

**'Boys' (and 'Girls'?) in the policy document *Boys:
Getting it right***

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Abstract

The Australian Government commissioned a parliamentary inquiry into the education of boys. This policy document *Boys: Getting it right: Report on the inquiry into the education of boys* was released in October 2002. It has directed subsequent moves in this area by the government. These have included the introduction of legislation to amend the Sex Discrimination Act so as to enable measures to encourage men into teaching, and a rewrite, currently underway, of the previous policy the *Gender Equity Framework*. As such it is important to understand the way in which *Getting it right* constructs boys and girls, as this will shape the direction of these subsequent moves. This paper argues that *Getting it right* treats boys and girls as separate and fixed categories, exogenous to the wider gender order.

Boys in education is well and truly on the Australian political agenda. The federal government set up a parliamentary inquiry into boys' education in March 2000. This report, *Boys: Getting it right: Report on the inquiry into the education of boys* (Standing Committee on Education Training 2002) was released in October 2002. The Federal Government's response to this (Minister for Science, Education and Training 2003), released in late 2003, has taken up the central recommendations in *Getting it right*. Thus, it is important to consider the way in which the report talks about girls and boys and disadvantage, as this is likely to be followed in future moves. Two of the recommendations that have been taken up by the government are to be pursued in this paper. They are that (1) steps should be taken to increase male role models for boys and (2) the current policy, the *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* (MCEETYA 1997), should be recast and rewritten. The paper firstly questions the way boys are presented as the 'new' disadvantaged. Through focusing on these aspects of the report we can see that the report tends to treat boys and girls as distinct separate categories, rather than related; that 'boys' and 'girls' are seen as fixed biological categories; and that the broader social context in which they are placed is ignored.

Before undertaking my analysis it is necessary to briefly elaborate why it is important to understand the way in which 'boys' and 'girls' are represented in the report. I am following a post-positivist approach to policy analysis that argues that policies create that which they speak, rather than responding to pre-existing problems in the world (Bacchi 1999). Accordingly policies can shape social relations. Along this line, Bacchi and Eveline (Bacchi and Eveline 2003; Bacchi 2004) suggest that policies can be *gendering*. As such it becomes important to discuss the way in which we want gender to be understood. Accordingly my agenda needs to be explicit. I believe that it is beneficial to understand gender as a constructed concept. That is, there are constructions of masculinities and femininities that boys and girls perform. They are not simply fixed biological concepts (Connell 2002, 47-52). Further, there are multiple masculinities and femininities. Not all boys are the same, nor are all girls. Crucially, these are related concepts, they are defined in relation to each other (Taylor *et al* 1997, 139; Connell 2002, 9). The *Gender Equity Framework* offers an understanding of the construction of gender:

Understanding the process of gender construction is crucial if school and systems are to work for equitable educational experiences for girls and boys. Dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity define males and females as opposites by highlighting their differences and assigning them unequal value, status and power. These dominant concepts limit, in different ways, expectations of girls' and boys' participation and post-school outcomes. (MCEETYA 1997)

It is important to note that this gender construction occurs within an 'unequal gender order' in which, at present, men are more advantaged than women (Connell 2002, 5-6 & 142). The *Gender Equity Framework* locates the construction of gender within the wider gender order:

While it is important to focus on the way in which gender is created anew in individuals as they respond to social processes and practices, this process of creation needs to be read in the context of broader social processes ...

Everyday notions of gender are generally expressed in terms of differences – differences that are not equally valued. They are also not symmetrical in that masculinity tends to be defined as that which is not feminine, but femininity is

not defined as that which is not masculine. Further, to be like a girl is much worse than to be like a boy ... (MCEETYA 1997)

Of course, power is multi-dimensional (Connell 2002, 59). Yet, despite this, there is at present a hegemonic masculinity which has detrimental effects for both girls and boys.

