



Sheilas

28 years on



Introduction

Sheilas: 28 Years On is a seventy-one minute documentary film produced for Television One by Occasional Productions. The film features the stories of five prominent New Zealand second wave feminists who first appeared on our television screens in 1977, in the controversial feminist documentary series *Women*. In *Sheilas: 28 Years On* contemporary interviews with the women about their lives and their political beliefs are juxtaposed with archival footage from the original series and from the 1960s to the 1980s. This provides a visual background to what motivated the women to become politically active and documents the changes that have occurred as a result of their activism, both in their own lives and in New Zealand society. Students will gain insight into the causes and consequences of second wave feminist activism in New Zealand through viewing the film.

The purpose of this guide is to make relevant links between the film and aspects of the Social Studies Curriculum and Achievement Standards.

Curriculum Links

Achievement Objectives and Strand

The film would be most suitable for activities relating to Level 7 of the Time, Continuity and Change strand. Students will come to understand more about short-term and long-term consequences of events, values positions and planning social action.

Please note: sexual references make this film unsuitable for junior audiences.

Achievement Standards

Social Studies

- Examine ways people influence society (90272)
- Examine responses to values positions (90274)
- Plan social action in relation to a social issue (90275)

Setting

- New Zealand

Perspectives

- Gender

- Current Issues

ELANZ: Essential Learning About New Zealand

- Major events in New Zealand's history
- People in New Zealand's history
- The nature and organization of paid and unpaid work

Processes

- Values exploration
- Social decision-making

Synopsis

Sheilas features five women, each with



a segment devoted to her life story and feminist activism. The film revisits an earlier feminist series entitled *Women*. Each episode *Women* addressed a particular feminist issue and used an all-female crew to emphasize the notion that women can do anything that their male counterparts can do.

In the 1960s and 1970s women were generally confined to the home after marriage except where poverty or their husband's low income required them to work. Established gender roles limited the variety of paid work women could do as well as their sexual freedoms and reproductive rights. Sexism was reflected in the way women were represented in the media. The women in *Sheilas* set out to change this.

Miriam Cameron protested against militarism and went to live on a commune to create an alternative to the nuclear family. She became a female concrete worker in a male dominated environment. Aloma Parker used her influence as the first sex-therapist and one of the first full-time practising psychologists in New Zealand to initiate changes to sex roles for women. Sandi Hall worked in advertising and

used her influence there to try to eliminate sexist representations of women. She was involved in women's collectives and during this period came out as a lesbian. Donna Awatere-Huata was a psychologist who was passionately committed to eliminating racism from the education system. Raised in a violent home, she protested against racism and violence during the 1981 Springbok Tour. Marcia Russell used her influence as the editor of women's magazine *Thursday* to publicly debate feminist issues like the need for the Domestic Purposes Benefit, the 'Suburban Cabbage' syndrome and absent fathers.

All the women have moved on from the intense political activity of the 1960s and 1970s. Their consequent experiences of motherhood, career and some changes in political perspective, place the second wave of feminism in a historical context.

Useful background and definitions

The film assumes the audience is familiar with both feminism and New Zealand history, so it will be helpful to familiarize students with some of the

key issues that are mentioned in the film before they view it.

Feminism is a philosophy based on the idea that women and men should be treated and viewed as equal. Near the turn of the century, women in several parts of the world began arguing that women should be able to vote. This movement resulted in women's suffrage. In 1893 New Zealand was the first country to give women the vote. The so-called second wave of feminism began in various parts of the world around the 1960s. In New Zealand it centred on issues such as access to childcare, contraception and safe legal abortion on demand. In general terms, the movement called for an end to violence against women as well as an end to the discrimination against women based on their race (in particular Maori women) or sexual preference. Women also wanted more access to paid employment and greater financial independence from men.

The **Women's Movement** is one of the names given to the political activity that feminists used to create desired social changes. In New Zealand, as in several other countries, this political activity included protest marches,



consciousness-raising groups and a series of United Women's Conventions as well as lifestyle changes and the movement of more women into a greater variety of paid work. Women's groups also successfully lobbied governments to change legislation relating to issues of concern to women.

