

Challenging violence in schools

An issue of masculinities

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Series editors' introduction

Educating boys is currently seen – both globally and locally – to be in crisis. In fact, there is a long history to the question: what about the boys? However, it was not until the 1990s that the question of boys' education became a matter of public and political concern in a large number of countries around the world, most notably the UK, the USA and Australia.

There are a number of different approaches to troubling questions about boys in schools to be found in the literature. The questions concern the behaviours and identities of boys in schools, covering areas such as school violence and bullying, homophobia, sexism and racism, through to those about boy's perceived underachievement. In *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*, Epstein and her colleagues (1988) identify three specific discourses that are called upon in popular and political discussions of the schooling of boys: 'poor boys'; 'failing schools, failing boys'; and 'boys will be boys'. They suggest that it might be more useful to draw, instead, on feminist and profeminist insights in order to understand what is going on in terms of gender relations between boys and girls and amongst boys. Important questions, they suggest, are: what kind of masculinities are being produced in schools, in what ways, and how do they impact upon the education of boys? In other words, there is an urgent need to place boys' educational experiences within the wider gender relations within the institution and beyond.

Despite the plethora of rather simplistic and often counter-productive 'solutions' (such as making classrooms more 'boy-friendly' in macho ways) that are coming from governments in different part of the English-speaking world and from some of the more populist writers in the area (e.g. Steve Biddulph), there is a real necessity for a more thoughtful approach to the issues raised by what are quite long-standing problems in the schooling of

boys. Approaches for advice to researchers in the field of 'boys' underachievement' by policy makers and by teachers and principals responsible for staff development in their schools are an almost daily event, and many have already tried the more simplistic approaches and found them wanting. There is, therefore, an urgent demand for more along the lines suggested here.

This is not a series of 'how to do it' handbooks for working with boys. Rather, the series draws upon a wide range of contemporary theorizing that is rethinking gender relations. While, as editors, we would argue strongly that the issues under discussion here require theorizing, it is equally important that books in the area address the real needs of practitioners as they struggle with day-to-day life in schools and other places where professional meet and must deal with the varied, often troubling, masculinities of boys. Teachers, youth workers and policy makers (not to mention parents of boys – and girls!) are challenged by questions of masculinity. While many, perhaps most, boys are not particularly happy inhabiting the space of the boy who is rough, tough and dangerous to know, the bullying of boys who present themselves as more thoughtful and gentle can be problematic in the extreme. We see a need, then, for a series of books located within institutions, such as education, the family and training/workplace and grounded in practitioners' everyday experiences. There will be explored from new perspectives that encourage a more reflexive approach to teaching and learning with references to boys and girls.

We aim, in this series, to bring together the best work in the area of masculinity and education from a range of countries. There are obvious differences in education systems and forms of available masculinity, even between English-speaking countries, as well as significant commonalities. We can learn from both of these, not in the sense of saying 'oh, they do that in Australia, so let's do it in the UK' (or vice versa), but rather by comparing and contrasting in order to develop deeper understandings both of the masculinities of boys and of the ways adults, especially professionals, can work with boys and girls in order to reduce those ways of 'doing boy' which seem problematic, and to encourage those that are more sustainable (by the boys themselves now and in later life). Thus books in the series address a number of key questions: How can we make sense of the identities and behaviours of those boys who achieve popularity and dominance by behaving in violent ways in school, and who are likely to find themselves in trouble when they are young men out on the streets? How can we address key practitioner concerns how to teach these boys? What do we need to understand about the experiences of girls as well as boys in order to intervene effectively and in ways which do not put boys down or lead them to reject our approaches to their education? What do we need to understand about gender relations in order to teach both boys and girls more effectively? How can we make sense of masculinities in schools through

multi-dimensional explanations, which take into account the overlapping social and cultural differences (of, for example, class, ethnicity, dis/ability and sexuality), as well as those of gender? What are the impacts of larger changes to patterns of employment and globalization on the lives of teachers and students in particular schools and locations? The series, as a whole, aims to provide practitioners with new insights into the changing demands of teaching boys and girls in response to these questions.

As editors, we have been fortunate to be able to attract authors from a number of different countries to contribute to our series. This particular book addresses one of the key issues for educating boys – the reduction of gender-related violence. While we hear, frequently, about the violences of men and boys against women and girls, we are less likely to discuss violences between men and boys. Yet young men between the ages of 16 and 30 are the most likely group in the populations of late capitalist countries to be injured in violent attacks or fights, and the most likely to be killed violently. Within the school context most of the day-to-day violence is between boys. For the most part, this violence is not dramatic – it can be quite mundane violence, for example, pushing and shoving, that makes the lives of a large number of girls and boys (and, it might be added, teachers) miserable in schools. This kind of petty violence and jockeying for position may also interfere with schools' abilities to produce appropriate environments for learning and academic study. We are very pleased to be able to publish Martin Mills' work on this key issue as one of the first books in our series. Working from a profeminist perspective, he has explored the contexts for the violences of boys (to misquote Hearn 1998). His book, written in the Australian context, is extremely relevant to other countries. It is based on extensive and detailed practical work in schools in Queensland and does a great deal more than trace the theoretical explanations for boys' violence in schools. Drawing on his wealth of experience of anti-violence programmes in schools, he makes practical suggestions for ways of working which can take teachers forward in their approaches to dealing with violence regardless of where they work. Mills does provide some actual examples of ways of working, but the importance of this work is that he does so in a way that makes accessible to others the theories on which his own interventions are based. Thus, readers will be able to use his case studies in innovative and practical ways in their own work with boys in schools and elsewhere. The importance of anti-violence work with boys and young men cannot be over-stressed. It is an issue that has a bearing not only on boys' own school-work and achievement, but on the lives and experiences of all members of the schools community. Mills' work makes that clear and offers some ways of thinking through the issues.

