



## Endeavour Forum

**To Promote:** The complementary roles of men and women, male leadership and the virtues of family life.  
**To Address:** Affirmative action, unisexism, & relevant social issues,  
**To Preserve:** Family values, community standards and ethics.

History will judge this generation most severely for making some critical errors regarding the over zealous pursuit of equality for women. Most gender "reforms" including affirmative action, were carried out on the basis of ideology rather than popular consensus or validated scientific research. The drive to equalise the roles of men and women is not a fight against alleged male bias, but rather presents a retreat from reality and common sense - a rebellion against nature and the purposes of God. The 'equality for women' jihad is in reality waging a war against the primacy and the stability of family life, and due democratic processes. Ultimately feminism is an open rebellion against masculinity and femininity.

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2 December, 2000

Dr Brendan Nelson MP  
Chairman,  
House of Reps Standing committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Nelson,

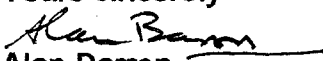
Thank you for responding to my e-mail letter regarding concerns about the Melbourne enquiry. We would hope that all members of the committee would have a positive attitude to the furtherance of boys education in this country. Unfortunately this was not my impression of the panel. I couldn't help but wonder if recommendations will be watered down to placate those on the panel who are not entirely enamoured with helping boys bridge the gender gap.

I also am off the opinion that unless many current exclusive **girls only policies are updated to include boys**, that no matter what you do for boys, the gender gap will remain. With over 17,000 female equal opportunity officers and millions being spent on girls, unless these are made gender inclusive, and if this can't be done then they should be banned because they are *sexist* and discriminatory, then boys educational disadvantage will remain.

**All Commonwealth funding should be gender balanced;** that is to say for every dollar spent on girls, a dollar should be spent on boys at the very least. But this does not go far enough, given boys disadvantage. **Until the gender gap is shortened, for every dollar spent of girls initiatives, there should be two spend on boys.** That's only fair and right.

Whatever you decide, I ask that you show courage and a determination to see this issue through for boys.

Yours sincerely

  
Alan Barron  
Convenor.

P.S ALSO ENCLOSED IS MY ASSESSMENT of the AIPS SYMPOSIUM, 'EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND LABOUR OUTCOME FACTORS AFFECTING BOYS AND THEIR STATUS IN RELATION TO GIRLS', HELD IN MELBOURNE NOVEMBER 22-23, 2000.

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"It is not often that a dominant class legislates its own downfall with quite as much thoroughness as the parliaments of the western world, filled as they are with men passing equal opportunities legislation in favour of women, have done". (David Thomas, "Not Guilty- In defence of the Modern Man", Weiden & Nicolson, London, 1993, page 63.)

## **Improving the educational outcomes of boys**

by Alan Barron.

2 December 2000 (1,450 words)

Late November I attended a Symposium on *'Educational Attainment and Labour Outcomes - factors affecting boys and their status in relation to girls'* in Melbourne. This is my assessment of that symposium.

The symposium was organised by the Australian Institute of Political Science (AIPS). It was opened by the Federal Minister for Education, the Hon David Kemp. The Minister high-lighted the performance gap between girls and boys especially in literacy where boys are at a significant disadvantage. Being behind in literacy meant that this was a significant handicap as modern education was centred around reading, writing and the ability to express oneself in an articulate manner he said. Dr Kemp outlined some possible causes of action to help boys educational performance. These included; improving boys literacy skills, improving the quality of teaching, and special programs for boys in under-performing areas.

It was interesting to note the composition of the invited guests. 50 per cent were women and at each session a female academic delivered a paper. (Had it been on girls education, would there have been a male speaker on each panel? I have my doubts!) It was obvious to me that some present were not too thrilled about the fact that the symposium was being conducted which looked at the problem of boy's disadvantage in education. Some wanted to say that educational under-achievement was both a male and female problem.

However, most of the speakers concurred that boys were at some disadvantage in education today. There was some consensus as to what should be done about it. In the last session the following were put forward as suggestions as possible measures to help boys performance in education.

Many speakers raised the issue of the attitudes of boys themselves. Boys are late developers and in their mid teens the need to identify with a dominant peer group and male role model at this stage (usually a sportsman). Boys at this age find it difficult to learn as they want to be the centre of attention, they want to impress the girls, and generally prefer to be doing things like playing sport rather than sitting still for long stretches of time involved in a one way communication (the teacher teaching a subject). Girls can sit in a passive environment for long periods but boys concentration in such situations was poor.

