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Title	**The importance of social change and trends in understanding increases in women's drinking in post-WWII Australia**
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Important social changes have occurred in Australian society since WWII. These have changed the role and position of women and help explain the rise in their alcohol consumption.

Alcohol consumption increased in many countries in the post-World War II period, particularly those with a history of a Temperance movement. In their paper, Stanesby et al., (1) explore sex and birth-cohort-specific trends in alcohol consumption during this period, based on a sample of Melbournians born between 1920 and 1949. They find that the relative increase in consumption was far greater among women than men, particularly higher for the younger cohort, those born in the 1940s, than those born in the 1920s or 1930s.

In this commentary, we offer some explanation for women's increasing alcohol consumption in the post-WWII period in Victoria, and particularly Melbourne.

Throughout recent history, attitudes towards alcohol have been influenced by temperance movements and religious organisations. Methodism and the temperance movement were particularly strong in Melbourne. While exerting significant influence on Melbourne's licensing laws in the early 20th century their influence declined from the late-1960s. Australia has experienced steady declines in middle class church attendance and a softening of anti-alcohol sentiments among Methodists. From the 1970s, census reporting of 'no religion' increased and the gap between the sexes lessened and steadied (4). These changes in religiosity meant that the drinking patterns of adult women were drawing closer to those of adult men.

Changes in class and income during this time spread drinking behaviour up the class system and moderation down it. Women's participation in the labour force has nearly doubled since the early 1960s (2). Women born in the 1940-49 cohort were much more likely to be employed in the mid-1960s, their early adulthood, than those born in the 1920s and 30s (2) and alongside the increased economic independence of Australian women came disposable income to spend on leisure, and leisure itself was linked to alcohol. These trends were reflected in the United States, where Schmidt (3) documents increasing consumption and experiences of alcohol-related harms among women in the United States as they gained economic independence from the 1970s.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, a younger generation of well-educated women, challenged the sex-segregation of the public bar, as an obvious symbol of discrimination against women connected to the larger issues of unequal pay women's lower wages and unequal access to employment, particularly for married women. As Kirkby & Luckins (5) note 'these mainly middle-class women did not endorse the separatist drinking culture of the mainly working-class women in the ladies' lounge; they were not concerned with the conditions of pubs or questions about their own respectability. They demanded equality with men, either as a political point or a given of their generation' (5: 84). Hotel trading to 10pm became possible from 1966 ending the notorious six o'clock swill. With this, the public bar became far less segregated, and women increasingly participated in public drinking occasions (6).

These and other social changes in Victoria, like mass post-WWII migration, help explain Stanesby's finding about the changing patterns in women's drinking patterns. These changes have important

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implications for alcohol consumption and it's important that quantitative epidemiological research take account of broader socio-cultural trends.

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