguable that the gender with an additional piece of anatomy get higher wages, favourable bias and is considered more worthy of a job. The constant battle of women against men in workplaces still causes controversy and ceaseless debates. Since 1919 when female basic wage was 54 per cent of the male

counterpart's basic wage, the centralised wage-fixing scheme achieved assured greater equality between the sexes in equal pay. "Equal pay for equal work" is the basis of the recognition of economic rights for women and was reformed in 1973. However, in managerial positions, there is a \$252 differential in pay; a discrepancy that favours the male party. Furthermore, if a female were to aspire for a more fundamentally secure position on the corporate ladder, she would be hampered by the "glass ceiling" phenomena. The "glass ceiling" is defined as "an invisible barrier created by male prejudice, male-dominated work practices, and unwillingness of organisations to take into account women's career paths, thus, these factors have prevented women from being promoted above a certain level". Whether this blatant inequality is due to the women being the "baby makers" or just because they are considered to be the "weaker sex", it is apparent that this inequality exists and is thus being scrutinised by many determined to greater equality for all irrespective of one's gender, age or reproductive plans. Females are combating this bias by becoming eminent business women. For example, Gail Kelly, who holds a Higher Diploma of Education, a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Business Administration with distinction and has also completed the INSEAD Advanced Management Program. On the 14th of January 2002, Gail Kelly was appointed the St. George Group's Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer; an action that strengthened society's growing appreciative perspective of women and their contributing role to the business world.

In Australia, girls have opportunities that far outreach those of the generations before them and they recognise the value of their prospects. For example, in Education, subjects are equally accessible by both sexes, which promotes equality and justice for all. In 1993 only 19½ per cent of girls were participating in secondary education, however, in recent years girls have made up a precise figure of 54 per cent of the higher education student population. Females are becoming more educated, enthusiastic and thus empowered. This is an exalted product of what the next generation of women can do. Unfortunately, after higher education comes the workforce, and

in the workforce lie adventures which hold the good, the bad and the ugly, such as sexual harassment. It is defined by the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1986* (Commonwealth) as “an unwelcome sexual advance or request for sexual favours or unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature”. Harassment occurs because of a person’s gender, race or age, but in this case, it is sexual against women. It is distressing to realise that one of the main problems concerning sexual harassment is that it is regularly not reported by women through fear of losing their job or suffering other recrimination. Sexual harassment is unlawful under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (New South Wales) and the *Sex-Discrimination Act 1984* (Commonwealth), and yet women still suffer from it.

These apparent advantages taken of women is repellent as it still occurs in a civilised society and is another example of the proportionally negative perception of women in today’s society. Despite the law making discrimination illegal, lesbians are also victims of such prejudice. Homosexual women have to fight for their rights in the division of a partner’s estate as the *Family Provisions Act 1982* (NSW) does not make specific mention of homosexual couples and hence result in inequality and discrimination due to sexual preferences which are not tolerable in today’s society.

As a result of a society with juxtaposed values, suffering from discrimination, bias and harassment is all part of a day for women, along with constant deliberation of whether to cook and clean. It has been shown that women over the past 40 years have improved their position on the “social ladder” and have enhanced their ability to attain equal opportunities. This has increased the possibilities that lie ahead for women of the future, who may become Prime Ministers, astronauts, lawyers, or even a traditionalist domestic housewife. Women may do whatever their strong hearts desire to make them intrinsically happy and equal to all others in society.



Zoe Ferguson wrote this essay in 2006 when she was in Year 12 at Mossman High School, Mossman, New South Wales.