

GIVING BOYS A RAY OF HOPE: MASCULINITY AND EDUCATION

DISCUSSION PAPER FOR GENDER EQUITY TASKFORCE AUSTRALIA FEBRUARY, 1995

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INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that much has been written about gender and education. However, we cannot assume that everything we know about girls applies to boys. For example, some writers on girls' education, have said that role models have limited application to girls. But the boys and men I have been interviewing for the last three years say that role models are important to them. It is clear that most boys are raised by their own mothers, and by mostly-female teachers. Girls may lack certain kinds of role models, but they usually have people of their own sex close to them as they grow up. The same is not true of boys. Thus it is clear that we cannot always take knowledge about girls and apply it to boys.

Since the time of the Whitlam Government, there has been discussion about programs to encourage girls. Much of the existing literature sees girls as victims, boys as villains, almost like a child's game of goodies and baddies. But if we want to create programs to encourage boys, we will have to understand what it means to be male. This will require a sound knowledge of masculinity. It may be convenient to extend the National Action Plan for Girls, and create a National Action Plan for Girls and Boys. It may be politically convenient, but it will not work. The construction of masculinity is based on the idea that to be male is not to be female. If we want a boys' education strategy, we cannot base it on girls' education programs. We have to base it on understanding masculinity. There is much existing research on boys; it needs major expansion.

Existing committees on girls' education cannot be transformed overnight into expert committees on boys and girls. Gender has been defined by feminists in the past, but debate in academia and the media shows that feminism is being questioned. There is a considerable body of knowledge about masculinity which did not exist three years ago. To have credibility, state and national committees should have a wide range of expertise from feminists and non-feminists. Nobody can pretend to know all about gender; we all have our own perspectives.

This paper examines masculinity, emphasising the conditional status of men, before critically examining current gender debates. It reviews research on boys, and offers some suggestions for action.

They didn't care about learning at our school. There was a giant trophy for winning the football, and if you came top of the class you got a bit of cardboard.

The Phys Ed department would get up at assembly every week and the whole school would have to stand in the sun and listen while they gave a minute-by-minute replay of the last game of football.

-Steve ,22, teacher

On the field they were mean. Off it they were animals.

- Advertisement for a video about American footballers

When girls have been rewarded with 'prizes' for beating up a doll, they have beaten it up as aggressively as the boys!

- Askew and Ross 1990:11

We've gone as far as we can with these boys, hitting them and suspending them and isolating them. And it just isn't working. Isn't there something better we can do?

-John G., teacher, south-west Sydney

We are all experts in gender. Each of us has lived on a daily basis with what it means to be a member of our sex. Like others, I lived most of my life without being aware of my gendered identity. I supervised student teachers in schools for 24 years; and then one day the realities of masculinity in schools hit me. Why was it nearly always boys who were constantly being put outside classrooms? Why was it boys who were being suspended, in overwhelming proportions? Although a great deal has been written about gender and education, boys are usually left out except as people to condemn.

Whereas the study of women is very far advanced as a result of the advances of feminism, masculinity is still emerging as a field of study. We have a huge literature on girls, but boys scarcely appear in the literature on gender, unless it is to be condemned. And if something is true of girls, is it necessarily true for boys? I have to emphasise most of all that I don't have all the answers on any of these matters. The more I study masculinity the more I'm convinced that none of us has the answers. At this stage I feel I am beginning to have the right questions, and maybe that's progress.

WHAT IS MASCULINITY?

There seems to be a lot of concern about theory in the work about boys and girls and schools. We should be happy if we have a number of theories to choose from, unless we live in a totalitarian state. I see theory as grounded in two things: research, and our own experience. If feminism has taught us one thing, it is that personal experience plays a vital role in showing us how the world works. This means that I have to state my own position in the scheme of things.

I grew up in a time in which work was a man's domain. Every woman I knew until I was 18 or 19, unless she was a nun, was married to a man and had a handful of children attached to her. Like other boys of my time I grew up thinking that being a man was a wonderful thing, though it sometimes seemed as if the price was too much to pay. When I was

18 I received a letter telling me that I was called up for military service in Vietnam; none of my female friends born in that year got that letter. Being male meant I was expected to go into the jungles and lay down my life, if necessary, to protect Australia from Communism. It was a war which I wanted no part of; but I was a man and I had to go or be branded as unmanly and unpatriotic. Again, when I was married I realised that I was responsible not just for myself but for my wife and the children who were born from a year after the marriage onwards. I bear that responsibility proudly, for being a father has been the best experience of my life. But I do think that men have to pay a price for the position they hold. Being a man gets you conditional approval: and everything is given as long as you are masculine. Step out of line, refuse to go to war, or show weakness, and you are ridiculed. This sense of the **conditional status of men** is missing from most contemporary descriptions of gender.

After a divorce, and a car accident which made me for a long six months very dependent on others, I began to review my life as many others have done in similar circumstances. I began to go to men's gatherings and men's groups, and all these men had something in common. They felt worn out by the effort of having to prove their masculinity. Young or old, men who identified as gay, straight, bisexual or uncommitted, they felt masculinity was a burden which they sometimes wanted to lay down. I felt that all of us were beginning that long journey of exploration of ourselves which was leading to a very critical look at the way we tell boys how to become men. And suddenly I could see that all the stuff we had been taught about men was a bit of a con-job. The central doctrine in that canon was that men are tough, and if you aren't tough you're not a man, so you must be a woman or a poofter. This realisation was strengthened by the reading I did.

At the same time, I began a study of how boys became men in a slice of Australia from 1920 to today. I could see that if we wanted to create a better and fairer society, we had to change the way we bring up boys. Girls are now raised in Australia with the general expectation that they will earn money outside the home, although there are exceptions, in regard to the Lebanese women I know, for example. But it seems to me that we are raising boys much as they were raised in the 1960s. The study gave me data on how men had changed in Australia over the last seventy years; and there were broad similarities with findings from countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia and the USA. My research showed me the following: I call them my propositions about masculinity.

1. The men who grew up in the 1930s and 40s lived in a time when a man's life was dominated by work. Men in country towns worked on the family farm or the railway; a few provided the town's doctor, lawyer, and perhaps teacher with a couple of tradesmen and a few shopkeepers. A man was expected to get his satisfaction from work. And a man out of work was a contradiction - something to be pitied.

2. These old-timers were responsible for others. One said he became a man at ten when his father went away for four or five months. In other words, you became a man when you were responsible for others - women, children, a farm. The responsibility was exhausting, for these men had little idea of how to relax except through an occasional taste of alcohol or sex. But every boy grew up wanting to be a father and wanting to be **like** his father. Men were available to boys: not only fathers, but a long list of male neighbours whom they could name. Men were happy and proud to be men. So nearly everybody grew up wanting to be a father. Masculinity was something to be proud of, not something to be ashamed of.

3. The men I spoke to were used to dealing with loneliness. Fear of being the man left out was the fear which underlay all other fears - even the fear of being called a poofter. I asked twenty-year-olds

What would happen if one of your mates said he was gay?

