

Implementing Boys' Programs in Schools: debates and dilemmas

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Introduction

This paper considers some of the issues involved in the implementation of (pro)feminist programs designed for boys in schools on the topic of "gender and violence". Such programs, often referred to by the neologism "boyswork", are becoming increasingly popular in schools as feminist, and feminist inspired, discourses which make links between dominant representations of masculinity and violence acquire increasing degrees of legitimacy in the education arena (for example, through policy documents such as the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* and *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*). The existence of (pro)feminist programs for boys in schools is testament to the extent to which feminist movements over the last thirty years have been successful in making gender equity issues a concern in schools (for examples of work in this area see Curriculum & Gender Equity Policy Unit, 1995; Reay, 1990; Denborough, 1995; Denborough, 1996; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Friedman, 1995). However, the introduction of gender and violence programs for boys into schools does not occur unproblematically. Discourses which

represent a male backlash against many of the gains of feminism (for example, Farrell, 1993; Biddulph, 1995; Biddulph, 1997; Bly, 1991; see Mills, 1997a, for a discussion of these texts) work to constrain the impact of (pro)feminist programs (Kenway, 1995; Kenway, 1996). These backlash politics, represented by both men's right and men's mythopoetic politics (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1995), have also been instrumental in creating "boyswork" programs. Thus, these programs are often in competition with (pro)feminist programs for space within the school curriculum. Unfortunately many of the programs rooted in these backlash politics have struck a chord with those seeking to deal with the issue of "boys in schools". (Pro)feminist programs for boys need to address some of the concerns raised through these backlash politics and programs in order to counter their claims that boys as boys are an oppressed group and to disrupt the appeal which these backlash programs have for educators.

In this paper I want to focus on two of the issues raised through a backlash politics (Faludi, 1992), that boys need male teachers (mentors) and that boys in schools need to be empowered, and _to discuss the relevance of these issues to the implementation of programs dealing with gender and violence in schools. It is my contention here that men do need to be involved in working with boys on gender and violence issues. However, this is not because boys require male figures in their lives in order to develop into balanced men, as suggested by Bly and Biddulph and Queensland's Education Minister, but because it is men's responsibility to address the privileged position in which they are situated in gendered relations of power. One area in which men can fulfil this responsibility is by working with boys on issues such as gender and violence. Thus, unlike those who advocate for boys from the standpoint that males are an oppressed group, this work needs to begin from the premise that men as men are privileged within the current "gender order" (Connell, 1987).

Adopting this premise makes the issue of empowerment problematic. Backlash politics in schools have constructed boys and men as disempowered groups within society, using statistics which relate to things such as rates of suicide, mortality and imprisonment, and suggest that the answer to this lack of power is to improve boys' self esteem through a therapeutic approach to boys' education. However, a similar notion of empowerment is also found in some forms of liberatory or critical pedagogical practice which seek to address issues of power and domination (see for example, Giroux, 1992; Giroux, 1994; Giroux and McLaren, 1989; Giroux and Simon, 1989; McLaren, 1994; and Kanpol, 1994). A consideration of the role which empowerment should play in the education of boys raises important pedagogical issues for teachers who want to avoid authoritarian teaching methods, but who do not have as their primary intent the empowerment of boys. For it needs to be acknowledged that the empowerment of boys as *boys* does not confront the issue of boys' privileged positioning in schools, and society in general, but instead works to ensure that this privileged position is protected. Thus, I argue here that whilst a consideration of power dynamics is important in the delivery of gender and violence programs for boys the answer is not the empowerment of boys. Rather, as suggested by Denborough (1995; Denborough, 1996), respect should form the basis of this type of work being done with boys.

In order to explore the roles of men in boys' education and the notion of empowerment in such programs, I draw on work I have done with boys in schools on gender and violence issues. In 1996 I was involved in constructing and delivering gender and violence programs for boys in two Queensland State High Schools: Mountainview and Tamville. Programs

examining the relationship between gender and violence were conducted with girls in these schools during this same period. Mountainview State High is situated in Queensland's Sunshine Coast hinterland and Tamville State High is located in a reasonably affluent suburb of Brisbane. The program at Mountainview was conducted with a grade twelve class of boys; and at Tamville with boys in a grade nine class and a grade 11 class. The material for this paper draws on interview data collected from boys in those classes; teachers who had assisted in the delivery of the programs, who had been instrumental in introducing the programs into the school or who had participated in the classes; and an Education Queensland gender equity policy officer who had played a significant role in the development of the program at Mountainview High.

It is perhaps important to note at the outset that I do not regard tackling the issue of masculinity and violence through one-off gender and violence programs, as occurred in the research schools, as the most complete way of confronting these issues. In each of the schools the programs were conducted on a limited basis, one lesson per week over the length of one school term, and were initiated through the school subject Human Relationships Education (HRE). This is not an ideal situation. For as a number of teachers commented there is little which can be achieved within the short periods of time over which these programs are normally run. For example, Simon states:

Simon: Well, you're not... going to create miracles in an eight week program.

and Victoria remarks:

Victoria: ... If you're going to modify anything that's happening, it's a slow process and that's the sad thing actually, that you are not going to see a lot of changes just, just in a few weeks or even in a year.

