THOUGHTS ON CHILD SUICIDE AND SOCIOLOGICAL HEALTH IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

Firstly spirituality. In all cultures both ancient and modern, spirituality and cultural identity and social bonding closely interrelate. We have seen a large change in the spirituality of Australians in the post-and post-post-modern era. Since about the 1950s people started not going to Christian churches (as Christianity was largely the religion at the time). Many children of this era where not baptized or initiated into a religion. Many people became agnostic and some groups such as the hippies of the 1960s had quite strong spiritual differences (and moral ones) to the rest of society. Then we had problems with fear of communism and a back-flip reaction to this was an acceptance of many, of the change from agnosticism to atheism. Societies with strong religious beliefs usually have strong society and familial bonding. I would suggest that this IS an issue in today's society as we try to find the answers to why bonding is being damaged and there is less confident and confidential bonding between citizens and members of families, even though this thought is unfashionable and likely to be misreceived. Children automatically assume these qualities from their parents. A very interesting book on the change of social bonding in Australian society has been written by a woman lecturer at the University of New South Wales. The book is called The New Social Ties and was published in 2006. Although I do not agree with some of the principles and conclusions she has come to as some of them are both very contemporary views and some biased by feminism , it is indeed a good start to understanding bonding in Australian society and where it has changed. Unfortunately she does not come up with any remedies. I have in my conclusion added some suggestions to further research the area of social and familial bonding.

Secondly morality; the change in what is understood as being right or wrong. With the change in attitude to religion and the change in the 1960s to a previous acceptance "standard" of morality people began to question themselves and think on a more hedonistic and individual basis. Those who remained with the moral "status quo" became fewer and fewer and eventually became marginalized. Many of the hippy descended children became (along with many left-wing political descended children) very vocal and dominant. An American book called The Good Life, the Moral Individual in an Antimoral World by Mendelson was recommended to me and I bought it as I felt that I may have been one of the minority who felt left out a little due to a difference in moral outlook to post-post modern morality. There are many issues in the book which relate to American values which do not relate to our culture here, (and there are many Australians who accept hocus pocus everything American without appreciating the very fundamental differences between the social, political and religious historical and present day American Society and that of Australian Society). However there are areas of compatible concern. For instance the issue of parents what Mendelson calls "institutionalizing" their children in public daycare centres under the age of five; at a time when the child needs to be able to give love to an adult and feel the adult's immediate love response and to learn that this is the communication it gets back to its own love. She also points out that this is a most important period of the child's life, when it starts to learn what is right and what is wrong in thought, action and deed. This is a fact I am sure most parents do not understand or have not been told. It is indeed a dilemma particularly for mothers as feminist thought for some time has told them that not only is it ok, good and right to make that choice, but that it is the choice they should make for their own benefit first. I must add that I have been told by a number of mothers in their 30's that they are very disillusioned by the feminist super-mum role pedaled to them whilst they were growing up. They have been left feeling incapable, stupid and substandard to what they later realize as a simply impossible role model; not enjoying any particular part of life and "working like a dog" because they were told they could and should "have it all". I reiterate it is a post-modern dilemma particularly for women. But Mendolsen believes that this early period of a child's life when the one-to-many adult ratio relationships are most important, is a period when bonding, communication, confidence and love is learnt. It could be this factor or even a disparity between children growing up without that bonding effecting children with a more secure bonding or vice versa that leads to youth suicide. I'm sure extensive and careful research could shed light on this factor. I do point out however, that her book looks at morality and American morality only from the individual's outlook to its needs in society and not the needs of the society for individuals to act in a certain way.

Thirdly the period of "allowing a child to be a child" and it not having to think like an adult is becoming less and less. Children are given adult issues when their brains are just not physically mentally able. Does this physically cause problems? The period of fairies and elves at the bottom of the garden is less and less for the post-post modern child. For some it is denied entirely. The period for a child to be secure in love at home and to dream imaginative dreams is very important for bonding, I believe, and also for communication and confidence in communication later in its life. I think this area of child mental health is not addressed or at least is not talked about in the general community. Research into this area along with spiritual or religious background could have a factor in the child's confidence in communication and thus bonding within and without the family and the child's friendship groups. A psychology behavior specialist would be able to shed more light on the issue than me. Also the differences between a child having this imaginative period in its life and one which does not, could be incompatible at an age where there is no mental capacity to comprehend the difference, and interaction could etch a mark not detected until a later date or when it is too late. I would expect also that a child with parents who spend little time with them would also have problems with this fact. I add that experts say that when a child is asked about time spent with parents, they all say that it is the length of time they spend with the parent and not what they do, as well as just "being at home and hanging around with them (their parents)". This is quite contrary to the parents who are made to believe that it is "quality time" that is the requirement. Again this is a disparity.