*Debbie Epstein
Máirtín Mac an Ghail*

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Introduction: challenging violence in schools as an issue of masculinity

Seldom do the news reports note that virtually all the violence in the world today is committed by men. Imagine, though, if the phalanxes of violence were composed entirely of women. Would that not be *the* story, the only issue to be explained? Would not a gender analysis occupy the center of every single story? The fact that these are men seems so natural as to raise no questions, generate no analysis.

(Kimmel 2000: 243)

In April 1999 two boys in trench coats walked into their high school in Columbine, USA, shot dead 12 students and a teacher, and wounded 23 others before killing themselves. The boys had planned their shooting spree in great detail. Three weeks later, in New South Wales, Australia, a number of boys were suspended from seven different schools for creating a similar 'massacre list' of students and teachers as that put together by the two American students (Baird 1999: 5). Such events have served to promote the belief that schools throughout the Western world are becoming like the stereotypic violent American school. For instance, in an Australian newspaper report headlined, 'I fear massacre in our schools' (Patty 1999) a headmistress (*sic*) of an exclusive girls' school, who had visited a number of schools in the USA where she had seen metal detectors, guards, identification badges and transparent school bags, was reported as saying,

Columbine High School was an affluent school in an affluent area of Denver in a very similar environment to schools in Australia. There has been an accelerating pattern of violence in Australian schools in the past 15 years. The availability of guns, unemployment, homelessness, the disintegration of families and the church and violence in the media. High rates of depression are reflected in the high rates of eating disorders, vandalism, drug use and violence in schools. It's a very dangerous and potent situation.

(Patty 1999: 18-19)

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Comments such as these are not uncommon. Violence in schools is clearly disturbing to educators, parents, students and the broader community. However, as with the head teacher above, acts of violence are often attributed to such things as family breakdown (or single mother families); violent videos, computer games, the Internet and song lyrics; lack of discipline in schools and the court system; lax gun legislation; and liberal parents. Issues of masculinity are seldom raised. This is despite the fact that in the majority of instances the perpetrators of this type of violence are male.

This is similarly the case with the concerns being raised about bullying in schools. In much of the bullying literature masculinity is rarely mentioned (see for example, Elliot 1991; Sharp and Smith 1994; Walker *et al.* 1995; Rigby 1998; Smith *et al.* 1999). However, a significant amount of research into school violence suggests that by far the majority of bullying incidents in schools are perpetrated by boys (Milligan *et al.* 1992; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1994; Sadker and Sadker 1994). Hence, in an essay on the Columbine killings and similar events, Gloria Steinem (1999) made the following comment:

We will never reduce the number of violent Americans, from bullies to killers, without challenging the assumptions on which masculinity is based: that males are superior to females, that they must find a place in a male hierarchy, and that the ability to dominate *someone* is so important that even a mere insult can justify lethal revenge.

(Steinem 1999: 47, original emphasis)

In this book I want to take up the task of challenging the assumptions, identified by Steinem, on which masculinity is based. This entails demonstrating the ways in which violence has become associated with 'normalized' forms of masculinity and it also involves making some suggestions about the ways in which this association can be disrupted. The book has developed out of work I have undertaken with boys in schools on gender and violence issues and draws on interview data collected from boys, teachers and others who were associated with gender and violence programmes conducted in two Australian State High schools.

Violence in schools

There is often an over-exaggeration of the amounts of violence present in schools. As the Australian Federal report, *Sticks and Stones: Report on Violence in Australian Schools*, states in its introductory paragraph:

Schools provide a safe learning environment for most children. It is erroneous to conclude that schools are unsafe. In some areas, rather

than being places of violence, schools provide havens and places of safety away from the violent community. The media in its reporting of isolated incidents of school violence has contributed to the community perception that the education system is violent and chaotic. It is easy to form the view that violence is a regular feature of school life. It is not.

(House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1994: v)

Similar comments could be made about schools elsewhere. However, a significant body of evidence does exist which suggests that many boys make life very difficult for other boys and for girls in coeducational schools, and that this is often treated as normal (see, for example, Morgan *et al.* 1988; O'Connor 1992; Milligan *et al.* 1992; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1994; Sadker and Sadker 1994; Collins *et al.* 1996; Hart 1998; Francis 1999). Based on their research in the United States, Sadker and Sadker (1994: 9) have stated that: 'Tolerated under the assumption that "boys will be boys" and hormone levels are high in high school, sexual harassment is a way of life in America's schools.' In Australia, the Federal *Sticks and Stones: Report on Violence in Australian Schools* states that:

For many boys being 'tough' was their understanding of what it was to be male. Aggressive play by boys towards girls was often described as 'typical' or 'boys will be boys' behaviour. It was even encouraged. It was the acceptance of this behaviour as normal which was most damaging in the school environment. It was this use by boys of aggression to gain power and dominate which was intimidating and threatening to girls and undermined their whole experience of school.