The ineffectiveness of such program is further compounded when they are introduced through personal development type subjects such as HRE. For as a senior policy officer with Education Queensland's Gender Equity Unit stated in relation to this:

Julie: ... and I suppose in some ways HRE is the thing we have always had a problem with in terms of looking at these issues as part of the curriculum. HRE is so marginal and our preferred method of working has been for some time to work through the core curriculum and not through the marginal curriculum.

The marginality of HRE is evidenced in some of the comments made by boys in both of the schools. For instance, a boy from Mountainview made the following comment in relation to how serious HRE was taken at his school:

Will: Not at all (laughter). Not at all it's um I don't know throughout the years we haven't really got in many discussions so maybe it's too difficult for the teachers. They're probably not qualified to do all the stuff but we just watch these out of date movies and instead of looking at the issues we just look at the characters in it: "Ah he's from Home and Away," or "Gee this is _corny," and so I don't think it works at all. Not at this school anyway.... I mean when I look to HRE every week I just think a blank lesson. I've studied in a lot of them and um when we're in holiday mode for a period I'd say you wouldn't get the best attention out of us.

And Sean from Tamville remarked

Sean: Some people think HRE .. as soon as it comes up.. they think oh it's a bit of a joke, all you talk about is sex... and stuff like that ...

As suggested by a number of the teachers in the schools and by Julie above, to deal with these issues most effectively these concerns need to be integrated into school structures and processes (see also Equity Unit, 1997). Whole school approaches have been successful in a number of instances (Ord & Quigley, 1985; Patrick & Sanders, 1994). However, it is subjects such as HRE which tend to be the most popular point of entry into schools for these issues, and at times have met with some success (Mills, 1997b). Thus, whilst not providing an ideal scenario for instigating educative processes which deal with the relationships between masculinity and violence, aspects of these programs require consideration, and also have wider implications for dealing with the issue of boys in schools.

Male Teachers

One of the issues raised in boys' programs is the place of male teachers in a boy's education. Central to men's mythopoetic politics is the importance of men in boys' lives (Bly, 1991; Biddulph, 1995; Biddulph, 1997; Fletcher, 1995; for critical assessments of such politics see Kenway, 1995; Kenway, 1996; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1995; Mills & Lingard, 1997). This concern has been picked up by the current Queensland Education Minister, Bob Quinn, and is regularly raised as an issue in newspapers. This can be seen in some recent headlines which suggest that men are being driven away from teaching..." Wanted: male teachers" (Meryant, 14.3.1996:3); "Men and young shun teaching, principals told" (Aldred & Butler, 1996, Oct., 5:15); "It's goodbye Mr Chips: Guys give our schools a miss" (Griffith, 1997, Jan., 12:19); "No panic, guys, kindies need you – lecturer" (O'Chee, 1997, Feb.

20:11); and "Even fewer men on the roll" (O'Chee, 1997, Nov., 27:7). One of the dominant arguments found within such sources is that boys need more male role models. This is often founded upon either the belief that schools have become a feminised domain causing boys to miss out on acquiring the discipline necessary to control their disruptive behaviour or the interrelated belief that the education of boys is a form of men's business. These two beliefs underpin men's rights and mythopoetic men's politics respectively. Those who argue for more male teachers upon these grounds, that is that men either should have or do have more authority or influence when it comes to educating boys, are reinforcing gendered power relations. Unfortunately there are a number of men writing in the field of boys' schooling who work from such a perspective (Fletcher, 1995; Biddulph, 1995; Biddulph, 1997; West, 1995). It is a perspective which is often constructs men as victims, often of feminism. For example, West (1995:12) claims: "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." And Biddulph (1995:24) says, in relation to feminism: "Any move to change the order of things which does not address the fact that men are equally lost, trapped and miserable will only create its own resistance."

The creation of all-male situations in which men, such as West and Biddulph, have the responsibility for educating boys, thus has the potential to create a dangerous environment for gender justice (Hagan, 1992). This is implicitly recognised in some of the comments made by boys in the research schools. For instance, Bryce comments in relation to whether or not programs for boys on gender and violence issues are best conducted by men or women:

Bryce: ... A female teacher might get pretty offended about some of the stuff we say.

Martin: Like what?

Bryce: I don't know about girls and stuff. About how you treat some of them so that's

probably why it's good to have males.

It is significant here that Bryce makes it sound as if the homo-social environments being created for these programs provide spaces where boys can articulate anti-feminist or anti-female comments without raising the ire of women. This has often been a (pro)feminist criticism of all-male gatherings and is obviously one of the big concerns feminists have about males working together without some form of accountability to feminists (Cannan & Griffin, 1990).