Understanding gender as a constructed concept allows for 'boys' and 'girls' to be fluid, moving, multiple concepts. It allows for a focus on the relationship between boys and girls rather than on their differences (Connell 2002, 9). Lastly, it locates girls and boys within the current gender order. The understanding of boys and girls in *Getting it right* does not allow for this: it sees them as fixed, homogenous categories, focuses on the differences between these categories, and treats them as exogenous to the current gender order. This is a kind of gendering that will be harmful to boys and girls.

Boys as the 'new' disadvantaged

Getting it right is popularly understood as offering a policy solution to the 'problem' of the 'new' disadvantaged: boys. Indeed, despite a more complex analysis in Chapter Two of the report (which we will return to), the overall impression in the report is that boys are the 'new' disadvantaged. Further, this is reinforced by the media and government discussions around the report. The way in which this is achieved is by treating 'boys' as fixed categories and by extracting them from the wider gender order. This allows for an ignoring of girls.

The foreword to *Getting it right* explicitly claims that boys are not coping as well as girls:

In recent decades greater attention has been given to addressing past inequities which had worked to the disadvantage of girls and women in education, the workplace and the broader community. While some of these inequities still exist, many parents, teachers, academics and community workers have expressed concern that, particularly in the area of education, boys are not coping with the changes as well as girls. (*Getting it right* 2002, vii)

Whilst there is some acknowledgment here that girls are still disadvantaged in some areas, the lasting impression is that girls have made gains and boys are not coping as well. The implication is that the new disadvantaged are boys (cf Hayes and Lingard 2003, 2). Indeed, peppered through the report are references to the 'relative disadvantage of boys' and to boys being 'more adversely affected' by social, labour market, and, significantly, policy change. Of course the implication in this reference to policy change is that previous policies directed at girls and gender have adversely affected boys. However, this is not justified in the report and, as we shall see below, the situation for boys is not so new.

The government adds to this understanding of boys as the new disadvantaged. It has 'invested' \$6million dollars towards the education of boys (Nelson 27 April 2004). And the Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, emphasises that 'the evidence is overwhelming that boys are falling behind in our education system' (Nelson 27 Nov. 2002). And, more recently:

Boys are doing worse than girls in some key indicators of educational performance, and evidence shows that the 'gap' between boys' and girls' performance has increased over time, especially in operational literacy. In addition, in some measurable areas, the performance of boys, as a group, appears to have declined over time (Nelson 26 June 2003).

So clearly boys are presented as the 'new' disadvantaged within the education system.

These references in the report to the *relative* disadvantage of boys, boys being *more* adversely affected, and boys not coping *as well as* girls indicate that boys' situation is *in comparison* to girls. However, this is different to a focus on the relations between girls and boys espoused by a construction of gender approach. The former treats boys (and girls) as fixed categories exhibiting certain selective statistical outcomes. This allows for an ignoring of the gender order in which girls and boys are placed. The latter, in

contrast, is concerned with the processes through which these outcomes are created and how they are related.

The report's understanding of boys and girls as fixed categories can be seen through a deeper analysis of the indicators it suggests demonstrate boys' disadvantage. This can be found in Chapter Two of the report. This Chapter does at least see the picture in slightly more complex terms than the foreword and the Minister suggest. In fact some areas, such as performance and post-school pathways, are seen as providing difficulties for both girls and boys. There are still problems with the report's approach to this and I return to these below. For the present, the actual indicators the report sees as demonstrating boys' disadvantage *in comparison* to girls is in relation to retention rates, expulsion and suspension rates, lower levels of literacy and social and cultural outcomes. These social and cultural outcomes cover areas such as:

...rates of depression and mental illness, attempted and completed suicide, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, motor vehicle deaths and injuries, juvenile crime and detention, violent crime and adult rates of imprisonment (*Getting it right* 2002, 36-37).

