

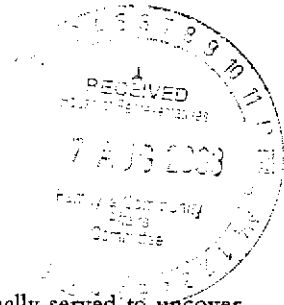
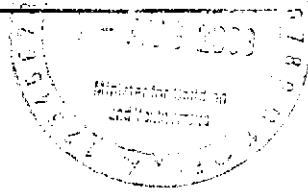
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Family and Community Affairs

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Secretary RECEIVED



Rt Hon Larry Anthony MLA  
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT

Dear Sir,

Re Review of Child Custody after Separation

In my experience interdisciplinary discussion of wide-reaching emotive issues has usually served to uncover and accentuate the rivalry between various compartmentalised agencies working towards the same end. Yet it is where they link up that the key insights lie from which the most effective changes can be made.

I feel strongly that the enclosed paper could provide such a key to the present decline and demoralisation of young people - males in particular. It comes out of personal experience [at the cutting edge of clinical experience as a general practitioner and fully trained family therapist] and a good deal of personal reflection since my recent retirement. Whenever I read on the subject there is never a link made between adolescent problem behaviour and the contemporary shift towards single-parent families, initiated by women.

What I have written reflects standard family therapy theory - it is nothing new. The new [and potentially powerful] thought is the link I have made between female 'freedom' and the long term effects [on male children] of the mother-son bond being substituted for the real thing.

Lay people as yet have no insight into this - the mothers involved are trying their very best to give the children everything they need - except the father they deserve. Most experts are too compartmentalised to see the obvious, and the government is generous to a fault.

How to change it is difficult - but impossible without the correct 'diagnosis' in such a complex area.

I enclose a family for study, which is up to date and allows for consideration of all the parties involved - [which numbers 8 individuals] They are well known to myself but obviously need their confidentiality respected. It illustrates how faulty dealing with the break-up, and social acceptance of the single-parent unit however well motivated, eventually destroys the very thing that mum is trying to protect - her son.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G. Findlow".

Gwyneth Findlow

Country Family Doctor and Family Therapist  
North Central Victoria 1975 - 2000

## Review of CUSTODY after SEPARATION & DIVORCE

### Present arrangements \*\*\*\*\*

These are out-moded, reflecting the time [pre-1960's] when marriages were hetero-sexual and stable [mothers 'at home', fathers in the work-force] and most break-ups were instigated by the male partner's leaving - whether from boredom, alienation, another woman, whatever. The father abandoned the nest [because he was ABLE to live independently] and the mother became dependant on the state for the means of feeding, clothing and housing the family. A father's contribution of 20% of his income towards support of his offspring in those days would have been entirely reasonable, since he had chosen to leave. It was assumed [for legal purposes] that the mother was the partner most skilled at child-care, and that the father was not very interested in the children as he was out at work most of the time. It therefore followed that the children's best interests [emotional and social ] lay in continuity of the maternal relationship where they were already invested since birth. Unless the mother was at least 'an axe-murderer' it was assumed the children would stay with her and their siblings. The status of the father was of no importance or relevance.

Nevertheless, in spite of the break-down of less fortunate marriages, the general consensus of opinion in society was that a happy marriage was something within reach of most individuals who wanted it.

### Down the track \*\*\*\*\*

Forty years on the situation is very different. Sixty-five per-cent of separations are instigated by females. A great proportion of marriage relationships are not formalised by a wedding ceremony. [Civil or otherwise.] Women are just as likely as men to feel disappointed or 'tied-down' by their relationship. Women are just as likely as men to be in full or part-time employment, openly preferring the work-place over the domestic environment. Sexual freedom is valued equally by both males and females, before during and after steady relationships are contemplated, and monogamy is largely a consideration of those with a religious affiliation. Society's attitude towards marriage is generally very negative as one in three long-term relationships break down and many children are compelled to live in so-called 'blended' families. Many low income families comprise children of three or more different fathers, attesting to the eclectic tastes of today's young women.

In spite of the equality now achieved by women [demonstrated also by increasing rates of lung cancer, death from automotive accidents, involvement in violent crime and so on] they still attract most of the sympathy from community and government when it comes to single parenting. Why IS this traditional attitude still in evidence, when the circumstances that engendered it are long gone? [My guess is, because

the politically active groups barracking for women's rights since the 60's are still vocal, having become mainstream health-care providers whereas there is nothing of equivalent noise and clout supporting the man's point of view.] A recently formed men's group against divorce and automatic female custody was given derisive media coverage, yet the same news item portrayed their [anonymous]ex-partners as poor little battlers doing their best in a difficult world - which is a long way from the truth in most instances. [Such subjects are taboo. The 'God, mothers and apple pie' syndrome prevails.] Mothering HAS to be above reproach; if we attack the myth what will we have left?

When the 'no-fault' divorce came in with the Family Law Act it was considered a great step forward. But if society still [informally] considers females to be the wronged party and worthy of support, while males are denied anything other than a tiny part in their growing children's lives, where is the justice in this system? This pre-judging the issue according to a black and white template which fits all, is the quintessential "prejudice" which our society is supposed to abhor.