This does not mean that there is no place for men in working with boys. I would suggest that the contrary is the case. However, the men's politics which is required in order to bring about greater gender justice is a politics which is accountable to feminism. Profeminism is such a politics. Profeminist politics are based upon the premise that it is men's responsibility to tackle those issues which are the source of their own privilege as well as those of other males. A profeminist approach to boys' education thus does not seek to exclude women from gender programs, and indeed argues that it is crucial that boys listen to girls and women about their views on gender issues. At times temporary homo-social environments maybe useful in order to allow boys to discuss issues which they would feel uncomfortable discussing with women or girls present. However, any attempt to silence women's and girls contributions to debates on gender and violence will serve to _preserve dominant relations of power.

Finding men to staff these programs, though, can often be problematic. There are not many men working in schools who identify with a profeminist politics. Thus, whilst it is important that men take on the responsibility of implementing profeminist gender and violence programs in schools, there is often a lack of willing male staff to take on such programs (Dunn, 1995). This was a view held by a number of women teachers interviewed at the two schools. For instance, Sarah, from Mountainview, states in response to a question about whether or not it had been difficult to find male teachers to be involved in these types of program at the school

Sarah: Yes, possibly because many men perceive that they will lose their power base rather than gain in so many other ways. Possibly because of this perceived threat. Possibly also because (male) teachers may not take the time to understand and agree with the connection between gender, violence and teacher management. Yeah. Um at the moment actually um teachers come and go, like at the moment in this school there seems to be only one male teacher that's actually wanting to be involved in anything sort of extra-curricular I guess if you can call it that. It's not really, but outside of the actual curriculum, curriculum areas and that's Craig at the moment. A couple of years ago there were um I think two teachers, two male teachers that would have... But even this year I mean I think the energy just sort of goes, goes up and goes down. At the moment there's ... if this hadn't been happening and I guess if I hadn't been sort of pushing it, as I feel I have been pushing it, I don't know that it would've happened. I doubt that it would.

Donna from the same school comments:

Donna: ... I don't know too many men who would leap to it. Um it's ...it's quite a difficult thing for men to do and handle and ah I suspect it would be fairly difficult to get men to do it. I was pleased that we had um outsiders come in and support our male staff.

The issue of a lack of male teachers was significant for Mountainview High School. A number of teachers there were feeling quite positive about the successful ways in which the

boys' programs had developed, and had thus planned to implement a similar program with the year elevens, leading into grade twelve. However, the plans had to be shelved because Craig, the male teacher who had worked in the grade twelve program had been granted long service leave for the last term of the year. This created a situation where there were no male staff members prepared to take on this responsibility.

The situation is perhaps a little different at Tamville, which is a much larger school. Simon, who had sat in on the grade nine's program, thought that it would not be difficult to find male teachers at Tamville who would take on the responsibility of dealing with such issues:

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Simon: I think in this school you'd find a group of teachers who'd be prepared to. You know we've got .. in the school we've got HRE teachers who are males and, and the sexual harassment coordinators half are male and half female. Like you've got a group of people who are really concerned and caring about this sort of issue.

Victoria supported this:

Victoria: I think that every school has a problem trying to find the male teachers who have some commitment to it. Um we have been a little bit luckier than some schools here because we've got people who are good at working in that field and who feel comfortable with it. But by and large a lot of them aren't. And um I know other schools where they have no male teachers taking HRE classes at all and um there must be a gap in credibility then when they don't see any men talking about those sorts of issues.

The important point here is not that women could or should not conduct these programs. The work of Dianne Reay (1990) with primary school boys in England is evidence of the very positive and successful ways in which women can work with boys on gender projects. And there was general agreement amongst most of the teachers that women were quite capable of teaching these programs. For instance:

Victoria: I think women can, ah qualify, I think that some women can do some of it. Um and do it well because we've all seen those kinds of things.

and

Rebecca:Mmm....For me I think the understanding the person, who is working with the kids, has is more important. Um certainly boys may be less inclined to take the word on a particular issue from a woman but, um...there is ways around that. I think that is only just one little bit actually. But a good understanding and a well-designed course I think could be run by men or women. Um, or maybe two together.

The point is more whether women should have to carry the responsibility for making gender and violence considerations an issue in their schools, as was the case at the two research schools. It is probably not coincidental, or atypical, that the guidance officer responsible for initiating Mountainview's program was female, that the HRE coordinator who organised the program at Tamville was female, or that the gender equity officer who was also instrumental in the setting up of the Mountainview program was female. It is important that men in schools take some responsibility for _acknowledging their own privileges and relieve female teachers of much of this burden whilst remaining open and accountable to feminists working in this area.

There are also important other reasons why men need to be working with boys on these issues. For example, there are some experiences which boys face that men may have once faced or are still facing. This is sometimes important for boys. For example, a number of the boys stated that women would not understand their points of view on some topics and that this could lead to discomfort for the boys, for instance:

Bill: Yeah I think it's better than females because I think some guys get a bit embarrassed when they're with females.

and:

Peter: ... like it's best to have a man because a man can like sort of knows what a boy's nature is about but women's women, I don't mean to sound like a Nazi or anything like that or sexist or anything, but um women understand girls better and stuff and men understand boys better, and stuff like that.