As an aside it is worth noting here that these indicators are not new (Gill forthcoming 2005; Yates 1997, 339; Hayes 2003, 11). This challenges the implication in the report that previous policies have created the present situation for boys. Of course, it could be argued that since these indicators have existed for a long time, attention to them is overdue. However, this misses the point made below that simply focusing on these indicators of disadvantage treats boys as fixed biological entities and ignores the wider gender order, allowing an ignoring of girls' situation. Also, whilst some attention needs to be given to boys, it is how this attention is given that is important. It needs to be in the context of understandings of hegemonic masculinity. Why is it that boys' behave in the way that they do that then creates these problems for boys?

The way *Getting it right* focuses on the statistics of boys' situation in comparison to girls allows it to treat boys and girls as discrete and static social categories in competition. It

reproduces 'boyiness' as part of a person obscuring the processes which produce boys as exhibiting this 'boyish' behaviour (Bacchi 2004). Relatedly, as Connell observes, rather than focusing on gender differences we should be focusing on gender relations (Connell 2002, 9). This is because differences become attached to the notion of a biological binary divide instead of recognising the processes, which produce girls and boys as different. Thus the selective comparative approach simultaneously treats girls and boys as fixed, unchanging categories, while ignoring the relationship between them.

Further, focusing on the indicators of boys' disadvantage allows for an ignoring of the wider gender order in which these indicators exist and, hence, an ignoring of the situation for girls. The report ignores that women have a lower standing in society than do men. Further, the report relies on selective indicators. Factors affecting girls in education are not mentioned here. These could include areas such as harassment, status, victims of domestic violence, rape, anorexia, bulimia, or amount of domestic responsibility. As Yates points out: 'literacy but not mathematics; alcoholism but not those on welfare payments; imprisonment rates, but not rates of those in political office, etc.' (Yates 1997, 339). The point here is not to reduce this to a debate about what indicators of disadvantage should count. They all combine to paint a picture about gender relations. Rather, the point is to highlight that in focusing just on selective criteria assessed by sex (or in fact one sex), rather than the relations between masculinities and femininities, allows for an ignoring of factors affecting girls. It also allows for an ignoring of the wider gender order.

The approach in *Getting it right* of comparing certain selective indicators based on sex falls into what Cox (1997) terms a competing victim syndrome. Cox warns against claims for finite resources based on "'the most disadvantaged group" position' as it can create 'real divisions' (Cox 1997, 75, emphasis in original). She claims that it is far more beneficial to challenge the system, which 'doesn't suit a lot of people' (Cox 1997, 77, emphasis in original). However, this system which Cox wants challenged is hegemonic masculinity, or, in her words, 'Anglo-Saxon, Western European masculinity' (Cox 1997,

78). Further, she is clear that inequality cannot be ignored (Cox 1997, 76). Cox, like me, sees that to really address inequality we need to understand constructions of masculinity and femininity and their relationship to hegemonic masculinity.

Thus far I have argued that in *Getting it right* there is an insufficient theoretical understanding of the processes that create the statistical data attached to girls and boys. The consequence of this is that inappropriate policy solutions get offered such as encouraging male role models for boys.

Male role models

One of the main explanations offered by *Getting it right* for boys' disadvantage is a lack of role models for boys (*Getting it right* 2002, xxii). On these grounds the report stresses the importance of getting more men into teaching. It is worth quoting it at some length here:

There is widespread concern about the decline in the number of male teachers, particularly in primary schools where the proportion is down to 21 per cent. This has been attributed to a number of factors including the status of teachers in the community, salary, career opportunities and concerns about child protection issues. These issues need to be addressed. State and Territory governments should pay substantial additional allowances to skilled and experienced teachers to retain them in teaching and to provide career paths which attract new teachers (*Recommendation 18*). The admission criteria for teaching courses should be broadened to recognise that motivational factors and particular personal qualities are as important as academic achievement in making a good teacher (*Recommendation 19*). The supply of teachers, and male teachers in particular, should be enhanced by providing HECS-free scholarships to equal numbers of males and females to induce high quality candidates to teacher education (*Recommendation 20*)

