

Gender (In)Equality In Participation And Opportunity: The Case Of Australia

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the recent *Global Gender Gap Report* released by the World Economic Forum (W.E.F.) Australia, along with New Zealand, were highlighted as “leaders in closing the gender gap” (Grieg, Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2006: 3). Based on the W.E.F.’s benchmarking tool, the Gender Gap Index (G.G.I.)¹, Australia achieved a rank of 15, out of 115 countries, and a score of 0.716 (1=equality). Perhaps unsurprisingly the Report has prompted considerable debate in Australia as to the status of women and, in particular, their economic well-being. Whilst many women² have benefited from access to education and health, persistent barriers continue to hinder women’s economic opportunities and political empowerment within the Australian context (Preston and Jefferson 2007a; Maddison and Partridge 2007). At a time when other countries are integrating gender into the policy development process and adopting programs to monitor women’s labour market outcomes (Rubery, Smith, and Fagan 1999: 1) Australia appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

When compared to the 1970s and 1980s it is apparent that the climate within which gender equality is pursued today has significantly chilled. In the words of Maddison and Partridge (2007: xiv) “whereas Australia was once a leader in the global struggle

¹ The Index is based upon four ‘pillars’: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment (Grieg, Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2006: 5).

² The authors wish to acknowledge that Aboriginal women and many women from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) background do not share the same access and opportunities to education, health, economic participation and political empowerment as Anglo-Celtic women. The experiences of socio-economic positioning, sexuality and disability also mediate women’s access to opportunities.

for gender equality [...] in recent years Australia has resiled from this commitment and many of the achievements of an earlier period have now been undone.” Other prominent feminist commentators such as Barbara Pocock (2003 and 2006) and Anne Summers (2003) have similarly noted recent adverse shifts in women’s labour market outcomes and a diminution over the last decade or so of the gender equity agenda by Australian governments.

Given these tensions, the W.E.F’s high praise of Australia requires closer analysis. In doing this, the paper takes as its focus the ‘Economic Participation and Opportunity Index’, a sub-Index of the G.G.I., which measures women and men’s labour market participation, remuneration, and advancement, identifying gaps and convergences. Attention is given to identifying factors which are often rendered invisible within broad concepts such as women’s ‘participation’ and ‘advancement’. Take for example the increase in the number of women in part-time and casual work. Measured at the aggregate level, the data can be misleading and fail to account for the socio-economic implications of non-standard employment for women (Preston and Jefferson 2007a). Issues of women’s remuneration and advancement require similar investigation, with a particular emphasis on understanding the impact of industrial reforms and continuing occupational segregation on women’s employment decision making (Peetz 2007). In this process of analysis, broader questions relating to the reported narrowing of the gender gap in the Australian labour market and long run prospects for gender equality can be adequately and appropriately assessed.

The critiques offered in this paper resonate with those of other gender sensitive measurements of well-being, including the Gender-related Development Index (GDI)

and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Whilst acknowledging the importance of measuring gender equality/inequality, both the assumptions informing the variables and the measurements employed within these indices, are highly problematic (Bardhan and Klasen 1999: 985-986). As noted above, the concepts and indicators used in measuring gender well-being are too often limited to aggregate categories which focus on a country's formal and public domains thus ignoring the diversity of women's involvement in the informal and less-public domains (Sharma 1997). Disaggregated data provides a less-cohesive analysis but one that typically, more appropriately reflects the realities of women's positioning within society. As is evidenced by the disaggregated data presented within this paper, women's economic participation and opportunity within Australia is both nuanced and complex. Whilst achievements have been made, it seems that the W.E.F's praise is both short-sighted and misplaced.

2. Background

In their analysis of *Women's Employment in Europe*, Rubery et al. (1999: 4) note "no smooth transition towards a more gender-equal society can be expected. Trends in women's employment opportunities cannot be considered as separable or independent from general social and economic policies." As this next section highlights, women's economic participation and opportunity in the Australian context is embedded within a landscape of shifting social, economic and political realities, both locally and globally. Whilst decades of federal and state government labour market reforms have impacted upon women's engagement and position within the workforce, the reforms initiated by the Howard Coalition Government were unique in their breadth of

coverage and depth of impact³. Feminist and pro-feminist researchers have identified the Howard industrial relations reforms, implemented through labour market deregulation, decentralised pay bargaining and welfare-to-work reforms, as posing the greatest threat to gender equality in participation and opportunity (Plowman and Preston 2005; Ellem, Baird, Cooper and Lansbury 2005; Pocock and Masterman-Smith 2005). The fragmentation and uncertainty which now typifies the Australian labour market makes it risky to rely on aggregated data in measuring gender equality/inequality. Disaggregated and contextualised data is essential for producing this closer reading as is an understanding of the contextual landscape in which women participate in the economy.