Protest marches were non-violent but vocal gatherings of people that called attention to a particular issue. In *Sheilas* archival footage shows women marching to **reclaim the night** from violence against women, to protest against the **Springbok rugby tour** of New Zealand, and to demand safe legal **abortions** and recognition for lesbians. One of the reasons that feminists agitated for legal abortion was that a significant number of illegal abortions were performed every year with no guarantee of safety for the women concerned. This is a complex issue. In *Sheilas* Miriam Cameron looks back in horror at her own abortions although she still believes in a woman's political right to safe, legal abortion, whereas Donna Awatere-Huata believes similarly but declares that she would never have an abortion herself.

Feminist **consciousness-raising** groups were small groups of women

who would meet together and discuss their lives. The idea behind these groups was that similar challenges are often faced by people who occupy the same position in society and that women could help each other work out ways to better their lives. A series of **United Women's Conventions** were similar but much bigger, and focused on addressing specific feminist issues in lectures and seminars as well as discussion groups. They were held every two years and were designed to include all kinds of women from all over New Zealand.

A number of **social movements** had sprung up alongside feminism, all drawing on the same left-leaning political view. A left view can be loosely understood as a principle of collectivity, of sharing resources and responsibility for things going on in the world. Governmentally it focuses on redistribution of wealth through taxation which is then spent in areas such as social welfare and health care. The anti-militarism and the anti-nuclear movement that Miriam mentions are examples of left-leaning social movements. 'Dropping out' and 'going back to the land' were part of this same philosophy. When Miriam joined a **commune**, a group of families

living on the same piece of land and sharing food and resources together, she was part of this social movement. The commune lifestyle was intended to help break down the **nuclear family**, that is the conventional family of mum, dad and two or three kids.

Aloma Parker mentions **sex roles**, **contraception** and the **sexual revolution**. She argues that sex roles and social roles generally were stricter in New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s than they are now. This meant that (for example) women often didn't go out to work unless their husbands didn't earn enough to support the family, and men were unlikely to feel comfortable expressing their feelings. The sexual revolution refers to the greater amount of sexual activity that now occurs outside of marriage and a change in our moral values surrounding sex. In earlier times sex outside of marriage would have been absolutely unacceptable for women. Aloma links the increase in women's sexual activity to the availability of effective contraception, in the form of the pill.

Activities before watching the film

The film is seventy-one minutes in



duration so in some classes it might be best watched in sections. Teachers may want to preview Aloma Parker's* segment before screening it for the class. (*Aloma's segment contains explicit references to genitalia and sexual intercourse as part of her comments on sex therapy.)

Before watching the film it would be an advantage for students establish some prior knowledge about what life was like for women thirty to forty years ago. This could be done through surveying their grandmothers or other people over fifty.

Model some questions:

- What type of work did women do thirty years ago?
- Did mothers stay at home to look after their children full-time?

- Who was Germaine Greer?
- What effect did the pill have on women's lives?

Students should brainstorm their ideas for questions.

Get the class to share their ideas and pick the best ones to be part of the survey.

Have each member of the class administer the survey on at least two people. Make sure students get informed consent to participate from everyone who takes part.

Collect and process the survey results as a class.

As a class, get students to make conclusions about the kinds of work women did, whether mothers stayed at home,

who Germaine Greer was, and the effects of the pill on women's lives.

NCEA Achievement Standard 90272 (2.2)

- Examine Ways People Influence Society
- 5 Credits
- Practice for External Assessment

Non-Assessed Exercises

Before viewing

Before viewing the film divide the class into expert groups of three to four.

Each group should concentrate on one woman. Ask the students in each group to consider the following questions independently while they watch and take notes. Provide students with a copy of Table 01.

Who	What social change?	How changed/influenced	Why significant	Consequences (include perspective) Short-term / Long-term	

TABLE 01



What social changes did the women in *Sheilas* attempt to achieve?

This might include:

- Provision of legal abortion
- For women to be able to work outside the home and in any role
- Freedom from violence
- The elimination of sex roles
- The elimination of the nuclear family
- The elimination of sexism in advertising images
- The provision of the Domestic Purposes Benefit
- How did the women attempt these social changes?