Male role models do matter and boys benefit by men modelling appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships with other men and women. This is much more effectively demonstrated to boys by men than it can be taught to boys by women in the absence of men. (*Getting it right* 2002, xxii)

A number of points need to be made about this push for male role models:

- The focus on role models assumes that boys (and girls) are not thinking beings but receptacles for messages. This is a very uni-dimensional view of power. It does not take into account the way in which there are valid reasons in today's society and in schools for students to behave the way they do: it pays off to be masculine and behave the way boys behave (McLean 1997a, 1997b).
- Admittedly, earlier policies directed at the education of girls did suggest role models. Whilst I think these policies can be subjected to the same criticism as the one above, it is also important to understand the way the present focus is different. Whilst there was a focus in the earlier policies on girls not achieving a comparable to boys in their future lives and a concern that girls had lower levels of self-esteem and expectations, this was also linked to changing school structures that demonstrated the pay off of being masculine. At the time males dominated schools' hierarchies. Despite the fact that women dominated the teaching workforce, there were few women in positions of power. In contrast, the call for role models for boys seems to be based more on the need for models of appropriate behaviour, rather than to challenge some kind of power differential. The wider gender order seems less significant here.
- There seems to be a revaluing of traditional masculinity going on here. There is no mention here of the different types of masculinities. Indeed the 'particular personal qualities' the report refers to would seem to be the biological 'man'. Such a focus can allow hegemonic masculinity to remain unproblematised (Raphael Reed 1998, 63-64). Raphael Reed gives the UK example of business people mentoring school children and picking them up at 6.45am for a breakfast meeting (Raphael Reed 1998, 63). It is clear here that one can't have parental responsibilities and be a businessperson.

- Relatedly, and significantly for the argument in this paper, maleness becomes fixed and unitary. There is an assumption that men and women have particular distinct qualities to offer. If this were the case one is tempted to suggest that they get more women into defence so that Australia's defence system can be run differently. Experience has taught us that such an approach does not work. Further, traditional masculinity seems to be the only one on offer. This forecloses any discussion of which types of men we would want to be providing role models. There is no mention here of the importance of providing gay, Aboriginal, disabled or non-English speaking background male role models.¹
- It is insulting to all those women who do work in education that it is only in the face of widespread panic about boys' education that it is recommended that teachers be paid more and have a better career path available to them. This is particularly so given that such a suggestion occurs precisely when men are being encouraged to enter this workforce. It seems to have passed the Committee by that the low status of teachers, and other women-dominated professions, is itself an example of the inequality women face in society. Again the wider gender order is ignored.
- It should be noted that the government response to *Getting it right* initially rejected recommendation 20's suggestion of inducements to increase the number of males entering teacher training. However, whilst the practical suggestion of HECS free scholarships for men and women was rejected, the 'spirit' of the recommendation was not. Indeed, the method of achieving male role models was seen as possibly setting an 'undesirable precedent' in terms of other university degrees where there are unequal numbers of women and men enrolled. One suspects that this refers to male dominated professions. Despite this initial

¹ There is some mention of the importance of Indigenous male role models (*Getting it right*, 2002, 31-36), but the discussion of issues for Indigenous boys is isolated from the wider discussion and ultimately the report claims that a sufficiently in depth discussion can not be undertaken by the report.

rejection it seems that the federal government has decided to take up this recommendation and introduced legislation to amend the Sex Discrimination Act so as to enable it to offer scholarships to encourage men into primary teaching (Nelson 10 June 2004). This sounds similar to affirmative action and indeed quotas. It is more than ironic that in a political climate where affirmative action is so completely off the agenda with respect to women, it becomes one of the crucial recommendations of the report when it is directed at increasing men's employment numbers.

Through this recommendation of role models we can see that gender is understood as fixed and attached to one's sex. Further, power differentials are ignored and room for an understanding of the relational nature of gender is foreclosed.