Australia, at the start of the 1990s, was in the midst of an economic recession with the male seasonally adjusted unemployment rate reaching 11.7 percent by December 1992 (A.B.S. 1994: 181). Analysis at the time by influential organisations such as the O.E.C.D. (1990) advocated, as a response to the crisis, a more decentralised system for wage determination and a dismantling of the highly centralised arbitral wages system (a system that had been characteristic of Australia throughout most of the last century). Other micro-economic reforms were simultaneously identified and pursued as Australia adjusted not only to the recessionary context but the increased pressures of globalisation and demand for flexibility (Preston and Burgess 2003a). By the mid 1990s economic considerations of productivity and business efficiency dominated the agenda and, in the labour market, culminated in the adoption of new industrial relations legislation in November 1996 following the earlier win of the Liberal-National Coalition (Howard) Government in the federal parliament on March 2, 1996.

³ It must be acknowledged that the Hawke-Keating Labor Government of the late 1980s and 90s introduced policies which marked the beginning of Australia's industrial rights demise.

The new legislation marked a watershed period in Australian industrial relations. Aside from placing a greater emphasis on individual as opposed to collective rights, the 1996 legislation also placed restrictions on union rights of entry, circumscribed the power of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (A.I.R.C.) and introduced provisions for individual (non-union) contracts, known as Australian Workplace Agreements (A.W.A.s). Although seen as radical in 1996, further industrial reforms came into effect in March 2006 which can be considered even more draconian. When combined with the punitive welfare-to-work reforms (operational since July 1, 2006) which require single parents to work a minimum of 15 hours per week once their youngest child turns six, it is clear that the bargaining context and industrial relations environment in Australia has drastically changed (Peetz 2006).

By the time of the W.E.F. report Australia's federal industrial relations regime had the following characteristics: individual bargaining arrangements which overrode collectively bargained agreements; a prohibition on pattern bargaining; and a specified list of prohibited matters which could not be included in registered agreements. There were also significant penalties for those breaching the Act. The A.I.R.C. was stripped of its wage setting functions (rendering national wage cases and pay equity test cases a thing of the past)⁴ and a new institution, the Australian Fair Pay Commission (A.F.P.C.) assigned responsibility for setting and adjusting the federal minimum wage and the minimum wages of former award classifications (now referred to as Pay Scales). Whilst signalling a new era (and new principles) for wage fixing, the 2006 regulations were also designed to limit the flow-on effects of wage

⁴ Test cases have been an important avenue through which trade unions have effectively raised working conditions and community standards generally. Recent test case decisions include 1969/72 Equal Pay decision; 1979 Maternity Leave; 1985 Adoption Leave; 1990 Parental Leave; 1994 Family Leave; 1995 Personal/Carer's Leave; 2001 Parental Leave for Casual Employees; 2002 Reasonable Hours/Working Hours; and 2005 Family Provisions.

adjustments from one sector or jurisdiction to another, thus opening up possibilities of broader set of wage outcomes (and inequalities).

In November 2007 the Howard Coalition Government lost office and a new Rudd Labor Government elected to the federal parliament. As part of their platform the new Government has promised to roll back individual bargaining and re-prioritise collective bargaining over individual bargaining. A bill to this effect has gone before the parliament although the transition period is five years. Thus far there have been no other changes to the workplace laws, e.g. to unfair dismissal protection (which doesn't exist for employees in firms of less than 100 employees), prohibited content and the welfare-to-work provisions which discriminate, in particular, against single parents the majority of whom are women. The policy setting now prioritises economic considerations over normative considerations – and there is little evidence this is about to change.

In setting wages the Fair Pay Commission (2006: 6) must, for example, have regard to: the capacity for the unemployed and the low paid to obtain and remain in employment and employment and competitiveness across the economy. The legislation also requires the Fair Pay Commission to take account of the principle that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value⁵ however, as a principle it would appear to carry less weight than those articulated above. Thus while the Fair Pay Commission may consider this pay equity principle there is no requirement ('must have regard to') or obligation to do so. As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry asserts "ACCI can see nothing in

⁵ Workplace Relations Act, s.222(a)

Section 23 of the Act, or in any other provisions which specifically directs the A.F.P.C to have regard to this [pay equity] issue, and can see the express calling up of other non-gender related considerations” (A.C.C.I. 2006: 267). Gender has not only ‘slipped out of view’ (Pocock 1998) it has been pushed out of view in effort to promote employment growth, business competitiveness and restrained wage growth (essential for low inflation).

Australia’s earlier commitment to feminism and gender equality has been sacrificed in the pursuit of economic growth (Maddison and Partridge, 2007), in turn threatening future convergence in men’s and women’s economic opportunities. That said, more and more women are participating in tertiary education (Preston and Burgess 2003b) and employment (albeit on a part-time basis) and the ‘chilly climate’ is unlikely to see these changes reversed. Australia is now a nation of what Hill (Hill 2007: 241) describes as, ‘modified male breadwinner’ households in which women continue to be positioned as second or marginal income earners and responsible for family-care roles. In this context the extent to which women are integrated into employment as opposed to marginalised, casual, vulnerable part-time jobs is critical for their economic and financial outcomes as well as their empowerment, status and well-being. The remainder of this paper examines recent trends and patterns, considers prospects for the future, and cautions against uncritical acceptance of W.E.F. reports on gender equality.