(House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1994: 14)

The state of play in schools at the moment is thus one where girls and women are often placed in threatening and dangerous situations. In a Brisbane study of the attitudes of grade nine boys to forced sex (O'Connor 1992: 4): 'One in three boys believed it was "okay for a boy to hold a girl down and force her to have sexual intercourse" if she's led him on.' A South Australian study, *Sexual Harassment Between Students: A Report of Teachers' Attitudes and Experiences* (Morgan *et al.* 1988: 35) stated that the victims of sexual harassment were predominantly female (93.3 per cent) and the perpetrators male (88.1 per cent). The *Sticks and Stones* report (1994: 7) stated that: 'The Committee was told that one of the biggest unrecognized aspects of violence in schools was gender harassment. As a component of violence, it was widespread in schools and was largely unrecognized as a violent act.' The report contains further comment: 'Surveys indicated that violence based on gender, together with bullying, were the

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most systematic and constant forms of violence within schools. In the majority of cases men and boys were the perpetrators of violence based on gender and girls, women and boys their victims,' (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1994: 14).

The *Listening to Girls* report states that:

As a part of their day to day routine, girls in co-educational classrooms and schoolyards suffer sex-based harassment from boys and sometimes teachers. Girls accommodate this harassment differently. Some react with hostility and anger, but it causes many to be passive and docile, restricts their access to space, equipment and attention to the teachers, and undermines their feelings of safety, self-confidence and worth.

(Milligan *et al.* 1992: 5)

The report goes on to say that: 'Harassing behaviour springs from and reinforces the idea that boys are the powerful and esteemed sex and that girls' interests and concerns should come second' (Milligan *et al.* 1992: 10).

In these reports there is an awareness that the situation can be worse for female Aboriginal students or students with disabilities and that violence is often directed at gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

The wide-ranging report of Australian schools conducted by Collins *et al.* (1996), *Gender and School Education*, reinforced the conclusions reached above. For instance, a major finding of this study is that: 'Boys are the usual perpetrators of sex-based harassment of their own and of the other sex . . .' (1996: x). However, there is slightly more emphasis in this document on the role that boys play in oppressing each other. For example, they argue that:

This Study adds to the former evidence of harassment of women and girls, very strong evidence that harassment of boys happens just as frequently, and in some categories more frequently. The harassers of boys are largely other boys. Further, except in the case of a few girls (particularly at Year 6 level when girls are physically larger than boys), our qualitative data suggests that harassing behaviour by girls is often a way of taking part in a game against 'outsiders' controlled by dominant boys. Boys are usually the serious harassers of members of both sexes.

(Collins *et al.* 1996: 164)

It is important to recognize, as Collins *et al.* (1996) have done, that violence by males against males, which is often interpreted as boys being boys or as bullying, is indeed gender-based. Such violence is often a form of boundary policing, usually with a homophobic edge, which serves to both normalize particular constructions of masculinity while also determining where a boy is positioned within a hierarchical arrangement of masculinities.

The role of teachers is also an important consideration in understanding the processes within schools that either hinder or facilitate sex-based

harassment. The Morgan *et al.* (1988: 35) study indicates that it is not just students who are responsible for the levels of gendered violence in their schools. Teachers too must share some of this responsibility. Evidence gathered for the report demonstrates that teachers sometimes saw girls as being responsible for their own experiences of sexual harassment. They state that,

A disturbing number of teachers made comments to the effect that if the girl was a 'slut' then the boy's actions were not sexual harassment. Further comments indicated that some teachers wanted to know what sort of girl she was, before they could make a judgement about the incident being sexual harassment or sexual assault, or who should be seen responsible.

(Morgan *et al.* 1988: 48)

This is a finding supported by the work of Milligan *et al.* who note that:

Some staff and some students do not believe that the behaviours under discussion actually occur. Others recognize that the behaviours occur but see them as the natural order of things: 'Boys will be boys'. These people tend to see the issue as a kind of hoax being perpetrated by radical feminists.

(Milligan *et al.* 1992: 11)

Furthermore, as the *Sticks and Stones* report comments, teachers are sometimes the perpetrators of sexual harassment. There is other evidence which supports this assertion that girls and women are often also the recipients of unwanted, harassing and/or violent treatment at the hands of some male staff both in the United States (Sadker and Sadker 1994) and in the UK (Mahony 1989). At the same time it is important to recognize that women teachers are also often the recipients of sexually harassing behaviour from male students (see, for example, Askew and Ross 1988; Walkerdine 1989). It is no wonder that Jones (1985: 35) once stated: 'Some of us are now convinced that mixed-sex schools are dangerous places for girls and women and that they exist to further benefit boys as they establish their sexual domination over girls.' There are several issues that need to be picked up from this evidence about male behaviour in schools. The issues of male teachers, of boys' complicity in violence against girls and women, and violence against boys are all important ones and are taken up throughout this book.

In exploring the relationships between masculinity and violence this book draws heavily on interview data collected from two Queensland high schools where I was involved in implementing gender and violence programmes with boys. I remember quite vividly driving home to Brisbane from country Queensland one Sunday evening in the early part of 1996 when I was first starting to work with the boys in these two schools. During that drive home

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reports began to come over the radio about a mass shooting in Tasmania. A 29-year-old man had gone on a shooting rampage in the Tasmanian historical site of Port Arthur. It was later revealed that he had killed 35 people. The events which occurred at Port Arthur on that day dominated the following week's newspapers and television news programmes. For the first few days the media concentrated on the actual events, on the impact on victims' families and on building a profile of the alleged 'gunman'. The events of the day were recreated by eyewitnesses giving graphic descriptions of what they had seen and amateur home videos being given constant airplay. In order to understand what had prompted his 'breakdown' there were interviews with his neighbours and ex-girlfriends who attempted to provide insights into his 'crazed' behaviour; there were even discussions about his favourite videos. Eventually, as questions began to be asked about the availability of high-powered weapons in Australia, the media focus, along with that of the politicians, swung towards the area of gun law reform.