Boys are more active and like things to do and learn better if there is some sort of physical activity said Dr Peter West from the University of Western Sydney. He said part of the problem is that modern education does not expect much from boys (but it does from girls). He said we need to raise boys expectations so that they will want to do better. He also felt that boys need an active curriculum to help them learn and good quality teaching which understands their emotional and social needs. He also suggested that boys need ongoing assessment to help them stay on track.

Professor Faith Trent from Flinders University South Australia, and the mother of four boys, made a very pertinent point. She said that teachers need to value boys as boys. Too often today maleness is seen as being somehow deficit. (She's absolutely right about that). She said maleness should be affirmed as a positive thing and that there is nothing wrong with boys. Modern education she said tends to see boys as 'a problem which needs to be fixed'. They don't need fixing she said, just understanding and to be listened too. Boys are told to be adults, yet they are not treated as adults. There needs to be a re-evaluation on how education treats its male students she said.

There was much discussion about why boys felt they were disadvantaged by modes of communication, that is language and policies were not boy friendly. Much is done to make the curriculum user friendly for girls but not so for boys. Also, in the classroom boys felt intimidated by girls because girls, maturing faster and having better verbal skills, can express themselves

better than boys. This tends to intimidate boys into silence or to see education as irrelevant and so become disinterested in their own education.

Other speakers raised the issue of the characteristics of adult learning. Are we treating boys as children and not as developing young adults? And also do boys and girls learn differently? What works for whom and why? The evidence would suggest boys and girls learn differently. The present system has a universal approach and this is clearly not helping boys. If this is the case then there should be different ways of teaching boys and assessing their performance. For example boys do better at the end of year exam than girls who do better with the written assessment tasks throughout the year.

It was also mentioned that the evidence suggested that boys range of subject choices was narrower than girls. It was therefore argued that boys choices should be expanded in order to help them feel more at ease with the academic environment. Many speakers pointed out that boys are the ones most likely to be disciplined and/or expelled from school. In addition 84 per cent of remedial students are boys. Some boys find it difficult to learn so they want to drop out of a system which brands them as backward for not keeping up with the others. Research would indicate that boys rebel because they do not believe the educational system is interesting to them, or is relevant. They feel alienated by the constant stress on the need to discuss and articulate their feelings. These things girls do, but not boys.

Some felt that teaching is female dominated, especially in primacy schools and that boys lacked role models and have difficulty relating to an educational system run by women for the educational benefit of girls. To help address this more male teachers should be employed in primacy schools. It was felt that male teachers would have more of a teaching style suited to boys. There is little research available as to how boys relate to male and/or female teachers. Some felt that before it was necessary to recruit more male teachers, it would be best to have evidence based policies which supported this practise. For myself, I think its a furphy. Some primary schools have over 90 per cent female teachers. This cannot be good for the boys because they have no adequate role models to learn acceptable and appropriate male behaviour, especially if they come from a single parent (female) household.

Following on from this was a discussion about the merits of single sex verses co-ed schools. The general consensus was that even in co-ed schools, a single sex class for certain subjects improved the outcomes for both boys and girls, such as science and maths and was highly desirable.

Lastly, the issue of quality teaching was raised and vigorously advocated by Dr Ken Rowe from the Australian Council of Educational Research. He argued that if boys education was to be improved then the quality of teaching would have to be improved with emphasis on caring, competence and respect. Improve the quality of teaching and improve the outcomes for boys he said.

But this begs the question, why is it that with the alleged present inadequate standard of teaching, girls are still outperforming boys handsomely? Girls are doing okay but boys are not. Could it have more to do with all the copious special measures and teaching resources being used to improve girls education? I think so. Generally speaking, it has very little to do with the 'quality of teaching'. Girls are the beneficiaries of the governments largesse and equal opportunity policies. That's why they are outperforming boys. Teachers are conditioned to help girls but to ignore boys, so in that sense it may have something to do the quality of teaching.

Dr Rowe admitted that even if teaching quality was improved, the performance gap between girls and boys would probably close up but still remain. So his suggestion of improving teaching is not going to address the problem really of boys educational disadvantage. It would seem to me to be a herculean task to raise the standard of every teacher in the system. And besides, what measure do you use to ascertain the educational outcomes between good, and not so good teachers? Academic results? Behaviour? Participation/behaviour of students in the class? His improving the quality of teaching argument is not a very practical or realistic solution for redressing boys disadvantage in education.