3. Economic Participation and Opportunity

In the W.E.F. Gender Gap Index the sub-index ‘Economic Participation and Opportunity’ is comprised of five components: (a) common ratio of female to male

labour force participation; (b) gender wage ratio (for similar work, based on an ‘Executive Opinion Survey’)⁶; (c) common ratio of female to male earned income; (d) common ratio of female to male legislators, senior officials and managers; and (e) common ratio of female to male female professional and technical workers. Based on the W.E.F. Gender Gap Index data and methodology Australia achieved a rank of 15 (out of 115 countries) and a score of 0.716 (1=equality). Australia’s rank (and score) on the W.E.F. Economic Participation and Opportunity Index was equal to 12 (0.726) (out of 80 countries). Table 1 summarises the W.E.F. results.

Table 1: W.E.F. Economic Participation and Opportunity Gender Gap Index Scores, Australia, 2006

	Rank	Score	Sample Average	Female	Male	Female-Male Ratio
Economic Participation and Opportunity	12*	0.726	0.596			
Labour force participation	30	0.80	0.69	56%	71%	0.80
Wage equality for similar work (Executive Opinion Survey)	45	0.65	0.64	-	-	0.65
Income (PPP US\$)	8	0.72	0.52	24827	34446	0.72
Legislators, senior officials and Managers	14	0.56	0.37	36%	64%	0.56
Professional and technical workers	1	1.00	0.79	55%	45%	1.22
Educational Attainment	1	1.00	0.939			
Health and Survival	57	0.976	0.973			
Political Empowerment	32	0.163	0.138			

Source: W.E.F. (2006). Note: the above table also summarises the aggregate score on the other three subindices of educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.

In this section disaggregated data and a broader set of indicators are used to form an assessment of women’s status with respect to economic participation and opportunity in Australia. The analysis begins with a study of labour and workforce participation with data disaggregated to shed light on full-time and part-time participation as well as age related differences. Thereafter the focus turns to employment trends before

⁶ The Executive Opinion Survey is an annual survey conducted by the World Economic Forum. In 2006 over 11,000 business leaders in 125 economies were surveyed, with information sought on a range of issues including “factors central to creating a healthy business environment ... issues such as childcare availability and cost, the prevalence of private sector employment of women and wage inequality” (World Economic Forum 2006).

proceeding to an analysis of the gender remuneration gap and a study of the advancement gap.

Participation Gap: Labour Force Participation

In the W.E.F. report Australia's performance with respect to labour force participation (defined as the share of employed and unemployed workers as a proportion of working age population) was ranked 30th, based on a female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) of 56%, a male labour force participation rate (MLFPR) of 71% and an overall female-male (gender) labour force participation ratio (GLFP) of 0.80 (see Table 1).

Analysis of trends in Australia's participation rates show significant increases in female labour market participation in recent years with increases reflecting changed social norms and attitudes surrounding women and work, together with changed financial needs of individuals and households (e.g. household debt), changed aspirations of women (a function of increased participation in education and an associated increase in the opportunity cost of time out of the labour market), public policy effects (e.g. policies with respect to child-care, tax and welfare-to-work for single parents), and federal legislative provisions such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act 1986* (for further discussion on women's patterns of participation in paid employment in Australia see Siobhan Austen (2006)). In 2006 the GLFP ratio was equal to 0.82 amongst 20-64 year olds, up from 0.75 in 1996.⁷

Cohort effects (or generational changes) are now the main drivers of changed

⁷ Data taken from A.B.S., Labour Force - catalogue number 6202.0.55.001.

participation (Austen and Seymour 2006). When combined with the demographic effects (the ageing of the population) the cohort effects (shown as the bold diagonal space in Table 2) have contributed to an overall change in the age distribution of labour force participants. By 2006, older women (aged 45-64) accounted for 38 percent of all (20-64 year old) participating women, up from 24 percent in 1991 (Table 3).

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rates of Women (by Age) and Men, Australia, 1981-2006.

	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	1981- 1991	1991- 2006
Females Aged:	%	%	%	%	%	%	%-point change	
20 – 24	70.7	74.6	76.8	77.3	77.2	76.5	6.1	-0.3
25 – 29	54	61.8	67.4	69.7	74.3	74.7	13.4	7.3
30 – 34	51.8	58.3	63.9	64.4	67.4	70.3	12.1	6.4
35 – 39	56.6	63.8	70.3	69.9	70.2	70.5	13.7	0.2
40 – 44	59.8	65.8	73.5	73.9	74.2	77.3	13.7	3.8
45 – 49	55	60.6	68.2	72.2	75.4	79.0	13.2	10.8
50 - 54	43.3	47.4	55.8	61.2	66.3	73.7	12.5	17.9
55 - 59	29.8	28.6	35.6	42.4	49.5	58.8	5.8	23.2
60 - 64	12	12.7	14.7	18.4	21.4	34.2	2.7	19.5
Females Total	50.9	56	62.3	64.6	66.7	69.7	11.4	7.4
Males Total	89.6	87.7	87.4	86.4	84.6	85.4	-2.2	-2.0
Gender Participation Gap (%-point)	-38.7	-31.7	-25.1	-21.8	-17.9	-15.7	13.6	9.4

Source: A.B.S super-cube, lm8.srd. Estimates are based on August labour force data.