At this time I was working with a grade 11 (16–17-year-olds) and a grade 9 (13–14-year-olds) class in a Brisbane school, Tamville State High, and with a grade 12 (17–18-year-olds) class in a Sunshine Coast hinterland school, Mountainview State High. During the week that followed Port Arthur, the media and politicians seemed to take little note of the fact that the gunman was in fact that: *a gun man*. An article in Brisbane's *Courier Mail* on the Tuesday caught my eye. It was based on a league table style list of the worst massacres committed by a lone gunman (Bloody toll world's worst 1996). Pictures of these gunmen accompanied the article. That all these mass murderers were men was a fact that had been ignored by most of the newspapers I had read. I decided to use this list as a teaching resource for a lesson in one of the boys' programmes.

I began the teaching session by handing out a photocopy of the article from the newspaper and by playing a song called *Montreal December '89*, by Judy Small (1990), an Australian feminist folk singer. The song recounts conversations and speeches made at a memorial service for 14 women shot at the University of Montreal by a man who blamed feminists for his non-acceptance into engineering at the University (see Faludi 1992). In the song two questions are asked: 'Why is it always men who resort to the gun, the sword and the fist?' and 'What is it about men that makes them do the things they do?' The song also makes the statement that: 'I know there are men of conscience too, who would never lift a hand in anger, who reject the macho way, who hate male violence too.' The students wrote these phrases in their journals and we spent the next 70 minutes discussing some of the ways in which masculinity has come to be associated with violence, and also how it was possible to encourage boys to become 'men of conscience'. This book is an extended exploration of the issues raised for educators as a result of discussions such as this one.

Tamville and Mountainview snapshots

A snapshot of the schools and the programmes in each of these schools is provided here as an introduction to the empirical data used in this book. This brief look at the schools does not explore the complexities and interpersonal dynamics that formed a major part of the schools' cultures and were a contributing factor to how the schools developed their programmes. This is beyond the scope of the book (some excellent ethnographic studies examining the constructions of masculinities within schools include Willis 1977; Kessler *et al.* 1985; Walker 1988; Connell 1989; Mac an Ghaill 1994c; Sewell 1997). Rather, these snapshots serve as a touchstone, as backdrops or reminders of the sites where some of the masculinities considered here were constantly being reproduced, reinforced and contested.

The two schools are located in two very different areas of Queensland, Australia. Tamville State High School is situated in a middle-class area of Brisbane, the State's capital city. This large school of approximately 1500 students prides itself on its 'traditional' ethos. It is strict about uniforms and student behaviour. These qualities are significant in the school's 'marketing strategy'. A large percentage of the students at Tamville come from middle-class backgrounds. However, many of these are not Anglo-Celtic. In particular, the school has a large proportion of students from Vietnamese backgrounds. In addition, many families from nearby 'poorer' suburbs send their children to this school in the hope that they will receive a 'better' education than the one they would receive in their local State High School (one such school has recently closed due to a lack of enrolments).

Mountainview is a rural town situated on the State's Sunshine Coast hinterland. It is approximately two hours by road from Brisbane. Mountainview State High School is the only available high school for students residing in this locality. The small school population of approximately 400 students is largely Anglo-Celtic and the socioeconomic status of the students is varied. One interesting dynamic between students is founded on lifestyle politics. Mountainview is situated in a farming community, a community known for its conservative values. However, Mountainview also has a reputation for its alternative lifestyle communities. Students from these diverse backgrounds seem on the surface to put their differences aside. But, from the occasional comments, it is clear that for many students lifestyle is an issue. This was most evident on the issues of guns and homophobia, and in each instance the boys who held conservative viewpoints were the loudest in expressing their views.

In 1996 these two schools both sought to implement separate gender and violence programmes for boys and girls in their schools. These programmes had quite different origins. The Brisbane community group Men Against Sexual Assault (MASA) initiated Tamville's programme. The Brisbane City Council provided a grant to the group to implement gender and violence

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programmes in two schools. The coordinator of MASA sent letters around to numerous schools inviting them to apply to have the programme conducted in their school. The two schools which were selected, one of which was Tamville, were chosen on the basis of timetables and other practical constraints, along with the intention to obtain some sort of diversity between the two chosen schools. In each school two grade levels were to be taught, and there were to be separate boys' and girls' programmes.

The female staff for these programmes were largely drawn from or coordinated through community-based feminist organizations, such as the Domestic Violence Resource Centre and the Brisbane-based young women's organization, Zig Zag. In relation to the male staff, these consisted of two MASA workers, a young man recommended by a community organization (one of the intentions of the project was to not only work with school students, but to also provide some young people concerned about gender and violence issues with the necessary training required for them to engage in this form of community work) and myself.

Tamville was chosen due to the commitment that was shown both by a male deputy principal and the school's female Human Relationships Coordinator, Victoria. Victoria was concerned that the school subject Human Relationships Education (HRE) was losing ground in the curriculum and saw the invitation from MASA as a 'good opportunity' to raise consciousness around gender and violence issues. The school was also attractive in that it had 70-minute lessons, which the reference group felt were more conducive to the programme's implementation than the more common 40-minute lesson. However, the school's administration did not appear to be fully committed to the programme. There were some concerns raised by the principal that if the local community knew that the school was doing a programme looking at issues of gender and violence they would perceive that the school had a problem with this issue (this had some research consequences, see below, page 10). In addition, the size of Tamville meant that the students who received the programme were only a minority: approximately 40 students (in both boys' and girls' programmes) out of a student population of 1500.

