

# **INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS**

## ***HAVING THEIR SAY: Some Young Men's Beliefs and Attitudes about Being a Man.***

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The Inquiry into the Education of Boys is welcome and one which has attracted a broad range of contributions. This submission is a brief introduction to the study ***Having Their Say: Some Young Men's Beliefs and Attitudes about Being a Man.*** The study, in thesis form, was tendered as an exhibit (number 33) to this inquiry earlier and further details may be obtained from the inquiry secretary or myself.

## **Introduction and synopsis**

This submission does not discuss how better to educate boys; rather it presents the attitudes and beliefs of a group of 300 year 10 and 11 boys nearing the end of their school education. How they view their role in the world as men is what is offered. The impact of falling behind girls academically is discussed in the Inquiry into the Education of Boys media release (19<sup>th</sup> June 2000). The far-reaching consequences envisaged are a detrimental impact on career opportunities and dysfunctional personal and family relationships. The students taking part in this research had a positive outlook on future career/work opportunities and personal relationships. Clearly one of the factors informing this view was the education they have had.

This research project was conducted at the University of Canberra, Faculty of Education during 1998-2000. The 311 participants in my study were year 10 and 11 Canberra Grammar School students, an Anglican private boys school. I am not a teacher or involved in educational policy or employed by the school. This research project is informed by counselling values and beliefs, and led to a counselling degree. The study and findings could I believe, be of value to the inquiry into the education of boys.

The research was descriptive in nature and involved both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The aim was to put the participants' beliefs and attitudes to the fore, and add to the Australian content looking at boys, manhood, and masculinity. Possible indicators into what boys themselves consider important in their development into whole, well adjusted human beings emerged. At the fore was a close relationship with a male role model; significantly fathers were the role models most often chosen as the one that was important in their lives. My research looks not only at school influences, but also at relationships with parents, peers etc.

Some of the findings in my research point to high self-esteem. Brendan Nelson identifies the lack of self-esteem apparent in boys who have fallen behind at school as an area of concern. I think that the generally high self-esteem and positive outlook on their future, displayed by the boys participating in my study, indicate a number of things. Several positives necessary for effective learning both at school, and in life skills, are evident in their lives.

- High percentage of two parent families
- Close emotional attachment/connection with at least one parent
- Fathers were very important in their lives, the man they admired most and wanted to be like.
- The quality boys valued most highly, in the man they most admired, was that they were caring; not a physical, macho quality, but a quality that looked after their emotional well-being.
- My research also in part argues that single sex schooling is a positive, rather than a negative, factor in boys' education and development.

Identified as one of the desired ultimate outcomes of programs to help boys in schools (inquiry media release 19<sup>th</sup> June 2000), was a value system that tolerates less harassment, intimidation etc. by men towards girls, women and society generally. Perhaps there are indicators in my study that a value system is in place, that encourages more tolerance from men towards women, albeit in a place where it may least be expected, a private boys school. Perceptions and attitudes about future personal relationships are highlighted in this research; an egalitarian attitude was the predominant finding. The boys participating in this study valued equality with women, in relationships, in parenting and at work. Canberra Grammar School has made a submission to this inquiry, which outlines the educational aims, and philosophy of the school, I direct you to this for further information about the school.

### **Contextual Overview**

Western societies are increasingly becoming aware of the many problems facing boys and men. In Australia these problems include one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world, a high divorce rate, with most divorces being instigated by women, the breakdown of the family, and conflicting messages about what it is to be 'a man'. This study examined and described how a group of 15-17 year old young men, who attend a private single sex school in Canberra, describe their beliefs and attitudes about becoming adult men. Participants were asked to respond to questions posed in a four-part survey designed specifically for this research. These questions looked at relationships, gender roles, family, fatherhood, work and leisure and whether impending manhood appeared confusing. The context in which participants are situated is one of cultural and social flux; it was the current discourse and debate in Australia about how to be a man, men's issues, and the perception of men in crisis, which gave this study its broad contextual frame.