To the politicians

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**Perhaps the notion of responsibility for one's actions could be re-instated.**

If a woman **chooses** to leave her husband, perhaps she should forfeit everything that comes with the package. [His pay-packet, his property]

Perhaps the funds provided by the state should not be given en bloc to the woman to use as she likes, but allowed to be withdrawn for certain items only, such as kids' clothing, footwear and food

Perhaps the children's psychological well-being should be paramount, rather than the mother's freedom to behave as she likes, with whom she likes and wherever she likes.

She always has the freedom to choose -in the last analysis - but if she chooses to be selfish, she should forfeit the state's financial support.

Perhaps the father's access to children should be respected more by employers, and his emotional needs be treated with the same respect as is presently afforded his wife.

To the Academics

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Explore the **paradox** of co-existing perceptions of victim-hood and inflated entitlement.

To what extent do issues of Adoption, Child Sexual Abuse, and Feminist dogma interplay in the **genesis** of this strange mix?

What part if any does **government-funded** 'welfare' have on the System incorporating these dynamics so as to **encourage separation**, over-riding issues of humanity and common logic?

Do men [as distinct from sperm banks] have any **future** in the domestic sphere of western society?

## DOES ANY OF THIS REALLY MATTER?

Jesus said "the poor are always with us" - [there will always be some who can't make it , regardless of styles of government or provision of welfare.] In the western developed nations there has always been a small socio-economic 'sub' [meaning bottom of the pile] culture of non-managers - the "no-hopers" meat in the welfare sandwich. Flotsam and jetsam with a higher than normal incidence of mental illness, homelessness, addictions, criminal activity and so on. they start off 'disadvantaged' and never manage the herculean task of pulling themselves out of the vicious cycle. no matter how many hand-outs are thrown in their direction. This tiny proportion of needy folk who were once upon a time supported by their local rural communities, has now swelled to a sizeable politically relevant fraction of society proper.

The lack of hope, failure to master every-day tasks of living, unwillingness to forgo present comfort in exchange for next week's gain, pre-occupation with having 'fun' [disco's, night-clubs, casino] at the expense of responsibilities to one's partner, children or the elderly, the sense of automatic entitlement - have all been normalised in our society and re-enforced by film, women's magazines, the entertainment industry, new age philosophy etc. All the attributes once considered a 'given' or basic to a good adult life, which naturally resulted in positive contributions to family and community can no longer be taken for granted. **These ailments cannot be cured by money, because a sense of worth can only be passed on from one generation to the next through good parenting.**

It used to be logically assumed that good parenting was more easily mediated by a couple than a single person; the human animal having no natural apparatus for vegetative reproduction. Two mutually supportive individuals have a fighting chance of rearing offspring in their own image. [Able to give love, and capable of selfless behaviour.] The assumptions nowadays are quite different. The revolution which has come about as a consequence of our new power to control fertility has changed the way women think about everything - not just the way they express their sexuality. Men briefly became women's equals - as their enemies - now they are less than equal - as commodities. [Containers of sperm.]

Gifted young men and women entering the work-force dream of being successful and making money. They avoid relationships and anything liable to ensnare them into commitment [the big M.] Women who become tired of the emotional vacuum fill it with having a baby, and continue socialising as before. They are told that they have everything they need for a fulfilling life, without having a long-term partner. The mantra is "a man can give me nothing which I cannot give myself." Apart from being absolutely laughable from a biological point of view, it is not only untrue but dangerous in the chosen single-parent context.

**Whenever a woman chooses NOT to share power with a live-in partner, [because she doesn't have the skills] but has his children fill the emotional gap [because one-sided decisions are easier to make] she does them a disservice. Especially the males. Boy-friends may come and go, but it is the son who becomes the constant presence, the minder, the supporter, the one who knows his mum best, who gets first consideration when matters such as "where shall we live" and "what shall we do" come up. His mother may feel confident of having the last word when her son is pre-pubertal, but when he is an adolescent he will resent her 'hold' over him, and his dependence on her, torn between looking after her as he has been accustomed, and wanting to break free as an autonomous individual. He will feel that the only valuable thing he has to give a girl is casual sex, that women need men like a fish needs a bicycle. So - how then will he perceive his worth?**

**This is the real cause of poorer academic performance, increased suicide and other self-harming strategies using fast cars, drugs and alcohol. The male child has all of the responsibility towards his single-parent mother, but no power. An enervating depressing situation. No wonder that when he becomes a teenager he will want to reverse this [-> all the power and no responsibility] - a painful track for both him AND his mum. He is in a bind - still loving his mum and not confident to leave**

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**her without his help, but simultaneously beckoned by the outside world and prospects of other relationships [which he fears will not go well.]**

I am not suggesting that women should stay with a violent or abusive spouse. But to lead an unstable existence, subjecting kids to a variety of temporary boy-friends who have little or no empathy for the other guy's offspring, and so many changes of school and friends - is it any wonder they get behind with their work? That they even master numeracy and literacy is a miracle in itself.

**If the government encourages women to throw out their men-folk by assisting their financial independence and favouring wives in the division of assets and organisation of custody, the boys who become the next generation of men will continue to be even more de-valued than ever. Good family life [not toys, designer sneakers and McDonald's] which is so important for the nurturing of stable productive adult members of tomorrow's society will become a rarity - akin to a species in danger of extinction owing to the intervention by humankind into the natural forces of evolution. Such an intervention might [at a different time, pre 1960's] have been a compassionate response to genuine distress, but post the sexual revolution it is just another nail in the coffin of decent caring men-folk, who are already overpowered by the shift in female attitudes.**