Table 3: Distribution of labour force participants by Age and Sex, Australia, 1981-2006

	Women			Men			Women	Men
	1981	1991	2006	1981	1991	2006	1991-2006	1991-2006
	%						% point change	
20 - 24	21.3	16.8	12.6	15.5	13.5	11.8	-4.2	-1.7
25 - 29	15.5	14.8	11.8	15.4	14.4	11.9	-3.1	-2.5
30 - 34	14.7	14.5	11.9	15.3	15.0	12.6	-2.6	-2.5
35 - 39	13.1	14.8	12.3	12.7	14.0	12.9	-2.5	-1.1
40 - 44	11.5	14.9	13.5	10.7	13.6	12.7	-1.4	-0.9
45 - 49	9.2	11.0	13.7	9.3	11.0	12.6	2.7	1.6
50 - 54	7.7	7.4	11.6	9.2	8.5	10.8	4.2	2.3
55 - 59	5.2	4.1	8.7	7.9	5.9	9.3	4.6	3.4
60 - 64	1.8	1.7	3.9	4.0	4.1	5.4	2.2	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		

Source: A.B.S supercubes lm8.srd

Participation Gap: Employment

Although labour force participation is an important indicator of labour market activity, it is important that we understand the forms of participation as a way of making more sense of the participation data as a measure of women's participation opportunities.

Global competition has been linked with new forms of employment (Gereffi 2005; Toner and Coates 2006), including significant growth in the use of non-standard forms of employment (temporary contracts, part-time work) as organisations have down-sized, contracted out non-core activities and exhibited a preference for more flexible employment forms and new working time arrangements (e.g. changes to starting times and use of shift-work). By August 2005 30 percent of all (main) jobs in Australia were part-time and of those part-time jobs 58 percent were casual (technically defined as 'employees without paid leave entitlements') (A.B.S: 2006).

Although women are over-represented in part-time jobs, male part-time work is on the rise and, since 1991, has more than doubled. At August 2006 11.6 percent of all employed men (aged 20-64) were employed on a part-time (less than 35 hours per week) basis. The corresponding share for women was 42.8 percent (Table 4).

Moreover, whereas part-time work amongst men is fairly evenly distributed across all age groups (the youngest group excepted) the same does not hold for women, with those aged 35-44 over-represented in this labour market sector.

Table 4: Distribution of full-time and part-time work by age and sex, Australia, 1981-2006.

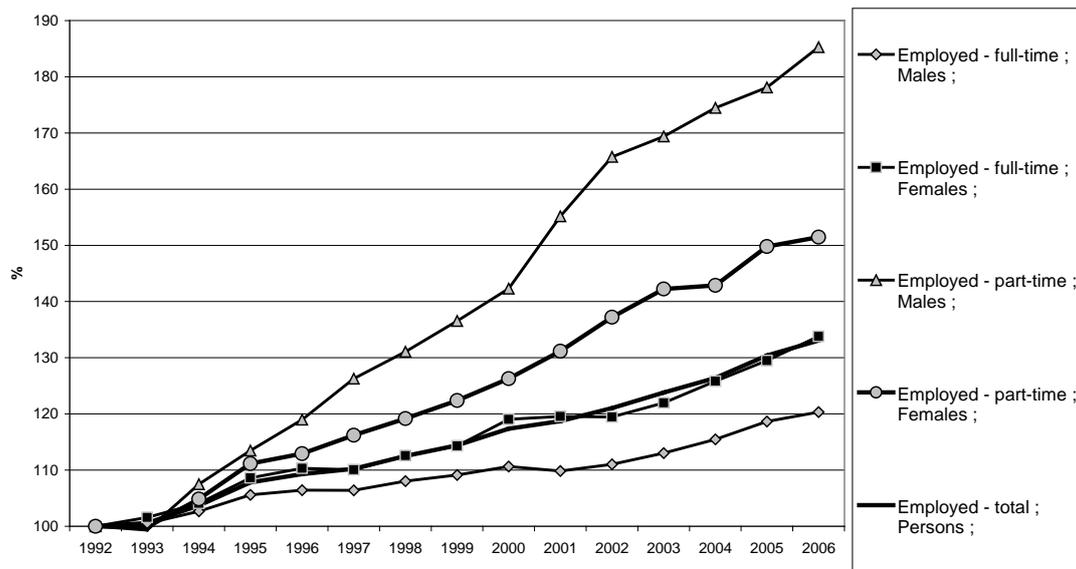
	Women				Men			
	Aug-1981		Aug-2006		Aug-1981		Aug-2006	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
	- % -							
20 – 24	16.9	3.7	7.7	4.6	14.0	0.8	8.7	2.9
25 – 29	10.9	4.4	8.5	3.2	14.7	0.6	10.5	1.3
30 – 34	8.3	6.4	6.9	4.9	15.0	0.4	11.7	0.9
35 – 39	6.8	6.4	6.1	6.3	12.6	0.3	12.1	0.8
40 – 44	6.6	5.2	6.8	6.7	10.6	0.3	11.8	1.0
45 – 49	5.4	4.0	7.9	5.9	9.2	0.2	11.6	1.1
50 – 54	4.4	3.6	6.8	5.0	9.0	0.3	9.8	1.0
55 – 59	3.2	2.2	4.7	4.0	7.5	0.4	8.1	1.3
60 – 64	0.9	1.0	1.8	2.2	3.6	0.3	4.0	1.3
Total	63.3	36.8	57.2	42.8	96.3	3.7	88.4	11.6

