

Nailing a Feminist Myth

ANDREW McINTYRE

MAYBE the times are changing, and the dreamed of swing of the pendulum is actually happening. I will not hold my breath, but it is pleasing to see the first genuine male apostate of the feminist movement coming out with a valuable new book that will earn him a *fatwa* as surely as Salman Rushdie earned his. Farrell's contribution, however, will be of great value in changing the perceptions generated over the last 20 years or so by the media and the skilled feminist lobby groups. They have, to a large extent, captured Western leaders and created in them a "female vote dependency" like heroin to a junkie. Unfortunately our own Liberal Party is as much addicted as the Federal and State Labor Parties and the book is thus a valuable starting point to question many of the policies implemented in this country.

Warren Farrell served on the board of directors of the National Organization for Women in New York City and lectured and made his career supporting and feeding the prejudices of the more extreme elements of the American feminist movement with catch phrases like "women are enlightened, men Neanderthals." He is well positioned to turn the tables, and he does so powerfully.

The book is constructed in an unrelentingly polemical way, and it is marred by new-age Californian clichés and smug and inaccurate generalizations about human nature that could put off some readers. Nevertheless, one should persist. The book's value comes from the copious amounts of hard statistics and anecdotes that systematically turn upside down the various myths propagated about inequality of power



Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men are the Disposable Sex*

Simon & Schuster

between the sexes. It should be compulsory reading for any policy-maker in almost any area, but especially health, education, defence and the law. The information applies to the United States but research in Australia suggests that the trend is very similar.

In compiling the book the author scoured thousands of publications and news clippings with the help of a huge research team. All facts and anecdotes were double-checked, and hundreds were rejected if there was any doubt about their reliability or accuracy. There are 50 pages of sources and references.

Farrell's essential concern is that male power is a myth propagated by radical feminists and the media to the point where it becomes difficult to think any other way. He asks where else in history do we find a victim group in society who has 53 per cent of the vote, who lives on average seven years longer than men, who has more net value in assets, who spends up to six times more discretionary income on themselves than men... The list goes on and on.

To dispel the obvious criticism that men *do* have real power in government,

the military, industry and the financial world, Farrell correctly points out that the power elite is a very small minority, and that his task is to focus on the majority of men, who by their sex alone are all systematically associated with power in the feminist cosmology. One cannot generalize about power from the sex of a single Prime Minister or a whole cabinet. Modern political elites do not as a rule represent, *nor are they elected to represent*, only the male or only the female members of society. Feminists, in any case, are always confounded by the likes of Margaret Thatcher, Bronwyn Bishop, Benazir Bhutto or the present reality of a female Prime Minister in Turkey! So let us look at the disempowered majority of males.

Inequality of Health

In discussing minority groups such as Australian Aborigines or American blacks, most commentators employ health and life expectancy statistics as measures of oppression and victimization. The fact that the life expectancy of Aborigines is very much lower than that of white Australians is often seen as a product of powerlessness and dispossession, a lack of control over one's own life. What do we make, therefore, of the statistical odds of the following four categories of 25-year-olds surviving one single year in the United States?

White females	1,754 to 1
Black females	943 to 1
White males	561 to 1
Black males	311 to 1

Farrell points out that blacks die

earlier than whites from 12 of the 15 leading causes of death, which he lists and analyzes, but that men die earlier than women from all 15 of the leading causes of death, and that these causes are largely due to industrialization. Industrialization has increased the life expectancy gap between men and women by no less than 600 per cent since 1920.

If you divide Australia into two groups, Aborigines and whites, you discover a lower life expectancy among Aborigines. The immediate response is to pour money into health service access for Aborigines. If you divide Australia into males and females you discover a lower life expectancy among males (at retirement-age women can expect to live twice as long as men). What does the government do? It pours spending into health services for women. Over 60 per cent of the Australian national health budget is spent on women, and the feminist lobby in Canberra is demanding more.

Farrell analyzes one health item in the United States that is very telling for Australia. Women die marginally more from breast cancer than men do from prostate cancer, but spending on breast cancer research is over six times higher than for prostate cancer research. It is obvious from the press which of the two is uppermost in the public mind. If we educated men to go for routine rectal examinations for prostate cancer and to do routine testicular self-examinations — the way we educate women to do routine breast self-exams — we would keep tens of thousands of men alive just as we are now keeping tens of thousands of women alive. (Some have already said, however, that AIDS research in Australia — aimed at helping predominantly men — has been disproportionately funded in comparison to breast cancer research. Apart from an erroneous comparison — AIDS is a *viral epidemic* that has the potential to infect both sexes — the extent of funding is best interpreted as an example of yet another special interest group, this time homosexual, getting more attention than it warrants.)

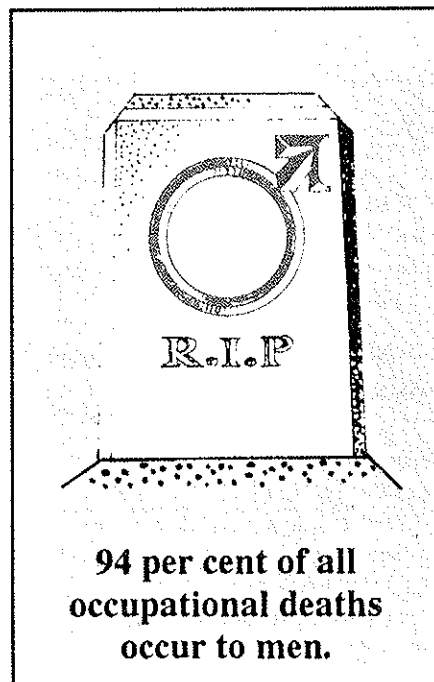
The author lists 17 areas of men's health not being adequately remedied by anyone. They include conditions which affect men exclusively

or disproportionately: suicide; circumcision as a possible trauma-producing experience; dyslexia; steroid abuse; colour blindness; testicular cancer; prostate cancer; hearing loss over age 30; sexual impotence; non-specific urethritis; epididymitis (a disease of the tubes that transmit sperm); klinefelter's disease, ALD, and other male-only inherited diseases.