The last decade has seen relentless social, cultural, economic and technological change radically redefine the society in which we live. The existing categories by which we

define ourselves and our way of life, family, work, our roles as men and women, have all been challenged. A major definition which has been fundamentally contested concerns the question of how to be a man, and this issue has spawned a vast body of literature (see August 1994, Buchbinder 1994, 1995, Edgar 1997, 1998, Mackay 1995). Research studies (see Connell 1995), popular literature (see Biddulph 1994, 1997) and the media have explored men's issues and masculinity with great intensity and from many different stances. This stream of research, popular writing and press attention on boys' and men's issues is reverberating in Australian society, tilting at established norms and values.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom about boys/young men who attend elite private schools, the participants in this study emerged as egalitarian and flexible in their attitudes with regard to relationships, gender roles, parenting and work. This study therefore in part refutes the stereotypes, which surround students at private boys' schools, including those that purport that these students will hold predominantly hegemonic, traditional views about masculinity and their role as men.

### **Research intentions**

The central aim of this study was to be descriptive. Using data from an extensive survey, the analysis presents the beliefs and attitudes expressed by participants about their future masculine identities. The constraints imposed on this study by the headmaster of the school in which the survey took place, and the University Ethics Committee, established boundaries within which I had to work. No personal intervention was permitted; a written survey method was encouraged and became the preferred choice of accessing the attitudes and perceptions of the participants. A pilot study established that written responses were the preferred option for the participants. William Pollock in *Real Boys' Voices* (2000) notes that although boys urgently want to talk about who they really are they fear being teased, bullied and humiliated. The methods used in this study afforded privacy and avoided this. Minimal statistical manipulation was imposed on the data, averages and percentages being the method used, with extensive quotation from the participants written work illuminating the findings.

How did participants describe their desired future relationships, the importance to them of work, of family, what image of manhood did they evoke? How did the participants interpret what Buchbinder (1994) calls '...the baffling and often contradictory requirements made of them by the current cultural construction of masculinity...' (p. ix). These are the primary questions, which this study addresses and explores.

Students at private single sex boys schools are often regarded as automatically belonging to a hegemonic, chauvinistic and overtly macho model of manhood (Connell 1994, 1995, Kay 1994, Hulse 1997). In looking at how participants described impending manhood and their future roles, the current study was able in part to determine whether this attitude is predominant in the views expressed by the students. Given that private single sex boys schools are regarded as producing men who hold power in our society, this study sought to find out from the participants their attitudes towards egalitarianism in relationships and

at work. By exploring the perceptions of these young men the study hoped also to gain some clarification into the general alienation and apparent lack of direction and hope expressed by Australian youth (Eckersley 1995, 1996, 1997 and Mackay 1993,1995, 1997).

Connell (1994, 1995) and others have focussed particularly on the construction of masculinity within educational settings. This study in part challenges the accepted wisdom that this type of school produces predominantly hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1994, 1995, Davies 1996, Kenway 1987) and puts forward the view that the philosophy and milieu of this school allows multiple masculinities to be accepted (Kay 1994, Hulse 1997). It is within this institution that the participants of the survey were based, it is therefore the setting for the survey but not the primary subject of the study. As such, the study does not seek to include a comprehensive review of the literature on gender and schooling. For a scholarly account of this important area in relation to boys and schooling see Lingard and Douglas (1999) and Gilbert and Gilbert (1998).

Only after taking into account all of the voices of boys and men can a valid picture be drawn. I wanted participants to be able to express their views without coercion or feeling they had to portray a masculinity that was desired from them. The perceived alienation and confusion of young men in Australia is of concern to our society as a whole and also as a counselling issue. Looking at young men from all perspectives will illuminate our understanding.

### **Summary of significant findings from the Survey**

Participants in this study, students in years 10 and 11 at Canberra Grammar School, had typically been at the school for over 5 years and thought that the school had influenced how they saw themselves as a man. They also typically lived with both parents who both combined work with being a parent and they described their family culture as Australian. Participants felt equally close to both parents and also that they pursued interests and activities with them both equally. However of their parents it was their mother, whom they talked to the most about issues, interests, and friends. The man participants most admired was their father, and the overarching quality they admired was that he was caring. They felt quite clear about what sort of man they wanted to be themselves, and felt that what it means to be a man in Australia was being discussed “a bit” (term used in survey) in society. Friendships were highly esteemed and participants would choose to talk to a male friend, followed by their mothers, above all others. Their peers also figured highly in terms of who participants felt influenced them about their beliefs about masculinity, as did their fathers. Participants felt strongly that a man did not need to show everyone he is the boss, be aggressive and act superior. On the other hand they did express agreement with the idea that a man is more admired if he is strong, rugged and athletic.