The 'joint and separate needs of boys and girls'

In the above discussion about the indicators of boys' disadvantage I held over discussion of the reports approach to performance and post-school options. This is because the report approaches these in a slightly different way to the other indicators addressed. Here, it does acknowledge that these areas do demonstrate that some disadvantages still exist for girls, hence not completely ignoring them as it does in other areas. However, again girls and boys are treated in an unhelpful way. In fact, despite the earlier focus in *Getting it right* on comparing boys to girls, when the situation of girls simply can't be ignored, the report changes tack, claiming that the separate needs of boys should be considered irrespective of the situation of girls:

This chapter provides evidence that many of the old gender divisions in education and employment still exist almost unchanged. This repudiates the suggestion that too much has been done for girls and that now it is the boys' turn. It is more constructive to seek to understand the issues in boys' education as a need to address boys' under-achievement rather than as a need to 'correct' an apparent disadvantage relative to girls. The way forward for both boys and

girls is to identify their joint and separate educational needs and to implement a policy framework and strategies to address those needs. (*Getting it right* 2002, 8)²

Admittedly, the report does refer to the 'joint and separate' educational needs of boys and girls. However, 'joint' needs are not pursued in the report. In fact, the overall impression is a descriptive list of separate and distinct educational needs. Further, the way in which the report calls for a rewrite of the *Gender Equity Framework* (MCEETYA 1997) and how this is taken up by the Government's response to *Getting it right* demonstrate that the focus is more on the separate needs of boys. The rewrite is seen as necessary by *Getting it right* so as to enable there to be an 'overarching policy structure for joint and distinctive boys' and girls' education strategies' (*Getting it right* 2002, 69). It calls for an addressing of both 'boys' and girls' social and educational needs in positive terms' (*Getting it right* 2002, 69). The Government response to *Getting it right* takes up this call for a review of the *Gender Equity Framework*. It describes the *Gender Equity Framework* as setting 'out the way schools address gender equity issues, and does not specifically identify issues pertaining to boys'. The implication here is that boys' issues are *separate* from gender equity issues. It claims that the review is necessary so that 'boys and girls are able to find and achieve their own potential in an educational context which takes into account their differences' (Minister for Science, Education and Training 2003). However there is no distinction made between the *types* of different (and, in its terms, separate and distinct) educational needs of boys and girls, nor the relationship between them.

Thus, girls and boys are still seen as unrelated categories. And again their situations are seen as exogenous to the wider gender order. In such an approach fundamental insights about the construction of gender get ignored. Such insights include that many issues affecting boys are the result of complex constructions of masculinity, indeed, that some

² There is an apparent contradiction in the way that *Getting it right* initially presents boys as the new disadvantaged in comparison to girls and then goes on to suggest, as seen in the quote above, that it is not in the game of comparing girls to boys. Ailwood (2003, 20) observes that policy documents tend to have contradictions within them. However, I argue elsewhere (Gill 2005 forthcoming) that this is a rhetorical ploy that keeps boys as the central focus. In fact the report's understanding of boys and girls is consistent whether it compares boys and girls or looks at boys separate needs.

of these issues are the result of privilege (Mills 2003, 67). This can be seen in more depth by looking at the details of the report's discussion of performance and post-school pathways.³

With respect to performance, the report challenges the narrow focus on year 12 results that is present in the media. Such a focus, it acknowledges, obscures the fact that there is still a gender divide in subject choices. Girls and boys still tend to choose subjects along traditional gender lines. Thus even if girls are achieving higher overall marks and some girls are getting higher marks in some maths, in the main they are doing subjects that are far less valued in society. Another aspect obscured by focusing solely on performance is that girls tend to choose subjects below their ability whilst boys tend to choose subjects above their ability. Thus, comparing their results in a particular subject is unhelpful as they are different cohorts of students. Indeed, the report observes that more work needs to be done to encourage girls to undertake subjects commensurate with their ability and to assist girls who are underachieving due to 'social or other factors' and that boys need to be assisted in broadening their subject choices, particularly with respect to English (*Getting it right* 2002, 31).