The answer on two or three occasions was

That would be OK - but I wouldn't want to be seen with him too much. My other friends would think I was gay, and then I wouldn't have any friends.

4. The men who grew up in the 70s and 80s showed a great fear of attack by women. Asked about what it means to be a man, they replied "**Women** should be allowed to do anything they want". They anticipated that any question about gender was softening them up for an attack on them as male chauvinists. When they realised this was not the case, they were able to articulate their ideas on masculinity. One said "You're always on your guard when you're a man. " This was repeated in other words by virtually every other man. They felt the need to play football and act aggressively to pass as an OK man. One listed a range of extreme male behaviour, from spewing up after competing to see who could drink the

most, to driving V8 cars, and so on - and then said "I don't do that any more, I've outgrown it." Men distanced themselves from such extremes, but it was clear that they still had fixed ideas of what a man should be. **And the need to prove masculinity was becoming more desperate in a time of blurred gender lines** (dramatic changes in the roles of women, and muscular gay men marching through the streets being the most glaring of the changes).

5. Men learn how to be a man. They learn it in part from fathers. Asked about masculinity, virtually all the men spoke of their fathers. Some of the most passionate comments were made about fathers - and it was clear that they all wanted their father's love and affection. At the same time, many rejected their father's ideas or ideals, at least for a time. The men whose fathers had died had erected mental shrines to them and were adopting their ideas with great determination. There is still much anguish around fathers, for which we can use the term father-hunger. Men seemed to want their father's love as much as they wanted anything in the world.

Men also learn how to be a man from other men as well as fathers. One explained how the school captain showed him how to punch an older boy who was bothering him. "After that" he said proudly, "no more troubles". Uncles and neighbours were also mentioned in this context. A 14 year old boy who has never seen his father spends many weekends with a mate who is part of a family in which the father and four boys play football. This boy is only one of the males I have interviewed who eases his father-hunger by finding other men to model himself on. In the nineties, with divorced men increasingly separated from their sons, and fathers having to drive further to work, the disconnection between fathers and children is something that should concern us all.

6. The men I spoke to had sexual experiences, with men and with women, which were seen as happy or unhappy and confirmed tendencies to identify as gay or straight. There was a minor pattern of boys having sex with older women or girls at school, in which the females seemed to be the initiators. But as the men got older, they valued the warmth and affection they got from others, as well as the sex. This agrees with the findings of Walker (1994): men who identify as straight do enjoy intimacy with other men, although this intimacy tends to become invisible in the eyes of some writers.

7. Masculinity has four pillars. One, as I said earlier, was the father. This caused difficulties for a man whose father was violent or who disappeared at an early age, for men expected their fathers to protect them from harm. Second was the body. People reacted to the men's bodies and interpreted them as tough or weak. One man said everyone treated him differently - generally with more respect - after he took up bodybuilding. The penis is an important part of the body; its performance or lack of it can lead a man to question his masculinity, and thus his very existence. Third was sport - PE teachers and coaches are much talked of, in very positive and negative terms. Sport and fathers were closely identified - men seemed to play sport, among other reasons, to get close to their fathers. One man used sport to avoid a violent father. The last is mates, the peer group. Work is a possible fifth, but there is not the inescapable identification of work and masculinity in the men who grew up since the sixties.

8. Australian mainstream culture draws a line between masculinity and non-masculinity (which embraces women and all other varieties of masculinity which are not given society's approval). We would more correctly talk about approved or dominant masculinity, and stigmatised forms of masculinity. The task of proving masculinity is so important because it is vital to be seen as a man to avoid being picked out, labelled and ridiculed. In the movie WAR PARTY, two Red Indian boys are about to ride into a barrage of rifle fire. In such a safe, masculine context, - one of danger and death, ironically - they can say what otherwise could never be said:

Hey, Sonny, we're brothers, right?

Any closer, they'd call us queer.

There is a blurry line between 'straight' and 'gay' which most men want to turn into a concrete wall to keep them safe from attack as 'queer'. In most western societies, males who are queer, gay, or even eccentric are labelled and ridiculed. Labelling is the weapon which is used by older men and women and by peers to enforce tough aggressive masculinity. So the question of not being masculine enough-which is present in a huge majority of men-is not incidental to understanding men. It is absolutely central. It is this conditional acceptance of men which the radical feminist accusation 'men have all the power' misses completely. You don't have all the power if you can't walk down the street arm in arm with another man without fear of attack. I have explored this notion in another paper (1994b).

This is an important place to begin an understanding of boys. Our boys are growing up in a society which is very critical of men. I have heard reports that one school found that a teacher was having a lot of difficulty with boys in her class. When the principal went to talk to her, he saw that she had the *All Men Are Bastards* diary prominently displayed on her desk. In addition, she had a lot of newspaper articles on the classroom wall documenting the evil some men had done. Boys seem to have decided that it was hard for them to succeed in that class. In other cases, boys have teachers who respect them and know how to talk to them. Either way, boys are growing up in a time of great debate about men. And the way out of the uncertainty is to retreat into toughness ; it seems a lot safer than softness.

BOYS AND GIRLS; SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT?

One key point needs to be made here, and it is something of a paradox. On one hand, the evidence here broadly agrees with work by Connell (1989) and Walker (1988) that there is a range of masculinities in which one is dominant. The comment on the first page of this paper by Steve reflects the fact that he was a boy growing up in a school in which Rugby League was king. Boys who excelled in music, or dance, or canoeing, or literature had to listen at school assemblies while boys who played Rugby League were praised. The school reinforced the dominant form of masculinity. Boys are not all the same as each other; and gender differences are compounded by differences across class, race, nationality and education.

On the other hand, boys do share some characteristics. They are perceived as 'just boys' from birth. Boys are all expected to fulfil a male script: to act as males, not to act like girls by crying or giggling or being soft, to take responsibility for a family, to go to war and go into the firing line. It is still true that the worst insult which all boys get is to be called a girl; this is the weapon which keeps boys in fear of not being masculine enough. And of course this teaches boys harmful ideas about women. In the early stages of my research on how boys grow into manhood, the boys I am interviewing appear to feel a strong sense of solidarity with other boys. They see themselves as sharply different from girls. They are, of course, acutely aware of their changing bodies and almost manically worried about being strong, muscular and tough enough in a world which prizes power and brute strength (a visit to the video store is a useful reminder of this). Perhaps their sense of difference from girls is in part due to an education system which continually highlights gender differences. I have often seen boys lined up in one line, girls in another. Boys are sometimes set against girls in class competitions. A boy who misbehaves will sometimes be punished by being sent to sit amongst the girls. Some of the boys I have spoken to resent the fact that girls are given encouragement in self-esteem classes and mentoring, while they are not. There seem to be lighter punishments for girls found fighting, as against boys found fighting. And the role of sports coaches in using 'pussies' and 'women' as terms of humiliation has yet to be documented in this country, although US research by Messner and others is compelling. Finally, the boys I speak to want to be men and they speak without prompting of the men in their lives. Masculinity is mainly a learned pattern of behaviour, learnt from fathers and other models. In sum, I see arguments for and against boys being seen as similar to each other.