There was a good deal of variation in the way participants described their perceived future role as men, but also a sense of cohesion in their outlook on several issues. The results present a positive group of young men who value equality with women and relationships with their parents and potential children above a career. The analysis of the participants' own written expressions demonstrated that there was a high level of interest and thought about their personal relationships; the salience of relationship issues to participants presented one of the most clear-cut survey findings. They appeared highly motivated towards developing and maintaining committed relationships with a significant other. The relationships they described gave both partners autonomy with a sophisticated level of negotiation about work, children and hobbies. The idea that men must keep their problems to themselves was strongly refuted; instead a keenness for sharing thoughts and feelings was expressed. Indeed the perceived characteristics of a good relationship were that it be equal in every way. The notion that to be 'manly' it is necessary for a man to be dominant over women was firmly rejected. Second only to the priority placed on relationships was the expectation and desire to be a fully involved parent sharing an equal role in child raising, even though women were still regarded as being more caring and nurturing than men. There was a desire for keeping work in perspective and maintaining a healthy balance in life with sports and other interests. A happy family life was considered more important than work or having a successful career, although it was acknowledged that work was important, with enjoyment of work taking precedence over a high income. Work was viewed as a means to an end rather than of prime importance. Several participants commented that they would give up their career to stay home with their children if their partner's needs required this, and childcare was mentioned as being undesirable and not an option. Participants felt optimistic about their future placing an overriding importance on relationships, which included relationships with a partner, children, family and friends.

### **Summary of significant statistics from the survey**

- 87% of participants stated that they lived with both parents.
- 78% of mothers combine work with being a parent and mother.
- 76.8% of fathers share parenting and home duties with a full time job.
- 83.9% of participants expect that their future wife will combine having a job with being a parent and homemaker.
- 61.1% of participants felt equally close to both of their parents.
- 34% of participants named their father as the man they most admired. This was more than twice as many as the next most admired, sportsman (15.1%).

- 70.4% of participants chose a male friend as the person they would talk to if they needed help with an emotional problem. Mother, 67.2%, closely followed this, then father 61.1%.
- 71.7% of participants stated that they were not confused about what it means to be a man in our society.
- In order of ranking those perceived as influencing participants most in how they saw themselves as a man were 1) Peers and 2) Fathers.
- 70.4% of participants disagreed with the statement that men needed to be aggressive and act superior in order to prove their masculinity.
- 66.9% of participants disagreed with the notion that men should keep their problems to themselves, as communicating their needs was a sign of weakness.
- 71.0% disagreed with the statement that girls/women like men who keep their worries to themselves, agreeing instead that they liked men who shared their concerns with them.
- 92.9% of participants felt it was very important that fathers spend a lot of time with their children.
- 87.8% of participants agreed that men have choices about which direction to take in their lives today.
- 75.5% of participants felt free to adopt whatever type of masculinity they liked.
- 66.5% felt optimistic about their future.
- 76.8% of participants felt society sends out mixed messages about what is expected of men.
- 92.2% of participants agreed that women had gained status over the last few years.

### **More detailed analysis**

- **The importance of relationships**

The clear thread running through the analysis of the data was the importance to the participants of equality in relationships, and the active part they expected to have in maintaining these relationships. Participants focused on the equality they expected to have with their partner/wife and the equal part they expected to play in raising children,

placing these first and second out of forty themes or sentences occurring frequently. Responding to whether they agreed that it was important for a man to be in a stable relationship with a partner, 49.5% said that it was. However most, 39.2%, were uncertain whether it was important for this to be marriage. They asserted as a matter of course that women had the same needs and rights as men to a career and that they would want and expect to be very involved fathers. Edgar (1997) says younger men accept as natural women's equality at work, many are willing to spend more time at home and to contribute more to child-rearing, and are also accepting if their wife/partner wants to be the major breadwinner. Both these points are born out by the results of this study. The salience of relationship issues to participants presented one of the most clear-cut findings. They appeared highly motivated towards developing and maintaining committed relationships with a significant other, 49.5%. The relationships they described gave both partners autonomy with a sophisticated degree of negotiation about work, children and hobbies. Russell (1992) describes the core reason for sustaining equality in terms of role sharing, as a man's belief in fairness, his belief that men can nurture as well as women, and that women can perform at work equally as well as men (p.10). These were all beliefs firmly expressed by participants. The sharing of their emotional selves was also discussed with the idea that men must keep their problems to themselves vehemently rejected (66.9%). The notion that to be 'manly' it is necessary for a man to be dominant over women was strongly rejected. The apparent duality of needs and expectations placed on men today was described by Silverstein (1994) and was one of the questions posed in the questionnaire in this study. She described 'new men' as needing to be strong as well as emotionally available, aggressive and empathic, tough and gentle. Exploring this possible dilemma with the participants in this study, it was apparent that, to them, it was not a perceived dilemma in their future as men; they were expecting to incorporate these dualities into their way of being.