Source: A.B.S. (2007) 6265.0

Most (54 percent) of the new jobs created since 1991 have gone to women, such that women's total employment in Australia increased by 32.4 percent in the fifteen years to 2006 (Figure 1). In the part-time sector, where employment growth was strongest, 63 percent of the new jobs were filled by women. The shift towards part-time work (away from full-time work) is particularly pronounced amongst women aged 35-44

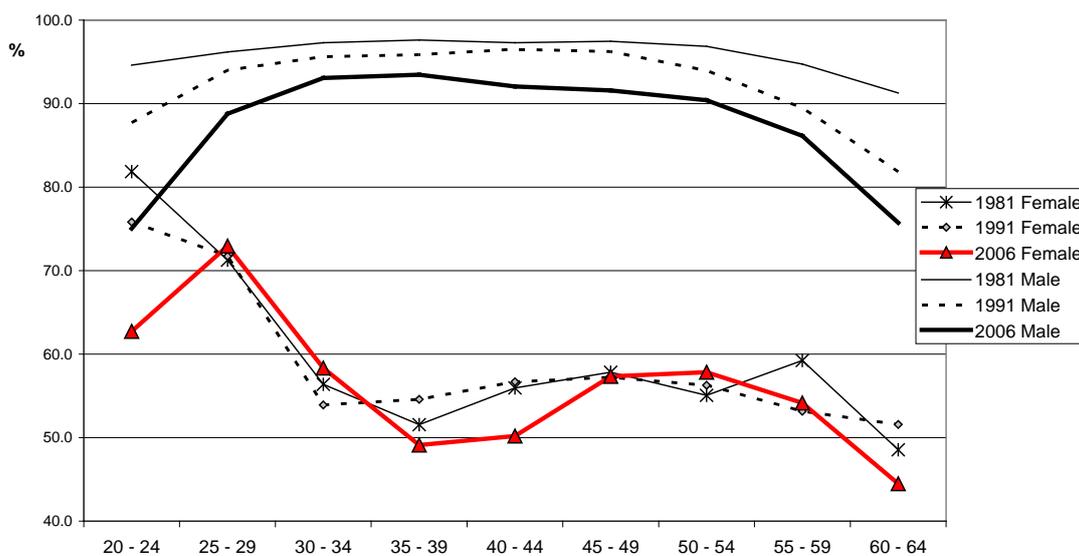
years and those aged 55-64 (see Figure 2). By 2006 the share of employed women working full-time was equal to 55 percent, down from 59 percent in 1991.

Figure 1: Employment Growth, Australia 1992-2006. (Seasonally adjusted, annual average increases).



Source: A.B.S. 6202.0.55.001

Figure 2: Full-time Employment as (%) of Total Employment by Age and Sex, Australia, 1981-2006.



Source: A.B.S supercubes lm8.srd

In a comparison of Australian and Canadian patterns of female labour force participation Austen (2006) identifies two important points of differentiation: (a) the relatively lower FLFPR for women aged 30-39; and (b) amongst women aged 30-39 who are participating and are in employment, a higher incidence of part-time work. Factors identified by Austen as possibly contributing to these differences include Canadian support for child-care (including taxation arrangements) and higher incidence of paid parental leave. Australia's apparent higher preference for maternal care over market based care is also seen as a potential contributory factor although, as Austen notes, there are feedback effects: "beliefs about the legitimacy of women's involvement in paid work are themselves clearly influenced by the pattern of women's actual experience of paid work" (Austen 2006: 39).

Since Austen's study part time employment has continued to expand, as has the share of employed women aged 35-44 working part-time (see Figure 2). The widening gap (between full-time and part-time participation) amongst this group might reflect changing attitudes although this cohort is more educated than earlier cohorts and educated cohorts are typically more likely to participate on a full-time basis (Austen 2006). The changed patterns is probably more reflective of changed economic conditions including difficulties faced in securing child-care, required participation amongst single-parent welfare participants when their youngest child turns six, changed employment demand preferences by employers and a changed IR climate supporting more atypical forms of employment. In some sectors (e.g. hospitality) there appears to be a growing trend towards offering shorter shifts as a way of minimising costs (i.e. saving on payments for breaks) (Preston and Jefferson 2007a). Integral to the critique of part-time work is the issue of 'job quality' (Pocock,

Buchanan and Campbell 2004). Whilst the question of what constitutes a quality or ‘good’ job remains unresolved, research suggests that a combination of minimum standards (incorporating pay rates, conditions and opportunities) and stronger resonance between the attributes of full-time and part-time work are important factors (Burgess 2005).