Not all boys are aggressive or violent. American research cited by Kimmel and Messner (1992) suggests that some aggressive males are conforming to society's expectations. Askew and Ross (1990:11-12) - who are not oversympathetic to boys- make the same point:

Most of the male heroes in comics and on television (whether goodies or baddies) are violent....Boys may be rewarded with parental approval for being rough: "I like the way he's rough. He's a proper lad", remarked one mother about her four-year old son...when girls have been rewarded with 'prizes' for beating up a doll, they have beaten it up as aggressively as the boys!

Once again, we can see that society conditions boys to be tough, although working-class boys seem to get more of this conditioning than others. (Of course, many boys find ways of expressing themselves which are not aggressive, in music, or art, or dance.) At least some of the men and women teaching sport reward toughness. And then other people in the middle-class, feminised school attack them for being too rough. Does this help explain why many boys, especially working-class boys, find that they dislike reading and English and history but enjoy sport?

There are many university experts who have produced a body of knowledge about girls. But boys do not want to be girls: they are searching for acceptable ways of being men. Understanding boys will need a different body of knowledge than the existing literature on gender, for what makes a girl does not always apply to what makes a boy. The single mothers who talk to me would be the first to agree with this notion.

THE CHANGING GENDER DEBATE

When I began this project gender was an issue defined by feminists. So much so that some of my friends urged me to do everything I could "not to get the feminists off-side". It is still true that there are feminist voices being heard, of various kinds. And there are still the voices of those who are avowedly antifeminist. John Laws and Alan Jones are among the loudest, and, it must be remembered, the most popular, however ill-informed we may think them.

My own position is that feminism is one of the great ideas of our time. It has transformed the way we see the world, just as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels did. But just as I do not embrace Marxism in all its forms, I do not see feminism as the only way I want to see the world. It is a legitimate view of gender issues, but not the only view. As Connell says (1994) it is a woman's view of the world, which highlights women's experience and makes little of men's experience. I am not a woman, and I look for a view which is more comfortable with my life experience than feminism is. So while I respect feminism as a point of view, it is not reasonable for anyone to expect that other people support feminism automatically. If we want to understand boys, we will have to keep our minds open to many points of view.

We know that feminism is a broad movement which means many things to different people. On one hand, we have Miles Franklin, who wrote a novel about Penrith, *Some Everyday Folk and Dawn*, dedicated to the men who supported votes for women. Dawn, heroine of the novel, tips a bucket of stinking slops over Ernest, a muscular young man who wants to marry her, late one cold Penrith night. Then the middle-aged narrator rushes out and tells him that Dawn really likes him. As she seizes his hard, brawny arm she makes it quite clear that she finds him sexually exciting. So while in theory the narrator condemns men as 'the army of oppressors' she is overcome by the hard, forceful presence of one particular muscular young man. I find this kind of feminism human and compassionate. On the other hand we have the point of view illustrated by Julie Burchill, quoted in *New Woman* in May, 1993:

A good part - and definitely the most fun part - of being a feminist is about frightening men.

Of course, there's a lot more to feminism...but scaring the shit out of the scumbags is an amusing and necessary part because, sadly, a good many men still respect nothing but strength.

Naomi Wolf's recent visit to Australia caused much discussion when she announced in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that what many women wanted at the end of a hard day at work was to go home to the comfort of a man and his penis. Clearly there is more to feminists than any of these opinions. And this is well accepted. What is not accepted is that there are just as many opinions among men. Why is this not well known? What my research shows consistently is that men have been afraid to voice their opinions in mixed company because they feel they will be attacked for the inhumanity of man to woman in centuries past. The men I speak to will, however, voice their opinions to one or two trusted women in their lives, and speak very warmly about them.

What is the range of opinions among men? The troglodyte voices of the talkback commentators are still there and still popular. But there has been a slow, steady growth in a more intelligent view of what a man is and what a man should be. One of my colleagues, Jo Milne-Home, has said men are just beginning to go through the self-examination that many women have undergone, and that men have a long way to go yet. And I would agree with that. Bob Connell's writings (1989, 1990, 1994) continue to appear, continually raising difficult questions and issues - although we have not yet seen

his writings become popular among men as a whole. His is an academic voice. We held in December, 1993 the First Australian Conference on Men's Issues at which there were many opinions expressed about men and where they were going. Some of those men were pro-feminist, some not, some unsure, and so on. The same debate is going on in the International Association for the Study of Men.

In the last twelve months we have seen a number of voices raised which put a more masculine view of gender issues than we have heard before. And not all of them have been from men. Carmen Lawrence, Minister for Health, has suggested that men's health needs are not being met - in part because men are so reluctant to seek help. That's because men are expected to be self-sufficient. It's for these reasons that some writers are beginning to say masculinity - as presently constructed - is a health hazard. We have seen, too, the visit to Australia of Warren Farrell, formerly a pro-feminist man and now someone who calls himself "sometimes a feminist and sometimes a masculinist". (I don't want to endorse Farrell's views, for when he takes on what he calls "the feminists" he tends to make his male readers angry, and so in the end he polarises the sexes unhelpfully). Steve Biddulph is currently touring Australia and getting huge audiences for his talks about fathers and sons. I believe the gender debate is just beginning, and it won't be stopped by calling it a backlash or anything else. Men have the right to explore their private and public selves, just as women do. It was the women in my own life, most of whom identify as feminists, who encouraged me to start this exploration of masculinity. In sum, then, I see a shift in the gender debate in that people are beginning to articulate a response to female voices publicly in a way we have not seen before.

THE CLIMATE OF EDUCATION

If the gender debate is shifting, as I claim, what is happening in education?

The American political scientist Iannacone argued (1967) that educational institutions tend to get out of step with popular opinion. This can happen for a short time, or up to thirty years. But eventually, democratic governments will force educational institutions to conform to popular wishes. They must do so if they wish to survive. In the next paragraphs I look at the gender debate in educational circles. And I use a number of measures for this before coming to a conclusion.

First, it is difficult these days to pick up a textbook which doesn't acknowledge feminism, especially in education and the humanities. The texts I use in my courses and the texts I have written clearly bear this influence. In part, it's because a text has to be defended, and nobody wants her or his book to be attacked as antifeminist or anti anything else. Radical feminists and other feminists are vocal, and well represented in media like the ABC and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Jenna Price until recently edited the Education page, for instance, while Anne Summers edits the Good Weekend; and the education writers for both Sydney's daily papers in 1994 were radical feminists). So these views are represented in education texts. I'm not implying anything sinister in this - it's perfectly understandable in terms of pressure group theory.