Admittedly, it could be argued that focusing on boys' need to improve their literacy is positive. It is a move away from the positioning of girls as deficient. However, the current focus does not go far enough. Despite Mills (2003, 70) observation that some discourses on boys can serve to 'give boys a gender'⁴, the report's approach does not allow for a focus on masculinities. This is clear from the call for male teachers as role models and its concern for styles of teaching to suit boys. The problem is seen as teachers and teaching practices, rather than as constructions of masculinity not sitting well with the skills required for literacy. Further, the report ignores the fact that girls

³ The report also looks at higher education and concludes, along much the same lines as it does with the performance measures, that more is concealed than revealed in these results (*Getting it right*, 2002, 40). Whilst more women are enrolled in tertiary education, there is a significant gender divide in areas of enrolment with men in higher status areas (*Getting it right*, 2002, 40-41). Further, men are in positions of power within the workforce.

⁴ Note, however, that Mills is not unequivocally positive about these discourses, but merely pointing to a possible benefit.

and boys choose particular subjects precisely because of the current social and political situation for women and men. Again it ignores the wider gender order and how boys and girls gender choices are related. To deal with boys' subject choices separate from girls' treats them as unrelated issues.

The report also discusses labour market differences for girls and boys. The overall impression, despite the report's refusal to explicitly acknowledge this, is that girls are still more disadvantaged in this area. Boys are both more likely to be employed and unemployed. This is noted to be due to differences in labour force participation rates (*Getting it right 2002, 38*). One suspects this hides women who are 'at home'. Indeed, women are more likely to be not studying and not in the labour force (*Getting it right 2002 39*). Women are more likely to be studying and to be working part-time (*Getting it right 2002, 38*). The report observes that women and men have 'differing' labour market participation and opportunities but that 'young men earn significantly more than young women' (*Getting it right 2002, 39*). Indeed, of 19 year olds in full-time employment, boys with low levels of literacy earn more than girls with high levels of literacy. This suggests that there is in fact a pay-off for boys performing particular masculinities. Surprisingly the report concludes:

However, the objective of public education must be to enable all students, irrespective of their sex or other background factors, to achieve their full potential. While the labour market disadvantage of women exists and warrants its own policy responses it can never be a justification for downplaying the educational needs of any individual or group. (*Getting it right 2002, 40*)

The implication here is that we need to focus on boys *irrespective* of the situation for girls. This treats the situation for boys/men as separate from the situation of girls/women. Yet the fact that more men are in unemployment and more women are outside of these figures is precisely because of the traditional gender roles played in society and that these serve to reinforce each other.

So as to justify the bypassing of indicators of girls' disadvantage in these areas (performance and post-school options) the report produces girls and boys as simply having different outcomes in different areas and that all of these need to be addressed. It does not take into account the power differential associated with these different outcomes. Women earn less, have less access to positions of power and have a lower status in society (cf Connell 2002, 142). Rather than seeing the differences as 'inequities in men's and women's social participation' they are seen as 'measurable sex differences that correspond with a sexed-based binary social relationship' (Connell and Schofield *et al* 2003, 9). These differences are not seen as being located within the wider gender order. Consequently, this focus on the descriptively different educational needs of girls and boys allows for an ignoring of the advantages of this system to men and boys (Eveline 1994).

Further, difference here inheres in individuals and groups. The needs of girls and boys become fixed and attached to their sex. A consequence of this essentialising is that differences amongst boys and differences amongst girls are obscured. Hayes (2003) notes that to talk predominantly of the differences between girls and boys creates a restraint on who can be talked about as disadvantaged. The disadvantages of girls and boys who are 'indigenous, poor, isolated, queer and/or from a non-English speaking background' (Hayes 2003, 11) get silenced (see also Ailwood 2003, 22). Indeed, as we saw earlier in the focus on increasing male role models there is no mention of the different masculinities that could be represented. Nor is there sufficient mention of the different needs of different groups of boys.⁵