It is interesting that Peter has recognised that there is perhaps a problem with essentialist notions of gender. Peter, at various times goes to great pains to not be "sexist" or a "Nazi". However, what he taps into here is the social dimension of gender. There are things that women do not understand about the ways in which some discourses impact upon men's gender construction, as there are those that men do not understand in relation to female gender constructions. This is also picked up by some of the female teachers. For example:

Sarah: I've always felt that it um it needs to be (males). Um when I was sort of a fly on the wall last year when James came in and worked with those boys for those sessions Craig was also there in the mornings but I was there for the, for the whole sessions ... um there's a lot I don't know about boys' or male culture. There's a lot I don't know and um I don't know if I skewed the results on those ...on those, those sessions being a female but it was really quite valuable for me because there is a lot I didn't know. So I think, I think if you were a female working within that area I think you would just have to be really sure and know that you felt that you really understood all the, the issues and things and I definitely don't ... yet. I guess .. yeah I used to come from a place where I thought it should only be males and that's one hundred percent males. Like I guess I can see that you know if a female feels comfortable doing it and feels that you know she understands the issues coming in for um portions of it but I still think it needs to be owned. At this _point in time anyways.

And Donna made a similar comment:

Donna: Well I thought about that. I ah .. for this school at this time I really think that it's better having men working with the boys. Um that doesn't mean to say that it should happen every time. Um occasionally I thought that such and such wouldn't happen or so and so would not have said that had a woman been in the room. But that might have defeated the purpose so I, I was prepared just to see how it went and for this purpose at this time I think it was better having men and no women.

However, despite their belief in the importance of men working with boys on these issues there is a degree of uncertainty in their voices. Neither woman seems prepared to state definitively that it should be only males conducting these programs. It has often been asked by feminists whether men can be trusted to deal with gender issues without the presence of women (Hagan, 1992; Cannan & Griffin, 1990). This is quite understandable given the politics of some of the men who argue for the need for more male teachers (see in particular Biddulph, 1997). Furthermore, it is also possible to point to the ways in which homo-social environments have often been used to reinvest males with patriarchal privileges. Donna's comment that she wonders whether "so and so would not have said that had a woman been in the room" is a telling one. Men getting together in all-male environments can have dangerous consequences for women, and of course for some boys and men (Epstein & Johnson, 1994:204). It is thus important that men who engage in these programs need to be able to deploy (pro)feminist analyses to make sense of their shared experiences with boys.

Another reason for men to be involved in such programs is that their involvement serves to carry an important message to students. Boys do need to be made aware that it is a legitimate activity for men to take a stand on these issues. As Victoria states:

Victoria: ... I think it is really important for them to see males doing it because then they are actually seeing another guy saying "Yes, this is possible." And and because some of the males in their lives are role models for their behaviour it is important that they see someone who has a different sort of behaviour to what that stereotypical behaviour is.

And Simon provides a similar response:

Simon: For the males .. for the boys it _is. Yeah I do. I do because it has more credibility for a male to say, "Hey, I'm you know I don't think violence is an answer," than having a woman say that to them. Especially the year nine level. I think that possibly in the senior school it mightn't be so critical. Like Sarah could do it. ... You know no problem. Probably Sarah could probably do it with the boys there too but I think the personnel you select is pretty critical.

Simon's point here, though, raises some problematical issues, notably that of the perceived authority of men. It is sometimes argued that boys will listen to men about these issues more than they will women. The argument suggests that women articulating the same concerns that men do in these programs are written off by the boys as feminists who distort the reality of existing gender relations. However, it is argued, it is often a little harder for these boys, although far from being impossible, to position men in such a way. This is a dilemma for programs in schools. Bowing to arguments that boys will listen to men better than women reinforces existing patriarchal gender relations of power where men are constructed as authority figures. However, it is important for men to not use this an excuse for avoiding dealing with this issue in schools.

It also needs to be recognised that the resentment which faces those attempting to implement such programs may be greater for women than for men. For instance, the boys at Mountainview were already articulating an anti-feminist language when the program was first introduced. This may have made it more difficult for a woman to present ideas without some of the boys utilising their "femiNazi" discourse. The potential for antagonism to women is suggested in some of the comments made by boys from the different classes. Oscar a grade twelve Mountainview student commented:

Oscar: I reckon it would be just as easy to discuss it (with women teachers) but you wouldn't get the feedback. Because you'd get a lot more mucking around just to sort of .. just because the female teacher is there you'd get a lot more kids mucking around I guess. Just to um, just to put off the female teachers. There's some kids just like that.

and Jason, a grade nine Tamville boy:

Jason: And if there was a girl or a woman there they would probably mess around more.