Russell (1992) argues that, since the role of caring family man even now contradicts accepted cultural beliefs, it may only be men with high self-esteem and independence who will either contemplate or adopt new ways of being men, or feel comfortable in going against the tide. He says that the personal characteristics of involved fathers were likely to be androgynous, demonstrating positive traditional masculine characteristics but also positive traditional feminine characteristics. This is borne out by the participants in this study who displayed a balance of both positive masculine characteristics and positive feminine characteristics as described by Russell (1984). Hulse (1997) describes the students from the private school in her study as having higher self-esteem and more egalitarian views than the students from the coeducational school. This current study has shown that the masculinities produced at the school which participants attend, encompass an egalitarian outlook rather than a predominantly hegemonic one. A sense of self-esteem is inherent in the data outcomes.

- **The importance of the family of origin and fathers**

87.1% of participants responded positively to the question 'Do you live with both parents?' posed in the questionnaire (the remaining 12.9% spending more time with their



mother, 57.5%, than their father, 12.5% and 30.0% spending equal time with both parents). This certainly goes totally against the divorce trends, which are variously described as 1 in 3 marriages failing, to nearer half of all marriages failing. What can be extrapolated from this percentage is beyond the scope of this research, but it would be interesting to find out if and why there are so many apparently intact families. Over 70% of participants believed that it was important to have a close relationship with their parents, and typically felt equally close to both parents and also that they pursued interests and activities with them both equally. However, of their parents it was their mother whom they talked to the most about issues, interests, friends (34.6%). Also described in the findings are the participants' perceptions of their fathers, their relationships with them, their influence, and their participation in the home. The man who was overwhelmingly the man participants most admired and saw as a role model was their father, and the overarching quality they admired was that he was caring. The role models these men presented to their sons were not just of work driven men, but showed men who participated equally in home-duties (76.8%), a scenario described by Russell (1998) as his aim for promoting balance between work and family in his work with corporations and the business world.

Faludi (1999) in her book *Stiffed: The betrayal of the modern man* describes how the many hundreds of men she interviewed had one common refrain, 'My father never taught me how to be a man'; they were portrayed as being emotionally if not physically absent from their lives. She summarises the men she interviewed as believing that: 'Having a father was supposed to mean having an older man show you how the world worked and how to find your place in it' (p.596). Fathers, as described by their sons, in the current study do not conform to the latter stereotype, indeed they appear to fulfil the desired role as described by Faludi's participants.

Biddulph (1994, 1997) places at the forefront of his agenda the need for Australian men to become better and more involved fathers. It would seem that from the responses about who participants see as their role model, who they feel close to and pursue activities with, that perhaps some fathers are doing 'fathering' well. Participants expressed their beliefs about the importance of being fathers and that they will be taking an equal and active role in parenting. Biddulph, arguably the leader in Australia of the 'Men's Movement', in an edition of *Compass* (March 1998) entitled 'Making Men', talked of industrialised societies as first removing fathers away from their families, which in particular affected boys, as now doing the same with mothers. From the current study we can see that both fathers and mothers combine work with parenting, and this seems to work for participants in this survey in terms of having close and involving relationships with their parents. Participants also described the high priority they placed on being good and involved fathers, suggesting perhaps that they had been valued as children. Participants commented also, without any prompting question, that they did not want their children to go to childcare. Biddulph talks about some of the desirable qualities of the 1950s man, as being needed still, such as being loyal, dependable, trustworthy, looking after his family. The 'Men's Movement' is directly opposed to economic rationalism, and the way our society is driven by materialism, and has a desire for expressiveness to come to the fore. There are some parallels between the

philosophy of the Men's Movement and the beliefs and attitudes of the participants in this study (although I'd venture they would not subscribe to this movement). Participants in this study appear not to place the highest priority on materialism. They talk rather about the great importance to them of being good and involved fathers. Over 90% of participants felt it was very important to spend a lot of time with their children, be involved partners and share equally with women. They also talked about wanting an emotionally open and rewarding relationship and considering their partner/wife their best friend.