Relatedly, the focus on the separate needs of boys and girls in *Getting it right* does not allow for an understanding of the factors producing difference. The way in which the subject is formed through power relations does not get addressed (Bacchi 2001, 114). Bacchi calls for a relational understanding of difference which 'challeng[es] the location of difference *in* a group or individual' (Bacchi 2001, 115, emphasis in original). Her claim

⁵ Note the discussion earlier in endnote 1 about *Getting it right's* discussion of issues for Indigenous boys.

is that difference is about the 'attribution' of difference, rather than some pre-existing difference that is 'identified'. What follows, she argues, is that there needs to be attention paid to 'the *activity* involved in allocating "difference"' (Bacchi 2001, 116, emphasis in original). This allows for a critique of deeper power dynamics in the formation of the different 'educational needs' of boys and girls.

This is not done in *Getting it right*. Most notably, no attention is paid to the relationships between masculinities and femininities. This, in turn, fails to take into account Schofield *et al's* definition of gender as the '*relational or interdependent character of men's and women's everyday lives*' (Schofield *et al* 2000, 251, emphasis in original).

Girls' / women's and boys' / men's lived realities are related. Men benefit from women taking on the home and caring responsibilities (part of the reason for women either being in part-time work or outside of the employment statistics altogether). A focus on the constructions of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between them allows an understanding of the processes producing gender differences without treating girls and boys as static and distinct categories. It also allows the gendered power order to be taken into account. The focus is on how hegemonic masculinities disadvantage girls through direct behaviour and through constructions of femininity and restrict boys who do not conform to dominant constructions of masculinity. *Getting it right* rejects this interpretation because it wants to focus on boys, without understanding the relationship between femininity and masculinity.

Conclusion

To be clear, this has not been an argument against addressing issues for boys. Rather, it is a critique of the way in which *Getting it right* does this. There are areas where boys are missing out in schools such as gaining the social and communication benefits from literacy and being confined to a narrow range of behaviours through dominant acceptable norms of masculinity. However, as I have suggested, there does seem to be a certain pay off for boys of being restricted in these ways. As authors such as Connell

(1995) and McLean (1997a; 1997b) argue, while some boys 'suffer' from dominant understandings of masculinity (either by missing out on these skills or through homophobic, racist or classist treatment), in the end, with respect to women, boys benefit from the 'masculine dividend': they enjoy a higher status than do girls and women. Thus, while there are significant individual 'costs' that men and boys suffer from the present gender order, and these should be addressed, it should not be forgotten that at present the gender order is unequal for women and girls. Indeed, Mills (2003 67) suggests that the 'traumas and pains' men experience are often the 'price of privilege' rather than the 'consequences of oppression'. Conversely, it can be argued that there is not the pay off to girls for some of their successes at schools (Yates 1997, 341; Hayes 2003, 10-11). Similarly, Hayes (2003) observes that while the concern for boys is about them 'failing, and falling behind girls', and one could add the harm they cause themselves, the concern for girls was always about 'the need to gain a status they never held' (Hayes, 2003, 10).

So, the point is not that boys do not have issues that need to be addressed, but that *Getting it right's* attempt to do this is unhelpful. *Getting it right* treats boys and girls as separate, fixed categories exogenous to the wider gender order. It does this by comparing selective statistical data relating to boys and to girls and hence presenting boys as the new disadvantaged, calling for male role models, and recommending a rewrite of the *Gender Equity Framework* so as to take account of the separate needs of boys (and girls). Presenting boys and girls as distinct and static entities ignores the complexity of girls' and boys' lives. It needs to be understood that there are different forms of masculinities and femininities available to boys and girls and that masculinities and femininities are interconnected. And, most importantly, that despite the multiplicity of gender, hegemonic masculinity is esteemed over and above other ways of being. *Getting it right* ignores the way in which gender is constructed, related and exists within a wider gender order.

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