Second, universities routinely reflect radical feminist concerns. There are all-female conferences - for example, there will be a series of discussions about gender which in practice often turns out to be feminism in one form or another. Or there will be a Women's Day at which men are usually not welcome. Much of the discussion on girls' education has gone on at such all-female conferences. Women say quite reasonably that women need to articulate their concerns without a whole lot of men around who don't help the process. And although I have two daughters and I am very concerned with their continuing education, and although as a senior lecturer in education I feel a right to speak on educational matters, I am shut out of most conferences on girls' education because I am a man. The existing debate on girls' education has been very hostile to male points of view. And it has been very negative about boys, who are usually seen as the problem.

There is little done as yet to encourage the study of masculinities in the universities. I co-ordinate a Men's Academic Network which aims to connect men and women writing about masculinities in academia, the media, and the community at large. But there are, it seems to me, just a few of us striving to get these studies off the ground. Michael Flood's bibliography on men's issues was a very useful start. But it remains - just a start. There is now an International Association for the Study of Men, listing just two hundred men and women worldwide. We now have an international journal called *masculinities*. But we have a long way to go before we have men in most faculties articulating men's voices in the way that women have done. All we have is a dark, inarticulate presence. Men constantly tell me they can't talk about gender issues for fear of attack. So they don't talk.

Third, there is much to be done in changing the mindset of people in the education industry away from the idea that

masculinity is not something like a block of concrete, tangible and fixed. I recall the moment when I found in the Australian National University Library catalogue the notation "For men, see sex". In four words, someone put into print a whole mindset about masculinity. The same thing happens when someone talks about 'boys' and we get a picture of grubby, untidy, furtive, sex-mad little blighters who are going to cause mischief. That whole concept needs to be explored and unpacked.

Four, John Martin of Cranebrook High School near Penrith has advanced the notion that reading literature is a female pursuit. Reading novels and poetry is something many males see as incompatible with masculinity; whereas most women see it as compatible with their femininity. He has examined reading and its doubtful connexion with manhood. He cites Kociumbas:

In older boys, tallness came to be seen as a sign of sexual purity, while short-sightedness, a hunched back and hands deep in pockets were the mark of the bookworm and masturbator.

That last phrase is worth repeating - boys who read literature are wankers, not really men at all. John examines British literature reviewing favourite stories of boys and girls and finds that boys' stories emphasised **what the male hero did** asserting himself and overcoming fire, flood or danger of some similar kind. Girls instead had stories about human relationships, which might explain (or be linked to) the common belief that relationships are women's concerns. Many boys will only read books about sport and cars and computers, or they read about 'real boys' who are action heroes. In another paper Martin detailed the action stories of boys in an earlier era who helped save the Empire - again by fighting Zulus, Red Indians and spies. No young hero in a book ever reads a book. And a headmaster pointed out the consequences of our construction of masculinity-as-action, telling John "it's about time we had a token girl in that remedial reading class of yours". Among twenty five reluctant readers in a middle-class school in 1994, twenty three were boys. Further research is needed to see whether boys having problems are mainly middle-class or working-class boys; or whether this is essentially a boys' problem

Fifth, there is a very strong feminist presence in the media, as noted several times in this paper. It is a constant effort to get an intelligent view of masculinity issues in the media, although there are plenty of men who provide empty-headed ones, or who see masculinity as not an issue. One small fact is worth noting: the Sydney Morning Herald refused to allow me to review Steve Biddulph's book *Manhood* ; yet this is proving to be a very popular book among men and women, selling 21,000 at last count. I sympathise with those feminist writers who also have difficulty getting intelligent views conveyed in the media. The education specialists at Sydney's two daily papers refused to run stories sympathetic to boys' education in 1994, and chose to run stories against.

I believe this evidence suggests that ideas about bringing up boys and girls have become strongly feminised. Perhaps, as Martin suggests, education always was an industry heavily influenced by female concerns.

What about schools ? My evidence suggests that schools often don't help boys grow into mature, reflective, happy human beings. Schools seem to give boys the message that they are safe as long as they are embracing tough, aggressive masculinity. And the main way this seems to occur is through certain kinds of sport, played in aggressive ways. It's much more important to be seen as a tough man than to be good at school. And so schools on the whole seem to be following the rest of Australian society in enforcing acceptance of men as long as they are seen as tough.

Support for the idea that education has become feminised comes from one well-respected feminist, my colleague Dr Josephine Milne-Home:

Unfortunately education has a feminised profession. We need more compassionate and caring men in teaching; the research says that men tolerate more noise and activity from children. There's too much emphasis on sitting still and making pretty pictures.

Why should school endorse one style of learning - as Jo suggests here, instead of any other? Why teach in ways that we know don't suit many boys, and then complain that boys aren't learning, and are too loud and physical? (There will be of course some exceptions among boys and girls to common patterns). Why can't we encourage all our children to be assertive, active and physical, as the teacher profiled on the 7.30 REPORT did, basing her teaching on de Bono's principles? Her classroom hummed with activity and the kids felt empowered. Why complain, as Askew and Ross do (1988:31) that boys tell jokes in class? A classic case was Andrew, a boy I taught in a Year 11 class. "Do you play Rugby League, Andrew?" I asked once.

"No, sir", he replied with a look of horror. "I'm straight". Most teachers are glad to have a bit of a laugh in what can be a tedious day. We do better to work with boys and with girls, rather than expect them to be something they're not.

It is worth noting that while the education system itself seems very feminised, moves to bring a more traditionally masculine emphasis to education are coming from outside the education system. Bettina Arndt reported in the *Australian* on 26 July that Steve Biddulph had recently spoken to 800 people in a meeting in Willoughby Town Hall. And Biddulph (1994) is calling for policies to bring a masculine presence back to teaching, including more men teachers and a more active approach to learning. Likewise, calls to the government to introduce programs targeted to boys come from the NSW Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations. I discuss two aspects of this movement in Appendices to this paper. But recall Iannacone's idea- discussed above - that if schools and universities get out of line with community attitudes, governments must step in or face electoral defeat. There is a community perception in Australia- as there is Britain and Scandinavia- that schools are failing to bring out the best in boys.

THE MALE EMPIRE: SPORT

Now there is one exception to what I said about the feminisation of education. That part of education that we call physical education has not been feminised. It is still heavily influenced by what Patrick White called the great god SPORT. I will have to demonstrate this with some short snippets of evidence as I am only getting preliminary results from some research into the effects sport has on boys.

First, the younger males I interview emphasise that sport forces them into a black-and white choice. They have to prove themselves on the football field, or they are mocked as not-male. Steve's evidence on the first page of this paper is only one of many voices attesting to this fact.

Second, "sport" has too often meant "team-played, aggressive sport". Tony, a primary school teacher, said "I was a nobody in a great big pile of people at school", but he later excelled in canoeing, mountain-bike riding and other outdoor adventures. One man who identified as gay said "if you didn't excel at football or bowl a ball with masculine grace you weren't seen as the full quid as a man". But this opinion was voiced by other men too who did not identify as gay.