The Mountainview programme grew out of a Queensland Department of Education gender equity initiative: the 'Inter-Agency Project'. The Department of Education's Gender Equity Unit was engaged in a project to examine how schools related to community agencies.¹ The Gender Equity Unit had done work with Mountainview previously and was keen to see how Mountainview was addressing issues of gender, and in particular masculinity, in their existing separate boys' and girls' camps. Thus, when Mountainview volunteered to be part of this project the Gender Equity Unit welcomed them.

The school's guidance officer, Sarah, was instrumental in the decision to be part of this project. Teachers, parents and some students were particularly

concerned about the 1996 group of year 12 boys. The whole year level was considered to be dysfunctional. There had been no school camp for this group of students because teachers were not prepared to go away with many of the students. Sarah was keen to address this behavioural issue in gender terms. For, as she comments:

I've always had . . . an interest in the construction of gender and how that impacts on behaviour, because I think that a lot of the behaviour management programmes that have been happening in schools just are very superficial without actually looking at the underlying reason why people act the way they do.

As a result of discussions with personnel from the Gender Equity Unit the school decided to pilot a gender and violence programme with students from grade 12 and grade eight. The original idea of focusing on grade 12 students was expanded to include those from grade eight as many teachers in the school considered the grade 12 boys to be 'a lost cause'. In this instance, because of the school's small size, and hence unlike Tamville, all of the year eight and all of the year 12 students were involved. The programmes were also to be implemented through the HRE curriculum. The grade eight programme was to be taught in the students' usual mixed HRE classes by their usual teacher. The grade 12 level was to be separated on the basis of sex, and the boys were to be further divided up according to their perceived potential negativity towards the programme. My involvement with the programmes was solely with the year 12 boys' programme, and with the group of boys who were considered to be more receptive to the issues. Apart from the smaller grade 12 boys' class, all of the classes were to be taught by teachers from the school. (I began my involvement as a researcher. However, this expanded as the programme began to take shape.) The smaller class of more recalcitrant boys was to be conducted by a community worker who was involved in private counselling as well as working in schools on gender and violence issues.

My involvement in the two programmes came about in an ad hoc manner. In relation to Tamville, I had been attending a conference/workshop day held by the Gender and Violence in Schools Network in Brisbane. As a result of discussions and participation in some of the activities I was invited by the coordinator of MASA to implement the Brisbane City Council funded school-based gender and violence project in one school. This led to my involvement in the project as both a member of the reference group and as the coordinator and designer of the boys' section of the programme at Tamville. Thus, prior to the implementation of the class-based activities I attended numerous meetings with other members of the project as we sought to identify the main objectives of the programme and to consider some sort of common approach to the issues. I also attended a parents' evening, and, with the female coordinator of Tamville's girls' programme, conducted

a teacher in-service on the issues we intended covering throughout the programme.

Some problems did occur in obtaining permission to use the Tamville programme as part of the research for this book. Permission was withheld for a number of weeks. The school's principal was concerned that my research would indicate that there was a problem at the school with gender and violence. However, after some discussion and after I had changed the name of the research element of the programme from 'Challenging Violence in Schools' to 'Promoting Supportive School Environments' permission was granted. This initial refusal does indicate the sensitivity that underpins much social justice work within schools. For instance I know of a Queensland school that was reluctant to tackle the issue of homophobia in case it was considered to be a gay and lesbian school (Mills 1996; also see Epstein 1994: 117; Boulden 1996).

Permission to use Mountainview as a research site was obtained without any difficulty. In this instance, members of the Queensland Education Department had informed me about a boys' project that was being planned in this school. My first contact with the school was met favourably by the school's guidance officer and my subsequent request to the principal to observe the implementation of the boys' programme was treated in much the same manner. I attended several meetings with a deputy principal, a guidance officer, a community worker, a senior policy officer from the Gender Equity Unit and a social work student attached to the Unit in the school term preceding the implementation of the programme. One of the meetings also involved parents. These meetings culminated in an in-service programme for all teachers who were to be involved in teaching the gender and violence programme in either their grade 12 or grade eight HRE classes. In the early stages of this programme I was working closely with the male teacher in the larger group. However, during the course of this programme, this group was also split into two, and I took on the responsibility for working with one of them.

In many ways the programmes in the two schools had similar aims: that is, to disrupt normalized masculinity's association with violence and to critically engage boys in schools with issues of gender and violence. However, the ways in which the programmes developed and were implemented were quite different.

The Tamville programmes were designed externally to the school and were implemented by 'outsiders' with very little input from the school, apart from teacher support in the classroom. In relation to the boys' section of the programme the four men involved in the teaching process had several meetings with each other and with the women who were implementing the girls' programmes to discuss the ways in which we would approach the eight-week programme. In these meetings there was a lot of sharing of ideas and resources. However, it was clear from the beginning that the programmes

in the two research schools would have quite different shapes. This was not perceived as a problem.

My original intention had been to observe these types of programme in action. However, my involvement in the project funded by Brisbane City Council enabled me to consider the ways in which I would implement such a programme for boys. In constructing the programme I drew on many of the excellent feminist and profeminist resources available (for example, Curriculum and Gender Equity Policy Unit 1995; Denborough 1995;² Friedman 1995; Salisbury and Jackson 1996) and avoided the more men's rights and 'therapeutic' type resources (Browne 1995; Fletcher 1995a, 1995b; for discussions of these men's politics see Kimmel 1996; Connell 1995a; Lingard and Douglas 1999). A unit outline was constructed on these ideas and was intended as a working document that would shape the various lessons presented throughout the programme. The boys in this school generally received the programme quite favourably, although the grade 11 group was probably the more receptive of the two classes.