This could include:

- Protests and marches
- Lifestyle changes like moving to a commune
- Consciousness-raising groups and conventions
- Moving into the workplace and doing male-dominated jobs
- Publishing and media activity to increase awareness of women's rights and change the image of women in advertising

Why were these attempted changes

significant?

- They represented a shift in the way New Zealand society viewed women
- They contributed to changes to women's lives
- They contributed to changes to New Zealand society

What were some of the short-term consequences of these types of action?

The women in the film:

- began to do a wider variety of paid work
- became involved in women's communities and activities outside the home
- could get reliable contraception and access to abortion
- could get support from government to raise children outside of marriage
- could take action against domestic violence
- could access lesbian communities and support if required

What were some of the long-term consequences of these types of action?

- Ask students to think about their own expectations about what women will do in the course of their lives. Draw their attention to how these are different from those discussed by the women in the film.

Examples:

- Aloma mentions married women were expected not to work outside the home and the difference made to women's sexual activity when effective contraception became available
- Sandi mentions being expected to care for her first husband's father after her marriage
- Marcia talks about not being legally allowed to work after 11.00pm and work being something to fill in the 'dreary' time between the end of school and marriage

Non-Assessed Exercises

After viewing

Each group should discuss the woman they were assigned and complete the table together.



Get each group to share their findings with the class. Others could add their responses.

Students could create a summary statement/s for each woman in the form of a speech bubble that outlines the social change, the way this was attained and the consequences of it.

The situation today for women

Share and discuss with students ways in which women are able to express themselves politically, economically and independently in the twenty-first century.

Women now have access to:

- Public participation and recognition as leaders and workers

- Legal abortion (with restrictions)
- The ability to control conception through access to contraception and information
- Greater levels of acceptance for lesbians
- Recognition of and support to get away from domestic violence

Assessment

This achievement standard requires explanation of ways people influence society and examination of the consequences of people's influence on society.

Achievement Criteria

Achievement

- Explain ways people influence society.

- Examine consequences of people's influence on society.

Achievement with Merit

- Explain, in depth, ways people influence society.
- Examine consequences of people's influence on society.

Achievement with Excellence

- Explain, in depth, ways people influence society.
- Examine, in depth, consequences of people's influence on society.

Achievement criteria also require students to:

- Use varying perspectives
- Apply social studies concepts that are relevant

Students will prepare a practice essay for external assessment.

Essay Question: Using the film as a resource, explain how the women in *Sheilas* helped to influence society, and the short-term and long-term consequences of their actions on society, using varying perspectives.

Social changes attempted by women in <i>Sheilas: 28 Years On</i>	Ways attempted social changes
Consequences on society Short-term/Long-term	Varying perspectives
Social studies concepts	

TABLE 02

Table 03

Planning page

(See Table 02)

Consequences must be on society in the short-term and long-term, not on individuals.

Students need to clearly identify how a gender perspective is shown. For example Sandi, as a young married woman in the 1960s, was expected to care for her first husband's father when she married. Today a young married woman will most likely maintain the career path she has created for herself.

NCEA Achievement Standard 90274 (2.4)

- Examine Responses to Values Positions
- 4 Credits
- Internal Assessment opportunity
- Non-Assessed Exercises

Before Viewing

Ask the class to watch the film and individually note Miriam Cameron and Donna Awatere-Huata's attitudes to abortion.

Would they do it themselves or do they see it as a woman's choice in a political sense?

After Viewing

Ask the class what Miriam Cameron and Donna Awatere-Huata each think about abortion. Are all feminist attitudes to abortion the same?

The Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) is a New Zealand-wide feminist group who have used a variety of techniques to lobby government so that women benefit. Their position on abortion has been consistent since the group started in 1975. It is expressed in their manifesto from 1978:

WEL believes the decision as to whether to have an abortion is the responsibility of the woman herself. Therefore WEL supports the provision of freely available abortion services

	WEL	SPUC/SOUL
For or against abortion?		
Why?		
Perspective?		
Whose safety comes first?		

and counselling throughout New Zealand. The only role of the state is to be ensuring that the services available are medically safe and supportive of the woman's choice.¹

WEL are in favour of legal abortion because of the potential harm to women from illegal abortions, where there is no guarantee of the doctor's skill and no care or counselling for women before or after the procedure.

