

Saturday, June 05, 2000

Subject: Boys Education

I have been working in the S.A. Education system for 25 years and have witnessed the benefits that improvements to education have provided for girls. We are now witnessing the achievements of girls in all aspects of the curriculum. This has provided increased choices and opportunities for girls which were long overdue. About 10 years ago a group of associates and I were posing the question, "What about the boys?" This was however treated as a politically incorrect question and the girls' in education movement continued with out much interest being given to a large group of boys who seemed disinterested in the whole world of school. I would like to focus on a variety of aspects of this disinclination to school;

- Research is showing that by the age of eight years old students have made some far reaching decisions about whether school is a place for them or not. At this stage of development the girls have had female models and mentors encouraging them within the school system. Boys generally have had female teachers affirming the values of being quite and assertive. These values do not sit well with cultural expectations of boys. The boys confront the first of many dilemmas to face them.
- If we look at the value that our society puts on males then is it little wonder that boys may find it challenging to realise that they will grow into a man when the media indulge in portraying men as elite sportsmen, killers, road ragers, harmers of others and criminals. We are entering a period of history where the role of men in society is being redefined. This is a period of uncertainty for men and this uncertainty is now being reflected in our boys. It is a time when men need to work together to redefine their role and therefore the role of boys. Men need to do the work with input from women, cultural groups and other interested groups but ultimately it is Australian Men's business. As the redefining of women's roles in the Australian community was women's work. I do not believe that women of the day would have taken to well to men redefining their roles in society.

How is this to be done while are in crisis?

More and more males, including young boys are dropping not only out of school, society but life altogether. Boys see suicide as an increasingly attractive option. Is this because they are not valued for their uniqueness or their maleness? Or are they not valued at all as reflected in coffee mugs with put downs about being male e.g. "I got this mug for my husband, good swap!" Television shows that depict women as the decision makers and males as indecisive and weak individuals.

I think the answer is in making a combined effort to celebrate the positives of being male, to use the media to support males as positive mentors, increase the contact young males have with honest open men and to encourage the big brother scheme in local High Schools with feeder Primary Schools.

Yours Sincerely

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