The Mountainview programme was developed over time as a collective effort involving teachers, a guidance officer, a deputy principal, an Education Department gender equity policy officer and community workers (I'm casting myself as a community worker here, although my status as an ex-teacher now involved in teacher education and in research gave me a credibility I might not otherwise have had). The actual planning of the boys' lessons began at the day-long teacher in-service prepared by members of the Queensland Department of Education's Gender Equity Unit. In the final session of the day the male HRE teacher, Craig, the community worker, Richard, and I planned how we would approach the first few lessons. It was decided that we would adopt some of Richard's suggestions relating to issues of personal power for both groups of boys in these initial lessons. However, once we began implementing these lessons it became clear that the two different groups were responding quite differently to the one approach. In order to cater to this difference, Craig and I began to use the Tamville outline as our model. This too as an approach became redundant in the face of the boys' opposition to the programme. Our response to this crisis led to some positive outcomes. We attempted to encourage the boys to indicate to us how it would be more appropriate to deal with these issues in the school. A suggestion from the students was that grade 12 boys should be trained to work with grade eight boys on these issues. We ran with this idea and this group of boys was then split up into two groups, one of which would be trained to deliver such programmes, and the other which would continue with the existing programme.

The school administration was very supportive of the boys' suggestions. The boys were invited to attend the grade eight camp in the next term and asked to provide grade eight boys with some workshops on issues of gender and violence. The school principal approved a day's release from classes

for this group of boys and for Craig, and funded an in-service style programme for the boys. In consultation with Craig and the guidance officer, Sarah, I constructed a workshop that included various activities which the boys could implement with the grade eights and also provided them with a theoretical basis for the programme. This section was delivered by Julie, a principal policy officer with the Queensland Department of Education. Unfortunately, the grade eight camp was cancelled due to a lack of interest on the part of grade eight students. The grade 12 boys were presented with an opportunity to run the programme at school, but this obviously did not enthruse them to the degree that an outside venue might have done. The dents to the boys' enthusiasm did lead to a few problems with delivery and time management. However, it was hoped that the lessons of this programme would provide a basis for future years.

The events at Mountainview represent an opportunity that existed for some boys to engage in a politics which sought to challenge dominant constructions of masculinity. What is of interest here is how many boys who had demonstrated an antagonism towards the aims of the programme in one setting were able to support and, with a group of peers, organize and conduct a similarly orientated programme with younger boys in a different context. This occurrence demonstrates how identification with a particular masculinity politics is not necessarily fixed, but can be shifted and reconfigured in response to particular contexts and events. Tamville and Mountainview, through their boys' programmes, sought to provide boys with contexts and interventions that would encourage a rejection of versions of masculine identity which perpetrate and tolerate violence as an acceptable means of masculinized behaviour. However, it is important to realize that non-dominant masculinities may only be performed momentarily, and that such performances can often be emotionally difficult for boys to maintain (see Connell 1997: 73). Schools thus need to provide a range of support structures that enable students, both boys and girls, to experiment with non-traditional gender performances in a safe environment.

The focus of this book is on identifying the issues that need to be considered in any attempt to challenge the presence of boys' violences in schools. It stresses the need for those in schools concerned about such matters to make the concept of 'masculinity' problematic, especially those masculinized performances that are grounded in misogynist and homophobic rhetoric. There is also a broader intent within the book to promote more equitable gender relations. Normalized forms of masculinity, that is those forms of masculinity which are often assumed to be 'natural', have been implicated in oppressing girls/women and marginalized boys/men through a variety of means, for example, access to legitimated knowledges, distributions of income, public recognition, and exclusion from institutions of power. However, underpinning these forms of oppression has been an implied threat of violence. As Connell (1995a: 83) has commented in relation to the

advantages accruing to men from the existing structure of gender relations: ‘A structure of inequality on this scale, involving a massive dispossession of social resources, is hard to imagine without violence. It is, overwhelmingly, the dominant gender who hold and use the means of violence.’ Hence, while this book is about violence in schools, I hope that it will be part of a struggle for a more gender just society.

Organization of the book

The purpose of this book is to provide a lens through which to approach the development of strategies and programmes that seek to challenge the existence of gender-based violence in schools. Those who intend to engage in such projects have a long and difficult road ahead of them. There are no quick fix ready-made solutions that can be implemented in the same ways in different schools. Every school has its own context or ‘thisness’ which works to shape gender relations within its grounds. Hence, every school will need to work out for itself how best to tackle the issue of violence; this book seeks to assist teachers, students and others in schools to develop their own responses to challenging violence.

The first part of the book is concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of such work with boys (and men) in schools. The second part focuses more directly on schooling and in particular on curriculum and pedagogy issues in relation to problematizing dominant constructions of masculinity. The book does not provide a list of instructions on how schools should implement work that challenges the legitimacy of boys’ violent behaviours. Instead each chapter concludes with a series of activities and questions – referred to as ‘strategies for schools’ – which a research group, or other interested people, within a school can use in order to stimulate discussion among staff and students or to develop their own strategies appropriate to their own schools. The conclusion provides some principles that need to be taken into account when undertaking anti-violence work in schools.

Chapter 1 of the book explores some of the ways in which violence has become associated with a ‘normalized’ masculinity. There is a particular focus here on the relationships of dominant forms of masculinity with sport and work, and with the ways in which boy’s and men’s identities are entwined with their abilities to demonstrate their power over girls and women and also over other boys and men. In order to unshackle violent behaviours from ‘normal’ ways of being a boy, educators will need to consider ways in which many of the practices considered in this chapter can be demasculinized.