- **Work and Life Balance**

Participants in this study expressed the desire and need for balance between commitment to their relationship, being a father, work, family, friends and a healthy life which included sport and hobbies. They did not envisage a life dominated by work to the exclusion of a happy and egalitarian family life, although it was acknowledged that work was important with enjoyment of work taking precedence over a high income. Work was viewed as a means to an end rather than of prime importance. Several participants commented that they would give up their career to stay home with their children if their partners' needs required this, and childcare was mentioned as being undesirable and not an option. Edgar (1998), in his keynote address to the Forum on Men and Family Relationships, argued the need for balance in men's lives in which caring for themselves lead to caring for the significant others in their lives. This caring, he explained, would be expressed by maintaining a healthy mind and body, earning an income and participating on a practical level in family life; family to include their partners, children and parents.

The young men in this study seem to have already worked out that neglecting their relationships and children, and placing work as their priority does not appeal to them. They seem to be driven by human rather than economic values. The young men in this study are traditionally regarded as those with power and privilege and were the managers of the past because of their schooling, class and hegemony. If they were adhering to these conventionally held attitudes, then according to Edgar and others (Segal 1990, Kenway 1997, Davies 1996) they would have the most to lose. This study has demonstrated that they do not have these attitudes but rather have egalitarian attitudes towards both men and women's roles. According to Edgar (Australian Financial Review Magazine September 1997) it is the men who are good at relationships, who demonstrate both empathy and emotional intelligence, who will be the better managers, the managers of the future. In that sense then perhaps these young men have not lost their 'power', rather they have demonstrated in their attitudes and beliefs about being a man today, a relevance, awareness, and adaptation to both their own needs and the needs of society. Russell (1998) has carried out extensive work on fathering in corporations. He equates happier employees with a better work ethic, and therefore better productivity, and says those who are happiest are the people who have 'work life balanced with commitment to their family' (p.76). He describes his main focus as being work life balance and encouraging the view that this is an opportunity for men, their relationships, their families and for organisations' (p.71). Participants in this study have demonstrated a clear attitudinal shift away from work being the priority in their lives towards balance in their lives between

family, leisure and work. Russell has found that it is young men, who want to change things, who are leading the way in ‘...wanting to have a better balance in life...’ (p.72). From their responses we can see that participants in this study clearly refute the idea that the career driven, ladder climbing workaholic’s life is a recipe for happiness.

- **Looking forward with optimism and engagement or negativity and detachment?**

In discussing what youth want from their future Eckersley (1997) looks at the tension ‘between the real and ideal in the hearts of today’s youth. Surveys suggest they appear to be adopting attitudes and values they believe are demanded by the world they live in and the future they expect - mistrust, cynicism, self-reliance, detachment, materialism, impatience etc - not those needed to achieve the world they want ’ (p.248). He calls for acknowledgment of the tensions and contradictions inherent in describing young people: ‘To represent young people as comfortable with the ‘postmodern’ world - even enthusiastic about it - when this is not true, risks fuelling their cynicism, alienation and disillusion’ (p.248). Significant to note therefore is the fact that as a whole the young men in this study did not present as cynical, mistrustful, detached or materialistic. They emphasise the importance to them of caring relationships, family and friends, these are what they valued the most highly for their futures.

Mackay (1999) in *Turning Point: Australians choosing their future* talks of his hope that society sees the need for *reconnection* with each other to counteract the alienation and disconnection produced by an economically and technologically driven world. Participants in this study are already talking about connection. Connection with significant others, wives/partners, parents, children, friends, these were the aspects of their lives identified as most important to them; in their attitudes these students are set to fulfill Mackay’s hopes.

Clearly masculinity is not just a given category to which you automatically belong, and there are real problems for boys/men in knowing who they are, and who they want to be and also what they have become or are in the process of becoming. Faludi (1999) encapsulates in part a sentiment which I think the participants in this study have displayed: ‘... as men struggle to free themselves from their crisis, their task is not, in the end, to figure out how to be masculine- rather, their masculinity lies in figuring out how to be human’ (p.607).

### **Limitations of the study**

The findings of this study must be considered within its contextual boundaries. It was only one case study of 311 students at a private single sex school in Canberra. This researcher acknowledges that the observations made based both on the quantitative and the qualitative research cannot be projected to the population of 15-17 year old young men in general. Another school in another context may give totally different results. However the researcher has been true to the tradition of research and the whole process

has been documented. The attitudes expressed in all sections of the survey were so consistent that the results gained suggest a reliable tool and a useful outcome. The survey designed and used for this study could therefore be used in other survey settings with young men and the data gained usefully compared and contrasted with this study.