May I perhaps suggest that philanthropists, government and universities with profound historical experience in anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, ethnicity, and perhaps religious studies be requested to resource some extensive research into modern, post-modern and recent psychological aspects of AUSTRALIAN society. I say particularly start with sociolinguists as spiritual and cultural acceptance is largely seen in assimilation and acceptance of language(for both adults and children) and also for cultural parity, particularly in accents and dialects of the same religion. See Sociolingusits by Fasold. By asking psychological questions by criteria of Australian regional accents we could possibly see regional similarities and differences in cultural behavior and sociological bonding, as well as that assumed by parents and eventually by their children through the normal pattern of a child assuming emotion, behavior and a social "fitting in" which appears to be giving problems in post-modern Australian Society. An Australian Language is a book setting out regional accents and dialects which was shown to me by   when I was studying my Language and Culture degree at   in   in the   . This text's delineation on the basis of accent and dialect would make an excellent start to make a framework for psychological aspects of bonding according to age, gender, religion, ethnicity *(cultural background whether colonial Australian, eastern European, South East Asian, Asia minor or African Australian). The aspects of psychology relating to human parental behavior and child behavioral studies I have no knowledge at all and I suggest that a call on expert assistance for this aspect would be needed. The psychological conclusions could be quite extensive if the right questions are posed. I do not believe that this type of study and research has been done yet in Australia and the texts I have recently read do not come up with any remedies. I do think though, that a study of this type if done properly and extensively would show up problems in Australian society which is causing the bonding and sociological breakdown leading to suicide. This issue is a social problem and not a political problem and I strongly believe that it should be dealt with socially and not politically. That is, no law can be made to stop suicide, though custom and religious pressures could in some instances halt the increase in suicide; a point not favourable on the present agenda for most Australians.

The other aspect which needs investigation is the one of social stratification. Australia is seen quite proudly as an egalitarian "classless" society which is fine in quick appraisal but does have some draw backs that many either do not see or are unwilling to see. It is all the time spoken of the working class and the middle class, so we have in our midst some belief in a social stratification. The drawback? The stratification is purely one of money "Socio-economic hierarchy". The working class man or woman is made to feel he or she is the same as everyone else and should be therefore able to share the same material (as money is the scale) standing as everyone else, but because he is earning less he/she is unable to achieve this status. A psychological tension is caused and the person is made unhappy and

worthless. He/she becomes stressed and anxious. We are seeing a lot of this in mental health at the moment. Just as the fat mother is made to feel worthless because she is unable to attain the figure of a young model, she too is made to feel stressed and worthless. The child picks up this tension and when the bonding is weak familially and the communication is weak in the family, the child feels a stress it does not really understand and the parents having worked all day do not pick up the distress early enough. Bullying and pressures at school or with friends are too much to bear and the child falls into depression unnoticed.

The SOCIAL leaders of Australian society should be saying to Australians that it is ok to be a working class Australian with only one or no car, a small house or unit/flat and rarely go on holiday not because it is KEEPING THEM DOWN OR OPPPRESSED, but because they CAN feel happy with what they have. Happy people are usually relaxed, assured and confident people and are an ASSET to society. They can relate to their children and others well and are a positive requirement. All people are important to all people and we need street sweepers, garbage collectors and clerks because we as a society cannot function without them just as we need lawyers, accountants and surgeons. Without them we would get sick or have problems with our personal administration and this should be seen on a SOCIAL scale not on a political, or economical scale. But yet all we hear on the television and in the media is politics and economics or environment.

It is ok to be working class and have less money. It is ok to be middle class and have no money and be judgmental of morals and ethics in others of the same class. In fact it is necessary for our type of society to remain healthy. A healthy society means a happy and successful society; which means a meaningful life for its citizens and subjects.

I hope that some of this paper will shed light on and at least provoke new thought and give rise to, the ability of the experts to investigate, research, diagnose and treat some of the ills we are seeing, so that people will be less stressed, more understanding of themselves and where they fit in and how and what the needs are for their children, society and themselves. I see a lot of unnecessary stress, unpleasantness and indeed ignorance by a lot of both learned and educated people and also of the less educated, and we have to find out what the problem is and how we can fix it.

Thank you for reading this paper and giving me the opportunity to write a little on a subject close to my heart.

*I think that this should be the order of importance though I would have to state that I have limited studies in anthropology, sociology, sociolinguists and philosophy.