This issue of behaviour is an important one. It is critical that boys do not interpret men's involvement in these programs as a consequence of men's greater ability to control classroom behaviours. Such an interpretation serves to reinforce dominant constructions of masculinity. Thus, it is important that men consider how they will exercise their authority over the class in ways which do not valorise hegemonic masculine practices. However, it ought to be recognised that in some situations men will probably need to use what might seem to be authoritarian pedagogical approaches. For, in some instance seemingly democratic pedagogical approaches can have oppressive consequences for others (see for instance Walkerdine,). This came out in a discussion with one grade nine boy with a Vietnamese background from Tamville. He had concluded that these programs were better run by teachers than outsiders to the school, because:

Than: I think it's better with a teacher. It's more strict. Because some guys they just much around.

For some students, they want oppressive behaviours repressed. However, pedagogical approaches which presuppose that the teacher has all the answers are also problematic, as noted by a grade eleven boy from Tamville, in a similar discussion about the merits of teachers versus outsiders conducting these programs. Julian comments:

Julian: Um .. I don't think it could really matter all that much. I suppose some teachers would be all right at it. But there'd be some that would be... you know some of the teachers you know, "We're telling you, we're not asking you." That's the ones that wouldn't be any good at it.

Teachers thus tread a fine line in the ways they conduct these programs. A didactic authoritarian approach to the education of boys, especially when conducted by men, may reinforce the legitimacy of domineering and oppressive tactics to achieve one's ends: perhaps this is not the most appropriate tactics to be valorising in a gender and violence program for boys. However, a more flexible, student-centred, democratic process may allow students to oppress others and to articulate repressive discourses unchallenged. Male teachers working with boys in this area will need to be sensitive to the balancing act they perform when working with boys and will need to consider how their work impacts upon and engages with existing relations of power. In the next section I want to note some of the ways the concept of empowerment should form part of this consideration.

Empowerment

Gender equity programs for girls have often had the "empowerment" of girls as a central focus. So too have approaches to education which seek to challenge various dominant relations of power (Giroux, 1992; Kanpol, 1994; McLaren, 1994). In many ways such approaches make sense when they are being deployed in situations where it is in the students' own interests to challenge those relations of power. Thus, for instance, the concept of empowerment, whilst problematic for a number of other reasons (Gore, 1992; Ellsworth, 1992), can legitimately be an important aspect of gender equity programs for girls. It makes sense to strive to empower girls _to resist the oppressions they face as girls, because it is in their interests to challenge existing gendered relations of power (this is not to deny that powerful hegemonic processes work to ensure that girls comply with dominant constructions of femininity). However, such an approach makes less sense when applied to boys.

(Pro)feminist boys' programs, unlike girls' programs, are based upon a premise which suggests that the current gendered relations of power favour boys' interests over those of girls, thus such programs are asking the participants to work against their own interests. It would, therefore, seem to be a little paradoxical to be seeking to empower boys in these programs, for this would amount to an attempt to empower boys to disempower themselves. Most boys are aware that (pro)feminist program are not about empowering boys. It is this which often precipitates the poor behaviour mentioned at the end of the previous section of this paper. And which also makes programs run by men, such as Biddulph, seeking to empower boys, in order to improve their social positioning within society, more compelling to boys, and to those who feel that feminism has made victims of boys. In the last section of this paper I want to consider why it is, given the privileged position from which boys as *boys* operate, that backlash approaches to boys' education which stress the need to empower boys have resonated with those concerned about issues relating to boys in schools; and to consider the implications this has for teaching boys about issues of gender and violence.

Backlash boys' programs which are grounded in a mythopoetic politics suggest that an answer to improving the welfare of boys requires the empowerment of boys. This arguments is usually founded upon what Foster (1994) has referred to as a "presumptive equality". The three interrelated aspects of which are:

...first, the presumption that equality for women and girls has been achieved; second, the presumption that men are equal in the sense of being equivalent, symmetrical populations, having different but equal problems; and third, the presumption that men and boys are equally disadvantaged in society and schooling as women and girls. (Foster, 1994:1)

These presumptions are evident in the ways in which some men utilise the concept of empowerment within approaches to boys' education. Biddulph (1995:25) provides a good example of this when he argues that: "What we must do now is make comparable changes in the empowerment of men to those that have begun to happen for women." This use of empowerment implies that boys are trapped within gender roles, rather than engaged in an active negotiation and contestation with gendering discourses (see Connell, 1995:21-27 for discussion of role theory). This concern for the well being of boys is also found in the New South Wales O'Doherty (1994) report, *Inquiry into Boys' Education – Challenges and opportunities A Discussion Paper*, a report which has been much lauded by sections of the men's movement (Biddulph, 1995:141; Fletcher, 1995:119). Within this report, role theory occupies a prominent place. In a similar manner to girls, boys are seen to be trapped within oppressive roles. For instance, the report argues that male roles whilst oppressive to women also limit boys:

Not only is this personally limiting for boys trapped by the dominant masculine stereotype, it is increasingly having serious implications for their future career prospects. The co-operation and communication skills traditionally regarded as feminine are increasingly recognised as important by employers. Boys who shun these "feminine" subjects which develop these skills may find it increasingly hard to enter the workforce. (O'Doherty, 1994:22)

Such a theoretical perspective ignores issues of power and privilege and instead emphasises problems facing boys as a consequence of particular roles which have been imposed upon them. It thus works to deny the existence of the political and social advantages which boys are receiving as members of a society which serves patriarchal interests, and also suggests that it is girls who are currently favoured by existing relations of power.

