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## **Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment Education and Workplace Relations**

Frequently allegedly dispassionate 'academic studies' lack any more than a superficial element of objectivity and are merely conjecture and belief asserted as factual scientific research. I have been widely published in the mainstream press on this issue (I would be happy to supply copies) of elements within the bureaucracy and other 'independent advisers to government' having their own political agenda, either overt or covert. It was my research which showed that key data in a National Health and Medical Research Council paper on abortions in Australia had been falsified. This resulted in the paper being withdrawn, the first time in the fifty year history of the NHNRC that this had occurred.

I believe A recent example of such advocacy research (research designed to come to a preconceived conclusion) is

*Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School July 2000.* Jane Kenway, Cherry Collins, Julie McLeod, Helen Forgasz, Rachel Boston, Angie Bloomer

Which was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. According to the 'Concluding Summary' the purpose of the report was

*To collate and interpret the current statistical data on the educational participation and performance of males and females and on their post-school destinations, and to assess the relationship between school and post-school outcome;*

*To review the current research literature relevant to understanding gender equity in education and gender and educational performance, and to analyses the available statistical data in relation to this research literature; and*

*To address the impact of gender on performance relative to other socio-demographic variables.*

In fact it is doubtful if any of these objectives were addressed let alone achieved. The purpose of the report seems to have been to whitewash the growing gap between the performance of girls and boys at school by linking in factors largely irrelevant such as the different proclivity of the sexes to enter the paid work force. The report finds that Socio Economic Status has a more marked effect on school performance and career prospects than the sex of the student. This is hardly a new discovery but did not seem to be of interest in the seventies and eighties when there were moves to 'feminize' curriculum, base on what is now known to be the false belief that boys were performing better in schools than girls.

This report seems to be based very much on a 'thump factor' i.e. if it is long enough it will not only look authoritative by few will have the time or interest to read it and thus its findings can be quoted as authoritative with impunity. This 'opaqueness' is reinforced by the habit of sources seldom being identified by page number, requiring extensive time consuming research to see if the assertions are actually supported by the source document At times much of the report seems to be little more than 'new class' feminist jargon repeating tired and worn out old platitudes. For example the second last paragraph on pate 136

*"But the world of work is not static, and at the moment, it is in considerable flux. This has major implications for those young g males and females who are just joining the workforce. Changing gender identities and relations, changing labour processes and labour markets and changing family forms are amongst the inter related features of current times. In Australian, as in other advanced Western economies, a characteristic of globalising labour processes and labour markets is what Bakker (1996,p7) calls the 'gender paradox of restructuring, involving the contradictory effects of the dual process of gender erosion and intensification.' "*

This concept of 'research by repeating platitudes' occurs throughout the report for example pages 142-143

*"This raises the issue not just of what qualifications are needed to successfully move from school to post-school work but what knowledge, experiences, skills and other attributes are needed in current youth labour markets -especially for those from a background characterized by poverty. Are resilience and **social capital** the answer? (emphasis added) Such new approaches would need to keep in mind that, in the current context, 'individuals are forced to assume greater responsibility for their experiences in the labour market and to constantly assess the implications of their actions and experiences. (Furlong & Cartmel 1997)*

It is interesting that one of the current 'buzz words' crops up. Perhaps not coincidentally the report was eulogized on the ABC's Australia Talks Back, a show politically beloved by the politically correct. At other points the report uses slight of hand which would do credit to an illusionist. For example page 124.

*"If we put it the other way round, it may be that more males resolve to seek full-time work only and will wait for it (this might explain why there are more unemployed males) while females are more likely to take part-time work if it is offered. It is also possible that decisions for this age group regarding part-time work and being 'not in the labour force' are related to parenting and family responsibilities. Full-time parenting is, of course, **a legitimate option for girls.** (emphasis added). Nonetheless, this should not prevent girls from pursuing education and training that enables them to be economically independent and secure. Neither should it be assumed by schools or the labour market that girls will necessarily choose full time-time parenting, nor should such a choice justify lesser attention to their education and training or to their equal rights to full-time employment and equal income. And, at the same time, boys should be encouraged to consider the relationship between their parenting responsibilities and their work and training directions. "*

This paragraph seems to show the extreme double standard which exists throughout the report. Males are "unemployed because they refuse to take part time positions". I wonder what howls we would hear from the authors if a conservative politician applied this to unemployed youth of both sexes. "Blame the victims"- but only if they are male!. Interesting full time parenting is not considered a legitimate option for boys. Given the emphasis on "social capital" in other parts of the report it is puzzling who the authors assert that someone who spends less time in the work force than another should still enjoy the same income and employment prospects, almost all jobs require relevant work experience, almost always the more the better. I believe that this is termed 'human capital'. This issue of females choosing a life style centered around part time work or work that interests them, leaving the prime responsibility for "earning the daily bread" to their partner, either present or potential, seems to have escaped the authors attention. Or would they dismiss that as "blame the victims".

This explanation, of deliberate choice, is supported by a later paragraph, again on page 125.

"Other aspects of the different pattern of male and female post-school experiences also overwhelm any social class effects. These aspects include:

*the greater use of training by males*

*the higher proportion of females **unable** (emphasis added) to move from part-time work to full time work*

*The greater proportion of unemployed males and,*

*Conversely, the much greater proportion of females not in the labour force so that, overall, there are more females than males without access to an earned income."*

If we take these statements at face value, males make greater use of training to improve their work prospects but suffer higher rates of unemployment. Women are unable (or unwilling?) to take on full time work, women are far more likely to have (choose?) the role of home maker, and may well make choices in their education that reflect this choice. Also quite explicit, in the view of the authors of that paper, but a view based on assertion rather than substance, males choose not to take up part time work but women are unable (presumably "prevented") from taking up full time work.

This is a theme repeated throughout the report, for example on page 142 it states

*"Prompted by Australia's high rate of young motherhood (sic) and the established evidence that 'lower educational achievement is the key risk factor associated with adolescent maternity' The study describes a polarisation of work and parenting experiences along class and educational attainment lines. This **results** (emphasis added) in an increase in deferred motherhood amongst highly educated young women in professional young women in professional occupations and longer-term economic and educational disadvantages amongst younger mothers."*

There seems a complete lack of logic here regarding causality. Is young motherhood the result of low educational attainment or does it cause it. The authors do not seem to be clear on this point. The fact that it may be a rational decision based on economic opportunity cost is not examined. An educated high income woman would have to give up or curtail an interesting career. A working class woman, with poor or zero career prospects with a lackluster job, who presumably would get the same subjective pleasures of motherhood as an educated woman, may not sacrifice any income once child support payment and social welfare, both monetary and non monetary are taken into account.

To further drive home the point I think the very terms of reference for this study are questionable. In the past studies and comments on this issue focussed solely on educational outcomes. For example **a document entitled** "Gender Equity Curriculum Support Paper", ACT Dept Education & Training, 1997. The paper is terrible - the usual opaque sociologist mantra. But the first sentence under the chapter heading "Gender equity as an across curriculum perspective" reads: "Gender Equity is about excellence in schooling outcomes for both girls and boys. " (Not life outcomes)

I think the gender bias of the "Factors Influencing ... " report is obvious.

I am continuing research into this and other reports, time permitting, and would be happy to appear before the committee.

John Coochey