The Victims of Violence

In relation to crime and violence, even the Governor-General, the Hon. Bill Hayden, felt the need to expose the recent scandalous Melbourne *Age* campaign on 'Violence Against Women' as a demonstration of media bias. *The Age* (4 June 1993) had a headline under the banner 'War on Women — 321,000 are victims'. When analyzing the figures from its own survey, *The Age* should have added "of which 140,000 are male victims."¹ Men, and particularly young men between 18 and 24, are four times more likely to be exposed to violent attack and murder than are women. According to the International Crime Victim Survey, rape in Australia constitutes only 7.9 per cent of all violent crime, affecting 1.1 per cent of the total female population. Men are the primary victims of all other violent crime.

Men are also disproportionately



represented among the genuinely dispossessed. Eighty-three per cent of America's homeless are men.

In the justice system much attention has been focused on judicial bias against women, but it is common knowledge that men account for around 90 per cent of prison inmates in all countries. Farrell shows that in all categories of crime men are dealt with far more severely than women in sentencing. In the US a man convicted of murder is 20 times more likely than a woman convicted of murder to receive the death penalty. Early prison release schemes, property settlement, child access and almost all other aspects of court dealings are analyzed: the outcomes of most are unfavourable to men. Has any research been done in Australia to expose the double standards?

Educational Injustice

In education we see a glaring inconsistency in policies set to overcome apparent prejudice against girls at school and, as a consequence, inappropriate expenditure, especially on affirmative action schemes. The Victorian Liberal Government set up a Working Party last year on Opportunity for Girls in Education, but recent figures show that *three times* more boys drop out of secondary education than do girls by Year 12.² This fact was not even discussed in the guidelines. And, further, 28 per cent more females than males actually commence tertiary studies and well over 30 per cent more females graduate in Australia with primary degrees. The present Victorian Government still maintains an Equal Opportunity Officer in every single primary and secondary school in the State for a staffing cost of around \$3.5 million.

One argument used to explain this educational injustice is that professional outcomes for women are still not as good as those for men. Farrell makes an analysis of the types of jobs men and women choose and reminds us of those men who are conveniently forgotten. How many readers are aware that 94 per cent of all occupational deaths occur to men? Farrell lists what he calls the "death professions": fire-fighting

— 99 per cent male; logging — 98 per cent male; trucking (heavy) — 98 per cent male; construction — 98 per cent male; coal-mining — 97 per cent male. More men die each day working in the United States than the average daily death toll during the Vietnam War. By contrast, those occupations having at least seven of the following 'desirable' work characteristics — ability to switch off at the end of the day, physical safety, indoors, low-risk, desirable or flexible hours, no demand to move, high fulfilment, contact with people — almost all employ over 90 per cent women. A majority of working women value flexibility and part-time work. A recent Institute of Family Studies survey indicated that two out of five working mothers, if they had a choice, would stay at home.

When it comes to women in the armed forces, Farrell plants enough land mines for the budding equal opportunist to make Pol Pot jealous. He employs copious statistics from research by the American Armed Forces, notably concerning the risks women are exposed to (excellent case studies of actual female performance in the Panama invasion and the Gulf War are examined in detail) and the extraordinary double standards that have been adopted in the US Armed Forces, which Australia is likely to copy. There is very little more to be said than that one hopes our political masters and mistresses in Canberra have looked at the same research.

In all, the book is a brilliant exposé of the myths surrounding feminist advocacy, but a disturbing book to read

from cover to cover for all of us who somehow doggedly believe in the triumph, just sometimes, of reason, empirical truth and plain common sense over the present hysterical climate of political correctness, moral equivalence and the post-modern deconstructionist dreamtime. ■

1. According to *The Age* Saulwick Poll for every 12 female victims, there were seven male victims. On the basis of 321,000 victims and their own survey, 120,000 were men abused by violent women. This was not mentioned in any of the learned commentary provided by *The Age*.
2. Department of Employment, Education and Training figures for 1992. In Victoria, retention rates to Year 12 completion are 79.8 per cent for males and 92.8 per cent for females. 17,497 males and 22,357 females commenced post-secondary education.

Asia Pacific in an Era of Trade Blocs

DEREK PARKER

ASIA is the flavour of the year, but few commentators actually know enough about the region to get behind the statistics and the propaganda. Michael Dobbs-Higginson, the former head of Merrill Lynch's Asian operations, has spent most of his adult life in one Asian country or another, and brings both intelligence and experience to his subject. Asia-Pacific is, he points out early, a personal view rather than an academic analysis; but in many ways has more of value to say than any number of almanacs and professorial theses.

He sees the next century as an era of trade blocs: an expanded EEC and a NAFTA group, perhaps extended to



Michael Dobbs-Higginson,
*Asia Pacific: A View on its Role in
the New World Order*

Heinemann

include parts of Central and South America. Faced with these adversaries, Asian countries will have little choice

but to form an association of their own. The developing and newly-developed economies are dependent on exports, especially into Western Europe and the United States. By themselves, none of the Asian countries — not even Japan — can maintain their economic success. They need either secure markets within the region, or the bargaining clout that an association would provide.

Dobbs-Higginson examines each of the Asian countries, assessing their prospects and evaluating the gains each might make from a supranational grouping. South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have shown a remarkable capacity for hard work and cohesion;