This suggestion has found receptive audiences in schools, both on the part of male teachers and students (Mills, 1997b; Kenway, *et al.*, 1997). One of the reasons for this is that many boys, and some men, in schools do not feel overly privileged or powerful, thus as McLean (1996:19) has stated: "One of the central paradoxes of masculinity is that while men, as a group, clearly hold the reins of power, the majority of men experience themselves as powerless." This paradox is what Kaufman (1994) has referred to as men's "contradictory experience of power", and consequently what makes (pro)feminist programs which suggest males should consider giving up privileges and the desire to be a powerful actor in the social order not particularly convincing for many men. In order to engage boys with a profeminist politics an examination of why it is that boys feel powerless in a world imbued with patriarchal relations of power is important.

One source of this powerlessness stems from what Connell (1995) has referred to as the "social organisation of masculinity". In this organisation most boys are happy being boys, they recognise the status that goes with being a man in today's society - hence the use of the term "girl" or "woman" as an insult to be deployed against other men and boys. However, a number of factors impact upon males to produce hierarchised masculine relationships. In schools, as elsewhere, these factors relate to the extent to which boys can measure up to criteria designated by dominant representations of masculinity, often referred to as "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995; see Donaldson, 1993, for a discussion of some of

the problematics associated with this concept), and also to factors such as class, race/ethnicity, sexuality and age.

Few boys or men can meet the standards constructed as the "ideal". Hegemonic versions of masculinity require the performance of particular physical and _emotional attributes, characterised by such things as toughness, stoicism and stamina. However, even these attributes are not always enough to guarantee that a man or boy will not experience any form of oppression. For, it is only a few men who are privileged in every sense, that is not only are they male, but also white, middle class, middle aged, heterosexual and able bodied. As Kimmel (1994) has said in relation to American men:

...we've constructed the rules of manhood so that only the tiniest fraction of men come to believe that they are the biggest of wheels, the sturdiest of oaks, the most virulent repudiators of femininity, the most daring and aggressive. We've managed to disempower the overwhelming majority of American men by other means - such as discriminating on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, age or sexual preference. (Kimmel, 1994:138)

The important point here though is that whilst most men experience oppression of some form or other they do not experience it because they are men, but because they are particular types of men. This is a feature of masculinity politics which is ignored in men's backlash politics. A sleight of hand is employed which seeks to cohere the social group of men together in such a way that those who experience oppressions primarily along axes other than gender are used to represent the oppression of men as a whole. For instance, those who advocate for more "boy-friendly schools" (Fletcher, 1995) utilise things such as boys' school suspensions and literacy levels without disaggregating the data, to see which of those boys are, for example, from low socio-economic and/or Aboriginal background, in order to demonstrate how schools serve the needs of girls more than they do those of boys. Arguments such as these serve to construct institutions such as schools as having been captured by feminist interests. This has the effect of not problematising masculinity but of suggesting that something external to masculinity has occurred to cause boys and men to have become disadvantaged. This occurs because most boys want to construct themselves as powerful, that is as potential men who will make their mark on the world. There is little status in constructing oneself as a victim. Indeed, status usually comes from demonstrating power which has the potential to make others victims. Julie, the gender equity policy officer, makes some useful comments upon this:

Julie: I think one of the issues, one of the major issues, is that boys have no experience in our culture of looking at masculinity as problematic and of looking at ... costs or negatives or difficulties associated with being male and a large part of the way that all boys construct their masculinity, no matter what kind of masculinity it is, within that framework of "my version being the best possible of all versions" of masculinity that could exist. So I think there is that issue. I mean when you start to talk about this stuff to girls it's very easy for girls to identify ways in which they are disadvantaged as a result of being female no matter what their class most girls can find some common ground

with each other. But boys find it very difficult I think to admit that there is anything that is a penalty about being male and extremely _difficult to identify any common ground with each other in terms of experiences of negative consequences.

The difficulty in admitting that there are problems associated with being a man may well grow out of the unwillingness to admit that one has failed to acquire the attributes and social status associated with hegemonic masculinity. It is often easier to lay the blame at the feet of something external to oneself. Feminism has served as such a scapegoat.

Thus, the uncertainties and pains which confront many boys have made anti-feminist masculine politics rooted in mythopoetic and men's rights discourses more appealing than a profeminist politics to boys, and to those implementing boys' programs in schools. In order for (pro)feminist programs to capture the imagination of male students they will need to acknowledge that men and boys experience pain in their lives. However, acknowledging that men and boys experience pain is not the same as asserting that men are oppressed group. The pain that boys often feel is the price that some boys pay in order to ensure that patriarchal privileges for males as a "social group" are maintained, and it is a price some boys are prepared to pay in order to gain societal respect. Thus, as Kaufman (1994) has argued, power and pain are not separate issues, but interrelated. Consequently, the pain which many boys feel should not be highlighted at the expense of dealing with issues of boys' privileged positioning within patriarchal relations of power. It is an adherence to the premise that boys as *boys* are privileged which raises a number of difficult pedagogical issues for those implementing boys' (pro)feminist programs.