In expert groups students could discuss the following and list their responses in Table 03 (above):

- For what reasons is WEL in favour of legal provision of abortion on demand?
- Whose safety are they most concerned about?
- What perspective can the WEL position be linked to?

Get students to read about the position of SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) and SOUL (youth outreach branch of SPUC) on the Internet (see list of web sites at the end of this guide). Ask students to consider and record their responses to the following:

- For what reasons are SPUC or SOUL against abortion?
- Whose safety are they most concerned about?
- What perspective can the SPUC/SOUL position be linked to?

A role play exercise could see a student take the role of a reporter for TVNZ and interview a SPUC representative and a pro-choice feminist

advocate about their views on abortion. Students should spend some time in their expert groups discussing the underlying beliefs of the characters and the reasons for their values positions.

Internal Assessment

This achievement standard requires examination of ways people can respond to values position(s) and analysis of possible reasons people choose particular responses to values position(s).

Achievement Criteria

Achievement

- Examine, in depth, ways in which people can respond to values position(s).
- Analyse reasons people choose particular responses to values position(s).

Achievement with Merit

- Examine ways in which people can respond to values position(s).
- Analyse reasons people choose particular responses to values position(s).

Achievement with Excellence

- Examine, in depth, ways in which people can respond to values position(s).
- Analyse, in depth, reasons people choose particular responses to values position(s).

Achievement criteria also require students to:

- Use varying perspectives
- Apply social studies concepts that are relevant

This assessment resource examines responses to values positions. Students are required to examine different responses to the values position of the Women's Electoral Lobby on abortion and present this in the form of a visual display or poster or in an essay. The assessed work should clearly establish a relationship between the perspectives held by pro-life groups or individuals and their responses to WEL's position.

The setting is New Zealand. An understanding of perspectives on current issues is required for the completion of this assessment.

Identify: at least one group or individual that holds a differing values position from WEL's values position stated above.

For each group or individual: include accurate and detailed evidence to examine through perspectives, ways in which each group or individual has responded to WEL's values position.

Through the use of Social Studies concepts and perspectives on current issues, analyse the reasons each group or individual chose their particular response to WEL's values position. In your analysis make clear links between their reasons and the ways they responded to WEL's values position.

NCEA Achievement Standard 90275 (2.5)

- Plan Social Action in Relation to a Social Issue
- 4 Credits
- Internal Assessment Opportunity
- Non-Assessed Exercises

Before Viewing

While watching the film get students to identify the types of social change that the women in *Sheilas* attempted to bring about.

After Viewing

Get students into expert groups of three or four and ask the members of each group to concentrate on creating and filling in a table for one woman featured in the documentary. The information you should include is:

- Who
- Type of social change attempted
- How was it attempted?
- Perspective?
- Was it successful?
- Why? Why not?

(See Achievement Standard 2.2 above for a list of social changes and meth-

ods of social action)

- Did the women achieve all their aims?

Consider that Sandi Hall has decided that it is impossible to eliminate sexism from advertising despite her efforts to do this, the nuclear family is still in existence despite Miriam's attempts at commune living and that domestic violence is still a part of the lives of many people in New Zealand.

Assign each group to assess the effectiveness of the political action that a particular woman in *Sheilas* participated in. As a class share the information.

Social action now

Ask students as a class to make a list of all the methods of creating social change that they can think of. Use the film as a resource and also supply some model answers. Encourage students to think about methods of social change they have seen in the news media.

These include and are not limited to:

- petitions and referenda
- protest marches and hikoi
- sit-ins
- starting action and/or consciousness raising groups
- going door to door
- mass media activity:
 - o press releases
 - o contacting television and radio news
 - o starting web sites, weblogs, mailing lists and news groups
 - o making and distributing flyers and posters
 - o publishing books

Using the list below create a table with the following headings:

- Issue
- Why is it an issue?
- What changes need to be made?
- Why?
- From whose perspective?
- What effective actions could be taken?
- What outcomes do you expect

from these actions? Why?