When the data are further disaggregated we see that employment growth has been strongest in jobs of 15-29 hours duration per week. Evidence suggests that this it isn’t a complete supply side phenomenon. In 2001, for example, of women aged 25-34, 17 percent of those working 16-29 hours wanted to work more hours; by 2007 this share had grown to 22 percent (see Table 5).

Table 5: Proportion of women employed part-time who would prefer to work more hours, by age and hours worked, Australia, 2007.

Hours worked per week	Aged 20-24	Aged 25-34	Aged 35-44	Aged 45-54	Aged 55-64
1-15 hours	30.8	27.1	30.2	28.7	27.2
16-29 hours	38.4	22.1	17.5	21.7	23.1
30-34 hours	32.4	15.8	11.6	9.2	16.6
Total (%)	34.5	22.3	20.6	21.0	23.9

Source: A.B.S. (2007) 6265.0

Participation Gap - Summary

Recent years have seen strong growth in the Australian female labour force participation rate and a corresponding convergence in the participation gap. Successive cohorts of younger generations are showing greater levels of attachment to the workforce. That said, much of the employment growth that has underpinned increased participation growth has been in the part-time labour market where a significant share of jobs are casual and short-hour (15-29). In the key child-rearing

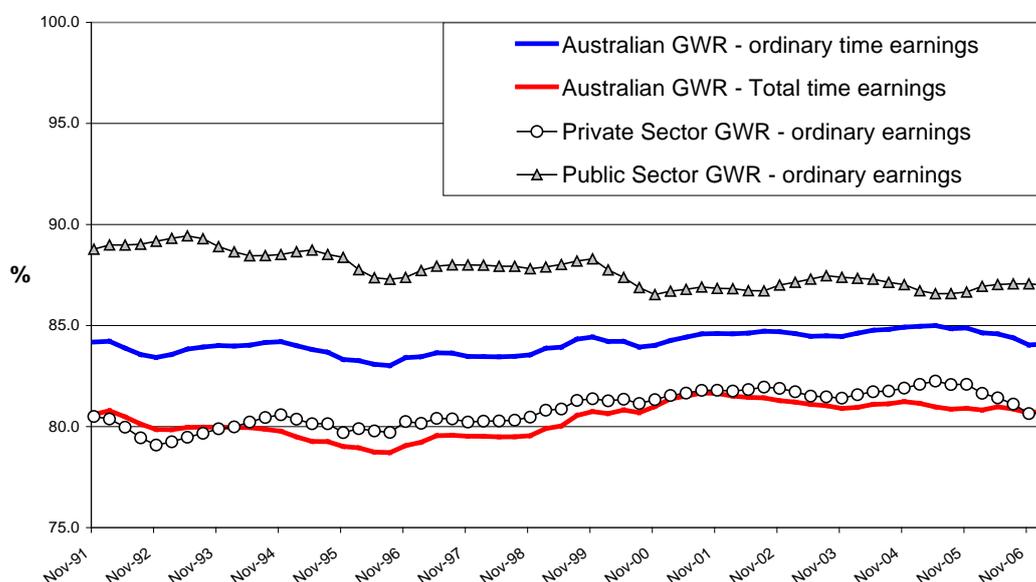
years (35-44) more and more women are, as noted, participating on a part-time basis. Whilst part-time employment does facilitate labour market retention its contribution to narrowing the economic participation gap is debateable. As will be shown below, part-time jobs tend to be poorly paid relative to full-time position. Research elsewhere has also highlighted the other less than favourable features of part-time work – e.g. reduced promotional opportunities, reduced access to education and training (Whittard 2003; Equal Opportunities Commission 2005); reduced certainty concerning employment security and reduced superannuation accumulations (Jefferson and Preston 2005). Australia's ranking with respect to labour force participation must, therefore, take into account hours of work, the quality of the jobs and the number of jobs (multiple job holding) if one is to make a more informed assessment as to whether or not such participation does indeed contribute to enhancing the economic security of women.

Remuneration Gap

In the 2006 W.E.F. report Australia ranked 45th on the 'wage equality' measure and 8th on the income ratio, with the female-male income ratio equal to 0.72. At the aggregate level the Australian gender pay gap (measured using mean earnings data) has exhibited remarkable stability (although an alternative interpretation could read 'is this as good as it gets?'). There has been little variation in the gap in the full-time labour market, notwithstanding radical economic and social reforms. At February 2007 the gender wage ratio (the common ratio of average earnings of women and men) in the full-time labour market was equal to 84.1 percent (using ordinary time earnings) and 80.8% using total time earnings (see figure 3). It was lower in the private sector where, in contrast to the relative stability of earlier periods, it has

recently been in decline.⁸ This decline is also reflected in recent O.E.C.D. (2007: 268) statistics showing deterioration in the *median* gender earnings ratio between 1995 and 2005 (falling from 0.86 to 0.84 in the full-time labour market). These data, of course, report the raw gender wage gap. In other words the data are void of controls for changes in the composition of the workforce such as changes in human capital endowments.