Teachers delivering such programs, will have to deal with the reality that a number of boys are unlikely to be willing participants in the program. Some implementors of boys' programs only deliver their programs to students who have not been coerced into participating (Denborough, 1995; Denborough, 1996). This is one way of heading off resistances to the program, and the attempt to respect students' "rights" is commendable. However, in only working with volunteers opportunities can be missed. For example many of the Mountainview grade twelve boys who in the early days of their program were very disruptive and resistant to the program's aims were later instrumental in constructing a similar program for the grade eight boys in their school (see Mills, 1997b). Indeed, their work with the grade eights was stimulated out of hostility to their own program. At the same time, though, it is important not to contribute to the sense of powerlessness many boys feel, or to contribute to their antagonism towards feminism by taking an authoritarian approach to the teaching of these issues or by ignoring the issues which many boys face. It is important to remember that on the basis of age, *all* boys experiences oppression. For instance, the hierarchical nature of schools and the positioning of youth in society often work to ensure that young people have little influence in the day to day running of their lives. In schools boys, like female students, have every move monitored and they are under constant surveillance as they are expected to conform to the dictates of the education system (Foucault, 1977). Society generally constructs youth as irresponsible and of needing to be kept under tight controls. In these instances boys experience oppression, however, they do so not as males but as young males. Furthermore, as yo_ung males they cannot be held fully accountable for existing gendered relations of power.

It is this which has led David Denborough to suggest that approaches to the teaching of boys about gender and violence issues ought to be respectful. This entails not attributing the blame for the high levels of gendered violence at the feet of the students. For as he says:

Education of the young is always seen as the first response to any global problem. I suspect this is not because it is the most effective means of social change, but because it is the easiest. Often such a perspective abdicates adults' responsibilities for change, and is used to justify the lecturing of young people about the "correct" ways of living. In many cases, such an approach simply makes young people feel more powerless, and is a perpetuation of injustice. (Denborough, 1995:78)

I am in accord with Denborough here. I find the notion of respect very useful when working with boys. It is an organising principle which is far more appropriate in this work than is that of empowerment. I want to illustrate by drawing on some comments made to me by a grade nine boy, Peter, who had had a big impact upon me whilst I had been working at Tamville. He had described the violence in his family to me:

Peter: Well I grew up watching my Dad batter the shit out of my Mum. See uhm he used to drink rum and that would make him go mad. When we'd come home, uhm him and Mum would have an argument and he'd ahh he'd ahh like hit her around. And it's sort of hard for me to talk about it like but uhm, and uhm I just you know ahh I, I always said when I was older I'm never going to let him touch my mother again, I'm never going to hit a woman or anything like that. ... that was just like a nightmare. Every weekend like on Saturday nights and stuff I'd just have to run behind this wall sort of thing and just watch Mum get the shit beaten out of her and I'd want to do something but I was too little to do anything you see and uhm it was just, shit, I'd just wish it would stop and stuff like that. And that's why uhm see I had to go to the guidance officer for the school cause I, I was getting into a lot of fights and they said, I had to tell them about my past and stuff and she said that's mainly why I get angry and stuff like you gotta like ... and uhm that's why I'd never hit a girl or a woman or anything like that. Just, it's just not on.

He also commented upon his involvement with violence:

Peter: ...I've had fights and that, I fought my cousins and stuff and friends, other friends and that, and it's like it's hard like the pressure's on saying, "Oh no don't be chicken, you'll smash him, you'll smash him," like that. And like you just get so, like I do I get so psyched up and I go out and I, and I, you smash the perso_n up. Like you want to keep going. That's like what I find happens to me. You want to keep going. You want to do it more and more.

And he later concludes our discussion with the following advice:

Peter: ... you can't say, ah, yeah "Violence is wrong" and that because like a lot of us we... we grow up we like we... violence comes in contact with us every day.

I think it is crucial that men working with boys on gender and violence issues, consider some of the consequences of what Peter has raised here. Peter is clearly not a privileged boy. Yet at times he is a boy who oppresses others. Does Peter need to be empowered?