Third, Virginia Chadwick, NSW Minister for Education, said to a group of teacher educators in mid-1994 that sport was dominating a curriculum which is supposed to embrace also health and personal development. Her words are worth quoting in full. She reports on the Ministerial Advisory Council on Teacher Education and the Quality of Teaching or MACTEQT, and its recent advice to her:

This Key Learning Area [Personal Development, Health and Physical Education], while on paper encouraging a cross-curricular, integrated approach, tended in practice to concentrate on the physical education component. In particular, it was considered that the personal development component was being overlooked.

We are now working with the TEC to see how we can turn this around.

I'm not sure what is going on here, but it appears that Phys Ed teachers have taken over the ramshackle empire of what is called for short PDHPE and colonised it. A systematic study would be worth doing to see if this is the case.

One PDHPE master summed up his general approach by saying

Son, if you can't kick that ball properly, you'd better go home and put on your mother's dress.

And a champion footballer, brought into the school at great trouble and expense, took a group of boys out onto the field, but when a boy kicked the ball rather tentatively, yelled

What a horrible kick! Pull your pants down, son, and let's see your fanny.

Fortunately, there are many compassionate people in schools who do not conform to these unhelpful and damaging views. There is a world here which cries out for exploration. But in a sentence, sport is seen as masculine, women and non-sport as feminine, and the two are seen as mutually exclusive. At present we simply don't know if these are widespread opinions. On the other hand, I have observed Cheryl Best, who was formerly a PDHPE teacher, talking to adolescents in a school. It was very clear that she gave all those kids great respect and encouragement.

So once again we have some puzzles rather than firm conclusions. I argued earlier that education as an industry has had a feminist influence - but we don't know whether this has extended to sport in schools. Perhaps sport has not had the rethinking which other subjects have had as a result of feminism. American research raises many questions about contact and sport and aggressive masculinity. At 20 institutions with highly-rated football and basketball teams, it seems that "athletes appear to be disproportionately involved in incidents of sexual assault on college campuses". One of the authors concluded (cited in Lipsyte, 1994):

Whenever women can be looked upon as objects and treated as fun, there's trouble...some of our best athletes are trained in violence and deception, and they can't just turn it on and off when we want them to.

There are, indeed, many questions to be asked about the effects sport has on adolescents. And this includes school sport. The boys I am interviewing are very aware of the behaviour on and of the field of star footballers and basketball players, and this influence on them needs to be remembered.

APPROACHES TO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

The idea is still current that boys get too much attention and that there is the constant need to redirect attention to girls. It is found in the comment by a senior education bureaucrat in NSW about what to do about the difficulties boys are having in schools:

We wait 2,000 years and continue to analyse the results very, very carefully.

It is found in Askew and Ross (1988: 29) who complain that boys prefer to manipulate materials than to read. Redirecting attention to girls was given official approval in the NSW Department of Education's *Desirable Attributes of Beginning Teachers*, printed in *School Education News* on 23 March 1994;

*All beginning teachers should be able to demonstrate that they...show developing skills in adapting their teaching to suit the individual learning needs of all their students in the context in which they are teaching, **noting the special needs of***

- *girls.....*

Now I don't think you have to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce that if teachers are told to "note the special needs of girls", teachers are encouraged to give less attention to boys. It would take another paper to document the tendency of educators to pass off the special needs of boys as gaining attention, being violent and disruptive and generally a nuisance in schools (see for instance *Education* on 6 June of this year). **Over the past fifteen years, the educational climate has definitely not been sympathetic to boys. And this is something that the mothers of boys are saying to me repeatedly (see Appendix). Once again, this idea needs careful research and exploration. And the Gender Equity Taskforce needs to demonstrate that it is not always giving priority to girls over boys. Boys have their own needs, just as girls do. We have to find ways of encouraging and developing all the kids in school.**

There are a number of ways of thinking about boys in schools. The first is that we have to confront boys about the needs of girls. This is found for example in Marsh (1994) a widely-used social studies text for trainee teachers. Its chapter, "Gender Studies", is seen as anti-male by most of my male teacher education students, and many of the female students too. The book by Askew and Ross takes the same line. One major problem with this approach is that most males will dismiss it as an attack-perhaps an attack on their masculinity. That is certainly the way many male student teachers react. It will antagonise males in the teaching service, particularly those in the important area of sport and personal development. And these males seem to have a large influence on boys. You don't change males by attacking their masculinity, because they have been taught that masculinity of a hard, aggressive kind is the only thing worth having.

The second approach is to reinforce the role of fathers and the traditional family. This seems to be Steve Biddulph's approach. This may be an appealing line to take, but in an age in which one in three families is a single-parent family (and there are no fathers in 82% of these) it has its limitations. There would be big advantages in reconciling parental concerns for boys with schools' concerns with boys; and some schools seem to be having success with boys by doing so. The contradiction between the two is often complained about by teachers, who say that they often seem to be fighting fathers' ideas of what boys should do; and this often means that aggressive sport takes priority over other activities.

The third approach is to stress that the most important thing is to allow boys to be gay. Politically, this is an impossible line to take. However, my research does indicate a close connexion between hard, aggressive masculinity and fear of not being masculine enough.

Lastly, we could try to take an all-inclusive approach which allows boys and girls to understand each other's needs and tries to get all of them to co-operate. This is my own position. A start has been made, for example by Peter Ireland at McKillop Senior College at Port Macquarie, New South Wales. His results are encouraging to teachers and have enthusiastic support from boys and their parents. But it will be difficult to maintain an inclusive approach because human beings tend to see their needs as contradictory. People assume that if we want to make life better for boys then we must be somehow against girls. I don't believe it has to be this way. Parents and teachers try to care for all the children under their care.

WHAT SCHOOLS REPORT ABOUT BOYS AND GIRLS

I have done a small survey on what schools experience as problems among boys. I surveyed a group of elite school principals, and added to this a group of high school principals scattered over Sydney. I set out to find why boys were being a problem.

Instead, I was confronted with a more complex answer. I grouped them under Behaviour and Learning Difficulties. Under Behaviour, I got the following comments for boys:

kamikaze attitude to life

can't control their anger

loud, noisy, rude

bully others physically

get expelled far more often than girls

deputy's discipline list is mainly boys (99.9% in one case)

90% of troublemakers

disrupt classes

peer pressure to be tough

won't open up

boys are labelled quickly

respect oldfashioned authoritarianism

industrial arts experience hardly any behaviour problems

But a list appeared for girls, too. It reads-

bully others but don't get caught very often

more able to lead

can use support structures

can adapt more easily to teachers

girls hit boys and nobody stops them

I have avoided analysing these comments, but instead present them as they are because I am still untangling a mess of different problems in the school related to boys and girls. But what stares me in the face is the possible conclusion that some schools might be serving girls better than they serve boys. Alternatively, girls -perhaps the majority of girls? -are better able to adapt to some schools' structures and systems, and to get help more effectively than boys. The script of being a tough male puts many boys in conflict with the school's power structure.