Chapter 2 takes up this theme by exploring the notion of violence as masculine and masculinity as violent. It argues that masculinity has had violence done to it by processes which suggest that there is only one true way of being male. It thus explores the ways in which different masculinities

are organized in relation to each other. The chapter suggests that decreasing violent behaviours in schools will require the expansion of the range of ways in which it is acceptable to be a boy. This will mean breaking down the notion that all boys are the same, and focusing on and valuing different non-violent ways of being a boy.

Chapter 3 explores curriculum issues with a focus on one of the more common means by which gender and violence issues are tackled in schools, that is through special programmes for boys. It argues that this is perhaps not the most effective means by which boys' behaviours can be challenged. However, such an approach is often the most strategic way of getting such issues onto the agenda within schools. This chapter provides an account of how one school's programme for boys implemented through a marginalized area of the curriculum served as a means by which this concern could be taken into other areas of the school.

Chapter 4 looks at some key pedagogical concerns in working with boys on masculinity issues. There is a focus here on the popular topic of male teachers and also on the advantages and disadvantages of having people external to the school working with boys on such issues. There is also some consideration given to the notion of 'empowerment'. Many boys in schools face a paradoxical situation. On the one hand they do not feel very powerful while on the other hand their relationships often involve them attempting to exert power over other students and sometimes teachers. This means that simplistic notions of 'empowering' boys need to be problematized. The suggestion here is that teachers must give some thought to ways of developing respectful pedagogies for working with boys which take this paradox into account.

The book concludes (Chapter 5) by presenting some key principles that educators need to take into consideration in their development of work on gender and violence issues with boys in schools. This is not a blueprint for change. There is sometimes a tendency within education to look for simple solutions to complex problems. Such solutions do not exist. Teachers, and others in schools, will need to give consideration to their local context and to negotiate and plan with their local communities appropriate responses to the issues of gender and violence in their schools. The principles offered in this concluding chapter represent a framework within which such negotiations and plannings can take place.

Throughout the book interview data collected from Tamville and Mountainview State High Schools are used to inform the arguments contained in each chapter. At Tamville, interviews were conducted with grade 11 and grade nine boys who had been part of the programme; the HRE coordinator responsible for initiating the programme's implementation and who had sat in on some grade 11 lessons; a male teacher, the science head of department, who had sat in on the grade nine programme; and the grade nine's usual female HRE and science teacher who had been with the girls'

programme. At Mountainview, interviews were conducted with grade 12 boys, these boys tended to be those who were most supportive of the programme's aims; the school's female guidance officer; a female deputy principal who had been very supportive of the programme and who had taken a grade 12 girls' group; and the male community worker implementing the programme with the smaller group of boys. These interviews were supplemented by an interview with a Department of Education Gender Equity policy officer who had worked closely with Mountainview High School in order to get their programme off the ground.

A note on men and feminism

This book, in taking as its specific focus men's and boys' violence, draws heavily on feminist theory for it has been feminists who have been central to problematizing dominant constructions of masculinity and their relationship to violence. For example, feminists have been able to identify rape, domestic violence, war, ecological disasters and poverty as consequences of masculinized gender performances (see, for example, Greer 1971; Brownmiller 1976; Daly 1978; Ward 1984; Reardon 1985; Woodhull 1988; Scutt 1990; Bart and Moran 1993; Polk 1994). This is thus a profeminist book. A profeminist masculinity politics is representative of what Connell (1995a: 220–4) has referred to as an 'exit politics'. Such a politics encourages men to 'exit' from those politics that endorse men's privileged positioning within existing gendered relations. It is a politics that seeks to address matters of gender justice from a masculine perspective, which treats feminism as an ally rather than as an adversary. Men who identify with this politics recognize that they approach matters of gender justice from a privileged position; and thus seek points of 'exit' for themselves and other men from privileged positions within existing gendered relations of power. Men's adoption of feminist politics is of course not unproblematic.

There has long been an understandable suspicion by feminists of men's use of feminism (Braidotti 1987; Jardine 1987; Morris 1987; Shoalwater 1987; Cannan and Griffin 1990; Hanmer 1990; see also Kimmel 1998). Inevitable questions include: 'What's in it for them?'; 'Why would a man voluntarily give up his privileged positioning within the existing gender order?'; 'Does this represent a colonization of feminist theory?'; 'Why now?'; 'How will the complexities within feminisms be represented?' The use of feminism in a text such as this one requires that these issues be addressed.

Clearly there are some personal rewards associated with the construction of a profeminist text, some of which do reinforce an individual 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 1994, 1995a, b), for example, financial gain and academic recognition. However, other issues also motivate some men's support of feminism in their work and personal lives. I find many of those suggested

by Bob Connell (1987: xiii) to be illuminative about some men's support for feminism. These include: that even those who benefit from an unjust system, such as men, can recognize the oppressiveness of that system; that gender injustices affect women who men are close to and thus some men have a 'relational interest' (Connell 1994, 1995b: 149) in tackling gender injustices; that some heterosexual men are also injured by the present system; that the inevitability of changes in gender relations means that some men will seek new ways of relating to women; and that men like all human beings have the capacity to develop the abilities to care for others. I would like to briefly comment on two of those reasons, which Connell elaborates on elsewhere (1994, 1995b): that some heterosexual men are oppressed by hegemonic masculinities and that most men have 'relational interests' with particular women, such as daughters, mothers, lovers and sisters. These are important points. However, they can also be problematic.