Figure 3: Gender Wage Ratio – Australia and by Sector, November 1991-February 2007. (Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings and Average Weekly Total Time Earnings for Adults Employed Full-time).



Source: A.B.S 6302.0 data smoothed using a four quarter moving average.

When using data on full-timers to study the gender pay gap two other factors need to be taken into consideration. The first relates to the fact that more educated women are likely to participate on a full-time basis. The lower incidence of full-time work by women in Australia may thus underpin Australia’s full-time gender wage ratio relative to other countries.

⁸ The recent widening in the gap in the private sector and at the national level is statistically significant at the 10 percent level, while the growth in the public sector gap from a low in 1993 is significant at the 1 percent level.

The second consideration relates to bargaining arrangements. The process of wage determination is significantly different across sectors, with part-timers and casual workers much less likely to be covered by a collectively negotiated agreement and more likely to experience a wage penalty relative to full-timers. At May 2006 the average hourly pay gap between casual workers and those on permanent full-time contracts was 20 percent. The gap was even wider when the sample was restricted to those covered by individual (as opposed to collective) agreements (see also Preston and Jefferson 2007b).

Part of the differential stems from the different employment patterns of full-timers and part-timers (many of whom are casual) and the industry sectors where part-time employment has been expanding. It has been particularly strong in industry sectors where wages growth has been below average, including the low-paid sectors such as retail, accommodation, cafés and restaurants) where part-time employed women are concentrated (Preston, Jefferson and Guthrie 2007c). The latter has contributed to an increased incidence of low pay in Australia. In 1995 13.8 percent of workers earned less than two-thirds of median earnings; by 2005 the share had increased to 15.9 percent (O.E.C.D. 2007: 268). This raises additional questions and concerns as to the quality of work and the sorts of new employment opportunities being created and celebrated in Australia.

As wage inequality increases we should also expect to see further deterioration in the Australian gender pay gap. The relatively compressed pay structure has cushioned current levels of gender pay inequities. This is particularly true of the public sector.

Data from Hiau Joo Kee (2006) (Table 6) shows the gender wage gap at different points of public and private sector wage distribution. Whilst the compressed structure in the public sector limits women’s pay disadvantage, the pay scales of the private sector are much less compressed giving rise to larger gaps, particularly at the top end of the distribution. As Table 6 illustrates, the gender wage gap in the private sector at the first quartile level was 12 percent, increasing to a corresponding gap at the third quartile, of 22.9 percent. This “escalating pay gap” was identified in a recent survey of remuneration across Australian mining and minerals companies (AusIMM 2008: 19). The survey reported “a gender pay gap of 5 percent (per hour) at entry level to 20 percent (per hour) difference at the level of senior manager” (AusIMM 2008: 19).

Table 6: Adjusted Gender Wage (%) by Sector and Position on the Wage Distribution, Australia, 2001.

	10th	25 th	50 th	75th	90th
Private Sector	6.5**	12.0**	17.7**	22.9**	25.8**
Public Sector	10.9**	11.4**	12.4**	13.8**	15.7**

Source: Hiau Joo Kee (2006; Table 5). Based on HILDA Wave 1 (2001 data). Notes: Hiau Kee controls for differences in human capital as well as occupation and industry.

Remuneration gap - Summary

At an aggregate level gender wage outcomes in Australia appear relatively favourable, particularly when comparisons are made using data generated from full-time employees. Currently the gender wage gap is around 16 percent nationally. However, trends in the full-time labour market obscure patterns of wage movements in other sectors. There is, for example, a sizeable part-time/full-time pay differential (Preston 2003; and Kee 2006). With individual agreements set to prevail for another five years we can expect to see further divergence in the wages of the low and high paid sectors. Such widening inequality will see further deterioration in the gender pay gap in

Australia. From an economic and opportunity perspective a closer examination of the pay distribution and of the different remuneration outcomes of full-timers and part-timers would provide a more helpful assessment of the gender remuneration gap in Australia.

Advancement Gap

On the basis of the 2006 W.E.F. gender gap report Australia has an enviable record in the area of employment opportunity. Relative to other countries in the sample it would seem that the share of women in professional and technical occupations is particularly commendable, with the W.E.F. giving Australia top rank against this indicator.