Ask each group to identify a social issue from the film it believes needs to be challenged and consider how they would go about doing this. For each issue discuss:

- What is the issue and why is it an issue?
- What are the main changes to the situation that your group would like to make?
- What are your reasons for this? Who do the changes benefit?
- What effective actions have you chosen to make changes to the situation and why are they likely to be effective? Your answers should draw on evidence from the film or news media.
- What outcomes do you expect to get and why? Answers should be based on evidence from the film or news media.

Internal Assessment

This achievement standard requires a plan of social action in relation to a social issue, and analysis of the plan of social action and its likely consequences.

Achievement Criteria

Achievement

- Formulate a logical plan of social action that addresses a social issue.
- Analyse the plan of social action and its likely consequences.

Achievement with Merit

- Formulate a logical and detailed plan of social action that addresses a social issue.
- Analyse the plan of social action and its likely consequences.

Achievement with Excellence

- Formulate a logical and detailed plan of social action that addresses a social issue.
- Analyse, in depth, the plan of social action and its likely consequences.

Achievement criteria also require

TABLE 04

Social issue to be addressed	Evidence of why is this an issue
Varying perspectives—who is this an issue for and why?	What method would work the best? Use <i>Sheilas</i> and any other news media for examples of types of social action. Provide evidence of why your chosen method would be most effective. Where has it worked before?
What are the likely outcomes of your chosen actions? Provide evidence to support your answer	Social studies concepts

students to:

- Use varying perspectives
- Apply social studies concepts that are relevant

For an individual assignment ask students to produce an essay or visual presentation.

Identify a specific social issue from the film that you believe should be addressed.

Produce evidence to examine through social studies concepts and perspectives on current issues why the issue is of concern and to which group of people.

Formulate a logical plan of effective social action to address the chosen issue, including evidence from *Sheilas* and/or from the news media to argue for the effectiveness of the choice of action.

Analyse the likely consequences of the social action plan, again supporting the likely outcomes with evidence drawn from the news media and/or *Sheilas*.

Planning Page

(See Table 04 above)

Useful Web Sites

General

<http://www.womenz.org.nz/nzwebs.htm>

This site contains information about issues including equal pay, domestic and sexual violence against women and being lesbian. Possible for thinking

about issues that still need to be addressed in Achievement Standard 2.5

<http://www.capwip.org/resources/whatworked/welnz%20paper.html>

Talks about the Women's Electoral lobby—an organization based on public equality for women that began in 1975. This site gives background on the women's group that lobbied the government about abortion.

The Abortion Debate

<http://www.spuc.org.nz/>
Information on their view of abortions by the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child.

<http://www.soul.org.nz/>
Youth outreach section of SPUC outline their views here.

<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Pro-choice>
The site discusses the main philosophical issues within the abortion debate.

http://www.fpanz.org.nz/SITE_Default/SITE_fpanz/SITE_need_help_now/abortion.asp

Family planning information for women who require an abortion.

<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/newzeal.doc>
New Zealand policy on abortion.

Useful Books

General Background to the Women's Movement in New Zealand

Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of New Zealand Women Since They Won the Vote*, Viking, Auckland, 1993.

Sue Kedgley and Mary Varnham (eds), *Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit: and Other Tales from the Feminist Revolution* (Introduction by Dale Spender), Daphne Brasell Associates Press, Wellington, 1993.

Maud Cahill and Christine Dann (eds), *Changing Our Lives: Women Working in the Women's Liberation Movement 1970-1990*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991.

The Abortion Debate

Elspeth Preddy, *The WEL Herstory: The Women's Electoral Lobby in New Zealand 1975-2002*, WEL in association with Fraser Books, Wellington and Masterton, 2003. See the section on the lobby for legal abortion pp 97-104 for a summary of the WEL New Zealand position on abortion and New Zealand legislation on abortion.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Elspeth Preddy, *The WEL Herstory: The Women's Electoral Lobby in*