The first point, that dominant masculinizing processes hurt men and boys too, may be used to legitimate the politics of masculinity therapy, which often construct men as victims. This lets men off the hook. It is important to recognize, as Connell does, that what he calls the patriarchal dividend is distributed, admittedly in different proportions, to most men. The reality that the current gender arrangements are ones that serve the interests of the social group men needs to be kept in focus in any discussion of men's suffering or pain resulting from the pressures exerted by dominant masculinizing processes. Furthermore, it ought to be recognized that the sufferings some men experience in relation to masculinizing processes are brought about as a consequence of the maintenance of an unjust gender order that privileges the interests of the social group men and boys over that of women and girls. Thus, while the issue of men's and boys' pain is one that needs to be addressed when working with boys in schools, feminist concerns about men making this a focus of their work also need to be taken into account (see, for example, Hagan 1992). Being open to feminist criticisms and responding to these criticisms in ways that do not construct men and boys as the victims of feminism is a crucial aspect of a profeminist politics. However, in encouraging boys to engage in a positive manner with feminism it is important to acknowledge, as Kimmel (1998: 59) does, that 'men should want to support feminist reforms: not only because of an ethical imperative – of course it is right and just – but also because men will live happier and healthier lives, with better relations with the women, men, and children in their lives if they do.'

Connell's second point about 'relational interests' has the potential to lapse into familiar patterns of paternalism where men seek to provide protection to 'their' women from other men, that is a form of 'white knightist' masculinity politics. (This was clearly the case for some of the boys who were interviewed for this book.) There is also the tendency, which is often well meaning, for some men to see some women, and in particular their

daughters, as being different from other women and as deserving of special treatment as a sort of 'honorary man' (see Bordo 1998). This individualizing of women will serve to negate the social and political dimensions of injustices against women. On the point of men's 'relational interests', perhaps, more significantly for the cultivation of a profeminist politics among some men has been their involvement with feminist women. Many profeminist men have utilized the knowledge gained from these contacts to provide a greater understanding of their own lives and to shape their struggles against injustices in a number of areas, not only in relation to gender. There are perhaps too many complexities involved in the acquisition of a politics to understand fully how any one person arrives at their particular position. The important point is that, as Connell (1994: 5, original emphasis) has commented: 'Support for women's emancipation is always a *possible* stance for men.'

Men's utilization of feminist theory, however, needs to be done in a respectful way. This will mean men acknowledging the privileges that become automatically theirs as a 'birth right' and how this 'birth right' has been integral to the oppression of a great many people. Furthermore, it will entail an active rejection of such privilege (although bearing in mind that despite this rejection, privileges will remain until such time as the existing gender order is reconfigured). This is not a Utopian fantasy. Challenging one's own privilege does have a history. Some white people have engaged in struggles against racial injustices; some straights have supported gay and lesbian liberation; some middle-class people have argued against economic and social inequities that advantage their class over those from lower socio-economic backgrounds; and some men have supported feminist struggles. A commitment to social justice can be a powerful motivating factor in cases of people engaging in struggles against their own interests.

There are of course difficult issues in relation to men engaging with feminist debates. A number of the feminist contributors to *Men in Feminism* (Jardine and Smith 1987) took exception to the term *in*. 'What do men think they are doing *in feminism*?' a number of the contributors asked (Braidotti 1987; Jardine 1987; Morris 1987). This is a valid question. There are a number of debates between feminists and within feminism which are not a place for men, for example, the debates over the extent to which women are made victims by their reporting of sexual harassment. It seems to me that a respectful relationship to feminism in such cases would see men working against the existence of sexual harassment and supporting women in their choices, rather than making suggestions about what women should or should not do. However, there are times when men using feminist theory have to make decisions regarding conflicting viewpoints within feminism.

Feminism is not a unitary body of theory. Consequently, there are often divisions and tensions within feminism. Profeminist men often have to make decisions about which feminisms to be 'pro' in relation to particular issues

(see Flood 1997a; Lingard and Douglas 1998 for a discussion of some of the most common issues surrounding profeminist politics). This is particularly the case in this book in relation to masculinity and violence. There are a number of clear differences between the writings of feminists such as Dworkin (1981), Brownmiller (1976) and Griffin (1979) and those of feminists such as Segal (1990), Marcus (1992) and Woodhull (1988) on this issue. In this book, I have found the latter group's analyses of this issue to be more useful for disrupting connections between masculinity and violence. However, while seeing the arguments of the former group, often described as radical feminists, as problematic, I acknowledge their work as having been critical to the placing of men's violence on the political and social agenda.

Throughout this book I have used those feminist theories which seem best to shed light on some of the ways in which schools can engage with the problem of boys and violence. These have been the theories which would seem to indicate that there is a potential for boys and men to change in ways that are less oppressive to women. Such a hope is often contained within the writings and practices of feminists (see, for example, Hagan 1998). For as Jane Kenway (1996: 447) states: '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.' This book seeks to support and contribute to such a feminist struggle by looking at the ways in which boys in schools can be encouraged to challenge and reject those masculinizing processes that legitimate men's and boys' uses of violence, and perhaps a little more ambitiously, to encourage boys to understand the ways in which violence has been an integral feature of maintaining an unjust gender order.

Notes

- 1 In 1997 the Queensland Department of Education was renamed with the more corporate title of 'Education Queensland'. In that same year the Gender Equity Unit was 'downsized' and subsumed under the more generic 'Equity Unit'. However, at the time of the school research the former titles were being used and are thus the ones that are employed here in relation to these materials.
- 2 A later edition of this article is published in McLean, Carey and White (1996), the 1995 version is used throughout this book.