The list for learning problems reads, for boys:

more specific learning difficulties

less mature, in perception and judgment

don't see study as important

no self-discipline or commitment

see academic work as irrelevant

make up 90% of special education classes (all in some cases)

lack strategies to learn from errors

don't see neatness as important

vastly prefer sport to art, music and dance

unconventional approaches to learning

non-conforming, not neat, not conscientious

For girls, the learning list reads:

better independent learners

more conventional, neater, organised

more biddable than boys

dominate extra-curricular activities, even sport at times.

Both boys and girls, schools report, often have parents who work long hours and fail to spend very much time with them. And parents often see school as an exercise to be struggled through rather than something really worthwhile.

The comment was made by one school that both boys and girls had needs, but girls were better able to get help. The same issue is important in research by Walker (1988). Another headmaster of a private school said that boys' unconventionality was seen as a poor attitude to school by many teachers. He said that as a consequence, they lost interest in school in Years 8 and 9. Some were able to reapply themselves and succeed by Year 11 or 12, but by then many boys had been lost to the education system. Or, to put it as another school did, nobody seems to care about boys.

This list tallies with what I found in interviews. First, recall that the males I interviewed seemed to have four strands to their masculinity: fathers (and the relationship to them) sport, their bodies, and school. But 'school' did not mean academic pursuits - it meant the peer group they hung around with. None of the men I interviewed - even those who had gone to university - talked enthusiastically about education as a serious, important undertaking.

Second, sport seemed to be a way of getting close to a father. This can be seen in a number of men - and not only in the way that a professional footballer stayed close to his football-coach father. Another man took up flying and in the same breath spoke of his father's life in the air force. The exceptions seem to be the men who were bisexual or who identified as gay, though my research is not conclusive on this point. All but one of the others, in the words of Sabo and Messner, were introduced to the world of sport by men, and introduced to the world of men by sport. Perhaps some forms of sport are the initiation into manhood that many current writers on masculinity have discussed (and I am thinking above all of Tim Johnson-Newell). There is no link between fathers and education in the broad sense, although one or two men followed their father's advice to 'get a decent job' which seems to have taken them into a teaching career. There is a lot more to sport than this, though I can't explore that here.

The comments about boys being unconventional raise many questions. Unconventional for whom? Can we talk about a male style of nurturing? If so, what would it be? Are there male and female ways of learning? And of teaching?

Once again, it would seem to me that to simplify all this, tough masculinity and sport are in one sphere. Other masculinities, education and women are in another. Education is not commonly seen as a pursuit which will enhance a man's masculinity, unless it is physical education. And all the men I spoke to in the younger generation displayed uncertainties about their masculinity, however hard they tried to hide them. The need for proving masculinity was freely admitted by many of them in an era in which gender has become uncertain and contested, in which past certainties are long gone.

Boys reflect some of the uncertainty that many men report to me. Men are widely condemned in the media as powerful and threatening. Yet it's always been true that women can get men to do some of the things they want. As Miles Franklin writes:

His muscle is an engine a woman can unfailingly command for her own purposes...the athlete may have the muscles of a Samson, and yet, being slow of thought and speech, be utterly defenceless in a woman's hands (1986: 94)

There is some truth in this, in the power women have in speech; something men often mention. Men in all-male gatherings almost invariably talk about how hard it is to speak about gender in mixed company without being contradicted and condemned. And the boys I am interviewing do feel that the girls and women in their lives have a great deal of influence over them.

Second, men have to work hard to maintain a masculine image. This is especially true in an age which derides and ridicules men, so that men become defensive, wary of feminism, and angry at people who tell them to change. As soon as men start talking about their feelings or hopes, some angry feminist will appear and attack them. So men don't talk about their feelings unless it's safe to do so; many of us were brought up never to speak harshly to a woman. Boys follow men - they won't often ask for help. They keep their griefs to themselves.

Robert Lipsyte (1992) reminds how fragile boys' masculinity is for them:

Boys are afraid. They are afraid of being humiliated, of being hurt, both emotionally and physically. You can translate that into being hit by the ball and then laughed at. Boys are afraid of being made to look dumb or inadequate in front of girls, on the field or in the classroom. Boys are afraid of each other, and they are afraid of girls.

To be a man is not to live in a fortress. In many ways, it is to live in a prison. You have to do this and that, or you're no longer a man, but the worst in the world. Masculinity is treacherous ground; as Steve, quoted earlier in this paper, said, you're always on your guard when you're a man. How do we expect such people to show compassion, kindness, or Christianity, or any other ideals for that matter? Does it begin to explain why so many of our boys suffer signs of distress from poor learning to behaviour disorders to suicide? And if we can understand all this, we might make life easier for boys as well as for girls. Many schools and parents want to create a more compassionate masculinity, rather than to stay stuck in present difficulties, and many are working hard at it (for instance McLoughlin and Honeyman, undated). Full credit goes to the compassionate teachers, men and women, who are trying to help boys live decent lives.

CONCLUSIONS: OFFERING A RAY OF HOPE

This paper has had to be long, because the literature on masculinity is not well known in educational circles. What does it all add up to?

First, much of the feminist literature - the predominant literature on gender and schooling - has a current concern with school violence, bullying and so on which clearly suggests that boys are to blame for all of it (as we can see, for instance in two articles in the Teachers Federation magazine *Education* on 6 June). The same articles suggest that "schools give priority to boys" and the implication is that teachers should give less attention to boys. What my studies of schools suggest is that boys do get a lot of attention - but most of it is negative attention. It's a strange kind of school that "gives priority to the interests of boys" by caning them, expelling them and putting them on detention. Once again, recall that my study of men found that with the significant exception of sport, males felt school was something irrelevant which had to be endured. We won't get anywhere by blaming and labelling anyone in schools.

Second, I have raised a number of issues concerning what I call the feminisation of education. I know that there are overwhelming numbers of men who are vice-chancellors and headmasters. But the people at the cutting edge are women. It was for this reason that Cheryl Vardon of the national Gender Equity Taskforce asked in June, 1994 whether we need more men in schools, especially at the kindergarten level. This call has since been endorsed by the O'Doherty Report. Department of Employment, Education and Training figures say that the number of males in teacher education across Australia has fallen from 34% to 27% in ten years. But bringing more men into teaching would be a very difficult undertaking; keeping them there would be more difficult still. And I don't know how many parents would prefer a semi-literate man to a literate woman to teach their children. This is a complex matter indeed. But until we change the situation we will reinforce the message that reading and writing is women's work; real men play sport.

Third, I have suggested that sport remains largely the empire of men. More precisely, Australian sport (including school sport) still contains an old-fashioned kind of unreconstructed masculinity which is alive and well. It was the kind of male atmosphere that in mid-1994 allowed Alan Jones to call a tall Chinese sportswoman a heifer. There are of course good, caring women and men teaching sport. My concern is that if the only man available to boys in schools is a sportsmaster or a sports-enthused teacher, boys will gravitate to that kind of masculinity. Boys do not want to be women and they don't want to be **like** women. Masculinity is defined by the majority of boys as everything that women and gays are not. The point was made eloquently by one of my interviewees in Penrith:

Do you enjoy being a man?

it must be wonderful to be a man, because they're always telling us that the worst thing you can be is a woman or a poofster.