Sex-segregation is, however, deeply entrenched in Australia and likely to become even more entrenched if current patterns of employment see an increasing share of women move into the current limited set of part-time job opportunities. In 2002 55.8 percent of all employed women worked in highly feminised jobs (jobs where the share of women in employment was equal to 70 percent or more). Research reported in Alison Preston and Gillian Whitehouse (2004) shows that although women have been making inroads to some areas of management such as sales and marketing management, policy and planning management and information technology management, other areas such as health professionals and educational professionals have, in recent years, seen *increased* feminisation. Vertical segregation also remains endemic. In 2004 in the Higher Education sector, for example, women accounted for

65 percent of the lowest promotional level, but only 24 percent at Associate Professor level and 16 percent at Professoriate level (AVCC 2005: 27).⁹

These trends caution against a narrow viewing of advancement based on share of women in professional and managerial positions. It is important to look at the disaggregated data and the extent to which the labour market is becoming more integrated. On-going sex segregation and current patterns of employment in Australia are contributing to acute skill shortages in particular areas, especially non-traditional areas such as resources sector and IT where attraction *and* retention is a particular problem. The masculine cultures in these sectors not only inhibit women's progression they also affect other outcomes, such as wage equality.

Recent research shows that the major forms of discrimination in these sectors revolve around sexual harassment (Hunter 2006) and the unavailability of quality, career level, part-time work to accommodate family responsibilities (Lord, Preston and Crosbie, 2006). As the U.K. Equal Opportunities Commission (2005: 5) notes "Some sectors and higher level jobs remain virtually 'no go' areas for part-timers, who are largely stuck in a 'working-time ghetto' as a result of old-fashioned management thinking about the expectations and limitations of part-time work".

A more useful assessment of Australia's advancement gap could be drawn from indicators measuring the 'brain drain' from professional level jobs generated by rigid employment practices. If part-time employment is to continue as the main vehicle

⁹ These data are sourced from the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) web-site, http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/policies_programs/women/FinalAVCCReportJuly05.pdf Latest available data are for 2004.

through which women in Australia balance their work and family responsibilities then it is critical that Australia offers a broader set of part-time employment opportunities to facilitate women's career retention and advancement opportunities. Part-time jobs are, as noted above, currently restricted to a narrow set of jobs, mostly in low paid sectors of the economy and are, therefore, a drag on Australia's productivity potential.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Following advice and recommendations from influential organisations such as the O.E.C.D., Australia has adopted a highly decentralised and deregulated approach to labour regulation. The reforms have been widely debated, particularly as regards their effects on gender equity. Proponents, such as the recent Minister for Industrial Relations, Joe Hockey, have stressed the favourable effects of the reforms particularly for women. In backing up his claims he has relied on the W.E.F. report (2006) where Australia is positioned as a "leaders in closing the gender gap" (Grieg et al. 2006: 3). It is this claim that has motivated this paper.

As this paper has identified, disaggregated data and a broader set of indicators shows that women's patterns of participation, remuneration and advancement are complex and dynamic. In keeping with the critiques of gender gap indices identified earlier in this paper, the highly aggregated indicators employed by the W.E.F are unlikely to capture this complexity. While there has been a closing of the gender participation gap, much of the employment growth has been in the part-time sector where career (advancement) opportunities are limited and where wages growth has been below average. Thus, although participation may be closing women in Australia are still strongly positioned as the secondary (or marginal) breadwinner with prime

responsibilities for care. Equitable economic participation is significantly impacted as a result. This is demonstrated by findings, which show significant wage penalties accruing to part-timers and lower overall life-time earnings that have ongoing effects into retirement through reduced occupational superannuation accumulations. Part-time work also impacts on promotional opportunities as well as access to education and training. The findings on advancement (e.g. share of women in professional jobs) show that many professional jobs (e.g. health and education professionals) have become further feminised in recent years and women still struggle to make inroads in to male dominated jobs. Discrimination in non-traditional sectors is still a significant deterrent to ongoing employment in this sector, particularly amongst women in prime child-care years seeking to balance work and family through part-time work. Opportunities for such employment forms are simply not present for professionals in such fields leading to an on-going exodus and brain drain.

Overall the picture gleamed from this research is less than favourable. Over the 1980s women made significant advances in terms of pay equity, child-care and access to non-traditional jobs. However, in recent years women have been strongly repositioned as secondary income earner and their increasing participation in part-time and casual work where earning outcomes are lower simply reinforces this role. There isn't a shared sense of progress. Indeed recent regulatory changes toward decentralised wage fixing further reinforce the vulnerability of women who are over represented in labour market sectors with relatively low bargaining power.

It is these complexities which problematise the W.E.F. findings and question Australia's progress in 'closing the gender gap'. The highly aggregated nature of the

data makes a closer reading of women's positionings within and outside of the labour market impossible. Any attempt to measure the gaps between women and men's well-being must appreciate and include an analysis of women's realities beyond the generic. A more complex and realistic picture of women's well-being and development will only be created when indices, such as the G.G.I. develop indicators which measure beyond the 'visible – formal' and engage with the 'invisible – informal' spaces of women's everyday lives. Until such time the results produced in the W.E.F's *Gender Gap Report* remain partial and as such their usefulness limited.

Given these shortcomings feminists should have reservations about adopting Australia's policies as a model to pursue when promoting gender equality. Australia is, for example, one of two O.E.C.D. countries without a paid maternity leave scheme. Increased participation in Australia has been driven through growth in part-time, casual work. These developments will not deliver the sorts of economic and financial security that women in Australia require for true equality (on this indicator).

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