This study carries the limitations of all studies utilising questionnaires as research instruments:

- participants may not answer honestly or accurately.
- participants may misunderstand questions.

Marsh (1982) states that inconsistency between attitudes expressed in a survey and subsequent behaviour is not problematic, or surprising, for the survey researcher (p.127). This researcher acknowledges that the attitudes expressed here may not always translate into action, or behaviour, once the participants are faced with 'real life'. It was the attitudes that were being probed in this study, and there is no attempt to predict whether behaviour would be consistent with attitudes. However since an individual's attitudes shape their behaviour, the egalitarian beliefs and attitudes expressed in this study may well translate into egalitarian behaviour when the students in this study reach the manhood they were envisaging.

It would have been fulfilling to have been able to convey at greater depth through an ethnographic study, whether, or to what extent, the attitudes expressed were instantiated in everyday discourse (see Edley and Wetherell, 1997). The use of a questionnaire survey allowed students to describe themselves without fear of challenge, ridicule and repercussions. This was important for this study. The 'jocks' or 'cools' or, in Connell's (1987, 1995) terms the hegemonic group of boys holding power, did not challenge the 'nerds' or other subordinated groups of boys, each group and indeed each individual were given the safety of privacy to express their thoughts. There were instances of disclosure about their place in the hierarchy from both camps and disclaimers about how they would be expected to respond to particular questions.

### **Concluding reflections**

The results of the survey, apart from constructing a picture of a broadly egalitarian masculinity envisaged by these young men rather than one overriding hegemonic masculinity, also offered insights into how they looked to the future. These young men seemed to regard their future in the adult world with a mature, measured optimism.

This study concurs with the argument that those who have traditionally held the power and maintained hegemony are now perhaps those with the most to lose (Silverstein and Rashbaum 1994, p.234, Davies 1996, p.211, Segal 1990, p.130). Davies (1996, p.12) describes the feminist agenda as dismantling conceptions of the hegemony of the

particular group that has traditionally held unquestioned power and that they arguably have the most adjustment to make. There did not appear to be a sense of powerlessness and confusion expressed by these students. They did not appear generally 'nervous' and 'insecure' about their masculinity as described by Segal (1990, p.130). There was also no sense of defensiveness, which is a common response when under attack. Only 28% said they felt confused about what it is to be a man with 71.7% saying they were generally not confused. The idea of what sort of man they wanted to be was 'pretty clear' to 73.3% of participants and not clear to 25.4%. Indeed participants seemed to be adapting to the rapid change and progress, taking place around them. From Davies (1996) we hear that: 'If hegemonic masculinity is simply repressed, it will undoubtedly re-emerge in one way or another as an even more powerful mode of being' (p.211). Attitudes described in the data in this study could refute this assertion, but clearly the participants are not testing reality yet. Tacey (1997) argues: 'masculinity must not be eroded or washed away by the rising tide of the feminine, but instead 'remade', 'reconstructed', and allowed to become the intelligent and self-critical partner of the new feminine reformation'. He argues for 'balance and integration rather than for the eclipse of masculinity by femininity' (p.1). There was a good deal of variation in the way participants described their perceived future as men, but also a general sense of confidence in their outlook. There was no sense of their masculinity being eclipsed by femininity, but indeed the balance that Tacey argues for seemed to be what they perceived as their desired futures. It appeared to me that in general the participants in this study were comfortable with the many hats that they are expected to wear today. Most did not feel that men were being marginalised, rather there was a sense that they confidently shared centre stage with women.

'The cultural products of any given society at any given time reverberate with the themes of that society and that era' (Rose Weitz, 1977p. 194). Mackay (1999) adds 'Attitudes are the symptoms of a society's state of mind' (p. vii ). The hopelessness and alienation described by Eckersley (1993, 1995, 1996, 1997) and Mackay (1993,1999) are true for many young people in our society, but so also is the sense of optimism and engagement with their future that the participants in this study display. Both are equally products of our society. The concern of my study was to give voice to, and present the beliefs and attitudes held by the participants in my study. With reference to the inquiry into the education of boys we need to give voice to and get feedback from the boys themselves at all levels of their schooling and in all types of schools. We need to look at what does work, as well as what does not.

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