This man is one of many today who are questioning the messages society gives him. It's for this reason that Virginia

Chadwick's comment is interesting - because she suggests that the PE teachers have taken over the new empire of Physical Education, Health and Personal Development and are drumming sport into young people. It seems some of them could be giving only token attention to the other two-thirds of the curriculum which raises questions about masculinities and seeks to raise self-esteem and assist young people in their personal development. And sport is already attractive to young men because sportsmen seem to have a mortgage on acceptable masculinity (see for dramatic illustration Drummond, 1994). Sport is a place where we need to concentrate a lot of attention because it's where many boys learn how to become a man. What **type** of man they become is something that concerns us all.

Fourth, I feel it is time to rethink a lot of our assumptions about boys and education. I think the matter of whether the school gives priority to boys is very much up for question. The school is a place with layered levels of gender, as Connell (1994) says, with ethnicity, class and gender intersecting; boys and girls can each be disadvantaged in different ways. There is no sense in thinking in terms of boys versus girls; teachers and parents have a duty to care for all the children under their care. My research suggests that in many schools boys will be made much of **provided that** they excel in tough, aggressive team sport. I don't see that this allows boys much room to move. And I would expect that the well-known comment that "boys are impossible in Year 8 and Year 9" might reflect the fact that boys are struggling with the demands of tough masculinity at a time when supports are being taken away.

By this I mean : the affection of a father, who has become someone the boy has to define himself against; the conditional support of peers, who cannot be taken for granted; the loss of a single teacher in primary school and the first year of high school in exchange for 12 to 15 teachers; and so on. This is where I have begun my latest project. We simply don't have answers to these questions.

Fifth, there has been a lot of debate in the media about boys being outperformed by girls. There might be some truth in this, if we could look at the significant patterns - for instance of boys underperforming in English and succeeding in many of the sciences. But it is much more important to know who is being bullied in school, who is being hit and harassed, and to do something to stop it. More important still, we have to find out why so many of Australia's boys and girls feel so hopeless about their lives - and why Australia leads the world in male teenage suicide. Again, this is not an exercise in raising one group over another in schools, but in creating a place where all can coexist as happily and usefully as possible.

Lastly, as Connell argues, we have to be aware that learning is seen as feminine unless it is a pathway to action. Many males aren't reading books unless the books teach them how to play games, fix cars, or get bigger muscles. Sport has to be examined and reformulated because it is the crucible of masculinity for so many of the men I have interviewed. (Anyone doubting the need to prioritise sport in the education of males should look at the list of most popular TV programs). Sport, art, music and 'feminised' learning should be where our recasting of education begins. The most difficult part will be to teach boys about sex, which worries people in authority in Australia more than youth suicide and violence.

Author Robert Lipsyte writes (1992)

Boys have to learn what girls already know: that a book is something you can make into a cave and that you can crawl into the cave, roll around in it, explore it, find out what's in it, and what's in you. Someday, there will be books that boys really need - about how they can be friends with other boys by sharing emotions rather than scuffling, about how they can be friends with girls. That might even mean books on an issue rarely discussed that tortures thousands of boys, many of them macho athletes: dealing with sexual feelings towards other boys.

I recently did a story on a young football player who had sexual longings for other men, tried to hide them in brawling and drinking, eventually tried to kill himself. He is a quadriplegic now, from that suicide attempt, and after my story came out, he and I were beseiged with letters and phone calls from young men who wanted to talk. A book might have helped them, a book that told them they were not alone.

We teach boys some terrible lies: that they have to be alone and they have to hide their feelings. But as many teachers will admit freely, underneath their swagger and bravado many boys have great anxiety about sexuality and a fear of homosexuality amounting almost to a mania. They pretend they know it all; but the little evidence we have suggests a huge ignorance about safe sex practices. Surely that's somewhere we could begin - to protect boys and their partners and all their families from the impact of AIDS. Somehow we have to deal with this problem up front instead of pretending it doesn't exist.

In *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*, Buzz challenges Jim to race a stolen car towards a cliff to see who is 'chicken'. Jim asks "Why do we have to do this?" All Buzz can say is "We have to do something". Two adolescent males can't find ways of being around each other except in the safe (?) male context of violence and risk. So they race towards the cliff; Buzz gets his hand caught in the door handle and careers over to the cliff to his death.

There are established spokespeople in the field of what has been called "gender issues". However, the established experts have given almost no positive attention to boys. And governments will have to listen to all the voices in the community, not just the established ones and the noisy ones, if they want to survive in the changing gender debate of the 1990s. It's encouraging that Ministers of Education are beginning to notice these issues, with Virginia Chadwick's enquiry into boys and education in NSW and the establishment of the Gender Equity Taskforce. I have been contacted by numerous schools which are setting up structures to address boys' and girls' needs. I am continually asked by mothers and fathers about why their boys become impossible in Year 8; the parental concern is there. (see Appendix for an example). Research is being done by Nichols (1994) and others on fathers and literacy; and by Drummond (1994) on muscularity and self-image. Feminists like Ramazanoglu (1992) have long been calling for a more thoughtful approach to masculinity. There are materials being produced for boys from feminist and non-feminist perspectives (Healey, 1995 is a survey of many approaches suitable for school use). **We are finally waking up to the idea that half the school population is male, and too many educational writers have dismissed it as uncooperative and violent .** The reality is far more complex. Working successfully on the problem will need concerted effort from teacher unions, from universities, and all of those involved in schools, particularly teachers, who have suffered a great deal from declining status and increasing pressure of work in the last twenty years.

The Gender Equity Taskforce needs to keep its mind and heart open to all points of view. Nobody has all the answers. No ideological group should be heard to the exclusion of others. Mothers and fathers want their voices to be heard, too.

I believe that there needs to be much more research on boys before we can begin to speak confidently about these matters. Just as we have been persuaded that one of the tasks of educators is *Listening to Girls*, it might make sense if we also **listen to boys**. We don't have to listen to one to the exclusion of the other. My own project on boys, sport and schooling has barely begun. Why isn't there funding set aside for action research in schools we know are successful in harnessing boys' enthusiasm and energy? Ireland (1994) found that every measure of participation in his school found the boys trailing behind girls, with the possible exception of sport. How many of these boys are working-class and Aboriginal boys? Isn't it time we had a hard look at the polar opposites of masculinity and education? **And we know how difficult it is to change schools. Is that any more difficult than changing the construction of masculinity? Until we get them closer together, many Australian parents can expect their boys to keep having trouble in schools.**

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This paper was given in an earlier form to a group of teachers and academics at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The need for a father, or consistently-loving male in a person's life, in order for him or her to progress confidently in the world is emphasised by Stephanie Dowrick (pp.90-91). Father-hunger is described by Messner (pp.26-9) who says many men become athletes in a search for their father's affection, leaning on work by Rubin, Gilligan and Piaget. There is a sound exploration of the changing roles of fathers, including gay fathers, in *Men's Lives* from p.499. The NSW Report on Families is useful on changing perceptions of men's roles in society. Challenging data on boys and girls in schools is found in the Cuttance Quality Assurance Report, released in December, 1994.