My tentative response to such a question is, no. Rather, my suggestion is that Peter needs to be treated with respect. I also tend to feel that any attempt to empower Peter would amount to disrespect. A number of feminist researchers have picked up on the ways that empowerment may have repressive consequences for those who a teacher is intending to empower (see Luke & Gore, 1992). For instance, the concept of empowerment presupposes that some voices tell the Truth more than others do. It also presupposes that it is the teacher who speaks with such a voice. Thus, there is an implication that the enlightened teacher is to be the person who will set the gender-trapped student free. Ellsworth (1992:98) comments on critical pedagogy in relation to this point: "The literature explores only one reason for expecting the teacher to 're-learn' an object of study through the student's less adequate understanding, and that is to enable the teacher to devise more effective strategies for bringing the student 'up' to the teacher's level of understanding." Peter clearly has an understanding of issues related to violence, perhaps often a much better understanding than do some teachers conducting these programs for boys. Furthermore, Peter is grappling with many of the issues found in gender and violence programs. This can be seen in his earlier comment about men and women's nature when he says, he does not want to sound like a "Nazi" or "sexist" and also in his comment "that's why I'd never hit a girl or a woman or anything like that. Just, it's just not on." To assume that one necessarily has a greater knowledge of violence and its consequences because one is older strikes me as disrespectful of Peter's interpretations of his own life experiences. It is also bad pedagogy.

A respectful pedagogical approach to these issues does not mean that teachers should not try to provide students with alternative ways of reading existing relations of power. A socially just approach to the education of boys cannot afford to ignore the privileges which boys accrue as a result of being male, and the behaviours which are implemented in order to shore up resistance to any challenges to those privileges. However, it must also recognise that the problem of gender and violence is not a pathological one but a systemic- structural problem. Treating students with respect, therefore, means not engaging with a politics of blame where the agency of students is exaggerated to the point of ignoring the pressures facing students. In working with students in schools it is often too easy to identify them as the problem. The problem is bigger than the students (Denborough, 1995:79). There is thus, as Fitzclarence (1993) has argued, a need for a collective ownership of the behaviours which represent the negative aspects of our culture. This is important. Adults in schools need to acknowledge their own complicity in existing gender relations. This is especially

important for male teachers working on gender issues. Perhaps a way of doing this is to reflect upon the times when we have stayed silent on issues of gender and violence because we were too scared or embarrassed to say anything. It might also be equally, important is to also reflect on the times when we have been prepared to speak out about issues relating to masculinity and violence, for example, in conferences such as this where doing so has the possibility of enhancing one's academic reputation and kudos.

Reflections such as these can help male teachers acknowledge the fears and anxieties we face as adults in confronting these issues in many contexts. Further, they will help us to acknowledge our own privileges as men are protected by the collective silences of men. These acknowledgments will help us to treat boys with respect by considering how much harder it is for boys to "step out of line" given the levels of homophobic abuse present in most schools (for example, Martino, 1997); by not treating boys as *the* problem; and by recognising the significance of creating a school context which is supportive of difference.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to explore some of the complexities of working with boys on gender and violence issues. I have stressed the importance of men owning up to the privileged positions from which they operate in gendered relations of power. As part of this owning up process I have suggested that men need to actively engage with a politics which seeks to undermine their privileged positions in the existing gender order. One aspect of that engagement, for male teachers, can be effected through working with boys on issues which problematise the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and violence.

However, I have not wanted to utilise backlash discourses which argue that boys *need* men. My argument for men's involvement with boys on these issues springs not from a belief that women are less able than men to conduct such work, but from a belief that they should not have to. Indeed, I would argue further that feminist work ought to underpin the approaches which men utilise in their work with boys. Unlike men, such as Biddulph, Bly and Fletcher, I believe that feminism has applications to the work being done with boys on violence issues. Men's struggles to create a more gender just world by working with boys on gender and violence issues are intertwined with women's struggles in this area. For as Jane Kenway states:

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Most feminists want boys and men to change so that they cause less trouble for girls and women and themselves, so the sexes can live alongside each other in a safe, secure, stable, respectful, harmonious way and in relationships of mutual life-enhancing respect. (Kenway, 1996: 447)

However, whilst feminist analyses provide valuable insights into the ways in which existing gendered relations of power are constructed and maintained, feminist approaches to the education of girls can not be replicated with boys. Feminist programs for girls work in the interests of girls. Boys' programs on the other hand have the task of encouraging boys to

challenge their right to gendered privileges, or as Connell (1995) says to their "patriarchal dividend". This presents major obstacles for those intending to implement (pro)feminist programs with boys, for on the one hand boys' self-interest works against this task, and on the other many boys do not feel privileged.

I have suggested here that this contradiction renders the concept of "empowerment" problematic when used in the education of boys. Boys as boys are privileged within gender relations, thus it would seem that they do not need empowering but disempowering. However, factors other than gender operate, often in tandem with gender, to make boys feel powerless. An important one of these factor is age. Thus, whilst I think that boys have to be held accountable for their actions, they should not be held responsible for the ways in which masculinity has become associated with violence. I thus suggest that rather than male teachers adopting an arrogant stance with boys whereby they seek to empower boys to be like them, that, in accordance with Denborough, teachers adopt a respectful approach towards the boys with who they are working. Such an approach will recognise boys' privileged position in gender relations. However, it will also recognise the complexities involved in being a boy growing up in a society where particular, often violent, masculine qualities are valued over others, and where factors such as class, sexuality, race/ethnicity and age are also implicated in the ways boys come to see the world.

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