I have deliberately used videos, anecdotal evidence and reports from teachers in this paper to supplement formal reading and research, and to emphasise the fact that book-learning is a world which is often hostile to boys.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by Stuart, Kirsten, and Joanna; Jim and Betty Power, Jo Milne-Home, John Martin, Rollo Browne and Paul Whyte. Mike Titano, Murray Drummond and Geoff Edwards were helpful

on sport. Jim Power and Professor Jim Walker offered helpful comments on an earlier draft. There were contributions from other men and women who for various reasons cannot be named. All responsibility for the above remains mine.

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APPENDIX ONE

WHERE DID THE IDEA OF BOYS' STRATEGIES COME FROM?

The idea has been bruited around that boys' education strategies are being driven by some kind of media campaign. This complaint was raised at the panel on boys' education at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference at the University of Newcastle in November, 1994. But Julie Lewis, education writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, said at the same panel that any media conspiracy theory was nonsense. She said that journalists are simply too busy and too driven by deadlines to take part in a conspiracy.

As someone who has taken part in the call to introduce such strategies, it might be useful for me to document some of the activities I observed and took part in. My account reflects my Sydney base, and it makes no claim to objectivity. Readers may then judge for themselves.

The world is becoming a smaller place; movements like Marxism, feminism and economic rationalism take place in many countries. Political correctness and the reaction to it are being discussed in the mid-1990s in many countries. In visits to Germany, Scandinavia and the USA in 1993 and 1994 I heard debate on many issues which were very familiar to me. At the time of writing, all these countries are having debates about feminism, men's various reactions to it, and where men fit into families. What to do about boys appears as part of this wider debate. For example, the BBC current affairs program *Panorama* had a documentary screening in October, 1994 a few months after *Four Corners* examined the same topic in Australia. In October there was a conference on boys, adolescence and sexuality in Denmark.

Thus there was a debate about gender going on in Australia in the early 1990s. It had been going on since the 1960s, or earlier. I became acutely aware of it when the media contacted me after the Australian National University publicised my study of boys becoming men, which was begun during a short stay at that institution in early 1992. When I was asked about men's issues, an interview frequently ended with a question- "How can we improve things?". A common response I made was "We have to change the way we bring up boys". Others in the men's movement -notably Richard Fletcher of the University of Newcastle - were also talking about raising boys to be more compassionate.

Nobody took any action, but the issue persisted. It paralleled wide media discussion about men. For instance, there was a *Good Weekend* devoted largely to issues of men's bodies and advertising in April, 1993, and there were frequent attempts by radio and TV to tackle perceived issues between men and women. In October, 1993 the *Herald* announced that Warren Johnson, executive officer of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations, had written to the Director-General of Education asking that boys' programs be introduced. This call was repeated by Johnson at a panel on boys' education at the First Australian Conference on Men's Issues in Sydney in December. The conference was small, but media coverage included every daily newspaper, at least in the eastern States, and went to New Zealand as well; boys and their difficulties was the topic highlighted at the conference. In a follow-up article, Bernard Zuel (1994) of the *Sydney Morning Herald* focused on boys' issues, dramatising problems boys were having in school and finishing with a call to moderate feminists to support boys' strategies. An accompanying article featured a mother worried about her son, who was described as having difficulty at school and underperforming. Sally Heath wrote in the same paper on 6 December 1993 that if parents wanted their son to be more competent, they should treat him like a girl. In other words, they had to ask him to be more responsible and caring. The article quoted Professor Margaret Prior as saying "we think boys are disadvantaged right through their life span because those expectations are not placed upon them".

As education writers for the papers chose not to carry arguments for boys' education, some of us wrote them ourselves. I wrote on boys' education in the *Herald* on 13 March, 1994. I cited several indications that boys were in trouble, and called on schools and governments to do something positive for boys. This article was reproduced a week or so later in the *Melbourne Age*. It was becoming clear that the NSW government would act. In mid-March, the NSW Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Virginia Chadwick, announced an enquiry into boys' education, chaired by Steven O'Doherty. This is the normal procedure for a NSW government faced with a controversial issue (Hogan and West 1980). Bernard Zuel followed this up on 29 April, again in the *Herald*, with coverage of Richard Fletcher's ideas on a boys' strategy and dramatic illustrations of boys' rates of violent death and suicide, compared to those for girls. Meanwhile Bettina Arndt was writing ably on the issue in *The Australian*. I was being contacted by many teachers and parents with requests for information on boys, but the issue was still just bubbling along.

It came to a head in July, 1994, when the O'Doherty Inquiry was receiving submissions. The *Herald* concentrated attention on objections to boys' programs by one academic, who was featured in two articles on the issue within ten days. At almost the same time, *Four Corners* featured a program called "What About the Boys?" The program dramatised the debate on boys' education very powerfully. Richard Fletcher and Lesley Stolar (the latter of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations) spoke for boys' strategies; one academic spoke against. There were other radio programs which discussed the issue that week. Those of us who monitored radio programs in that week heard many people speak who had clearly changed their mind in favour of boys' programs. The *Four Corners* program was in large part responsible. But it seems that people were looking for a wider view of education than had been provided to date, and were prepared to listen to new ideas. This was especially true of the parents of boys. As recently as 19 November, 1994, Adele Horin wrote in the *Herald* that she had changed her mind. As a feminist, she wanted to encourage girls; but as the mother of a boy, she wanted her son to learn compassion and a thoughtful masculinity, and to have a long, healthy life. I believe there are millions of mothers like Adele all over the world who want their sons to have richer, more satisfying lives and who listen to analyses of gender differences carefully.

At the time of writing the O'Doherty Report has been issued, and lies on the table of the NSW Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Its fate is not yet decided. It has been the product, not of any media conspiracy, but of a changing consciousness in the community. For example, when the NSW Committee on the Year of the Family reported its findings, it reported one of the surprises as the extent to which men's issues were gathering wide support in the community, both among women and among men (1994:47-8). One of its recommendations was the adoption of boys' strategies in schools to give boys positive, non-stereotypical role models.

It might be that further research would cast more light on calls for action on boys. The evidence I have presented suggests that the issue developed in NSW because it was taken up by a body accepted as a legitimate voice of parents, as well as by academics and journalists, many of whom are mothers and fathers themselves. This is in accord with the normal progress of educational issues in NSW, as described by Hogan and West (1980). I am not in a position to comment on what has happened in other States.

APPENDIX TWO

PARENTAL CONCERN ABOUT BOYS

I have spoken to many parents who are concerned about their sons' education and are hoping to see some strategies to improve boys' participation in school. In most cases these conversations take place on the telephone, or in my office or some other place. One can be reprinted here, by permission of its author, because it was faxed to me. All particular evidence has been removed, to protect people involved; there are no other changes. The concerns are fairly typical of the mothers, and to a lesser extent fathers, who talk to me about their sons. The views expressed are not necessarily entirely my own.

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