

The Academic Outcomes of Boys An Argument for a Pluralist Approach

Gregory IB Woodrow
 Griffith University

Abstract. The conversation surrounding the underperformance of boys and the issues they face have occupied the popular press and academic articles for some years (see Biddulph 1998, DiPrete and Buchmann 2013 Doyle 2010 and Epstein 1998). Much of this conversation continues to be polarised along gender lines, driven by those within the debate who have opposing interpretations of the issue of boys' comparative academic performance in relation to girls. I will discuss the politics of these conflicting interpretations, as expressed by pro and post feminism, to highlight the contrast within this conversation. Connell (2011) believes that the effect of fragmenting the debate into parallel gender policies is a weakening of the equality rationale of the original policy. The relational character of gender is lost by following parallel policies which results in more gender segregation at a time when less is needed.

I will argue that the rhetoric espoused by authors from different positions in the debate has done little to unfold the real issues around the underperformance of boys. The rhetorical elements that distract reasoned debate are highlighted by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) who legitimately ask; "Which boys are we talking about here?". Whilst the debate is distracted by a competing victims' mentality, any meaningful discussion around the issues of boys or girls will stall. One might argue that whilst the focus remains on the battle, the war will never be won.

Whilst it is not my intention to present a defined resolution to this dilemma, I will offer an argument against reductionism in favour of a pluralist approach (see Yeatman 1994 and Walby 1992). The debate will move forward, in a mutually beneficial way, when opposing views are brought together through an understanding that conversations around boys and girls need to articulate them as equal and interdependent stakeholders within their educational worlds.

Introduction

Given the discussion I am about to construct around the position that boys now find themselves within the educational landscape, I wish to clarify with the reader my position within this debate by offering a philosophical framework around which I will base my argument. Given the inherent social nature of schools and the constant gendered interplay between pupils and staff coupled with ~~and~~ my belief that all parties within this debate have a vested interest in addressing the issues around boys' attainment, I am drawn to the relevance of the pluralist argument within postfeminist theory or third wave feminism as Munford and Waters (2013) would suggest. Brooks (1997) elaborates on the philosophy of postfeminism by defining it as a 'conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism,

poststructuralism and postcolonialism'. Yeatman (1994) elaborates further by adding that postfeminism is: 'a politic representing a move away from reductionism to pluralism and difference reflecting on its position in relation to other philosophical and political movements demanding similar change'.

Walby (1992) suggests that as postmodernism is engaged with the principles of modernism, so too one might suggest postfeminism is positively and productively engaged with patriarchy in a way seldom seen amongst pro-feminist writers (see Smith 2013) and in doing so conceptualises power as highly dispersed rather than concentrated in identifiable places or groups. Barrett and Phillips (1992) build on Walby's argument of the dispersion of power by noting postmodernism's emphasis on difference rather than equality as the central differentiation between its theory and other social theories including pro-feminism which Carby (1982) and Hooks (1984) argue is rooted in a reductionist theory that historically focused on a select group of white, heterosexual, middle class women. Linda Nicholson (1990) moves this point forward by commenting that from the 1960s to the mid- 1980s, feminist theory exhibited a recurrent pattern; its analysis tended to reflect the viewpoints of white, middle-class women of North America and Western Europe. The irony was that one of the powerful arguments feminist scholars were making was the limitation of scholarship that falsely universalised on the basis of limited perspectives. Moreover, feminists were becoming increasingly aware that a problem with existing scholarship was not only that it left out women's voices, but also the voices of many other social groups. One may argue that the voices of men were excluded from this scholarship. A growing awareness of the oppressive nature of this traditional reductionist scholarship began to gather pace throughout the 1990s which took issue with the manner in which feminism had dictated to women what they should think and how they should act.

Given the philosophical framework underpinning post-feminism, one might argue that the aforementioned authors' philosophical positioning within postfeminism and its theory of anti-reductionism, pro-pluralism and the dispersion of power provides a philosophical framework that is best positioned to provide equality through an appreciation of difference across different groups. It may also be argued that the competing victims' mentality within the debate (see Mackey and Coney, 2000) often seen through pro and post-feminist conversations is stalling the type of pluralist, open debate that is required to strike some balance between the political positioning that conflicting sides have taken. For example, Smith's (2013) reductionist beliefs are borne out in her pro-feminist beliefs; 'Yes, I'm one of those feminists who doesn't want men in feminism, the type who doesn't think men can be feminists. I'm quite happy to talk with you, work with you, work in partnership with or alongside you, even count a select bunch of you amongst my friends, but call you feminists . . . nah!' The counter pluralist argument is put forward by La Paglia (2013): 'We often think of feminism as purely a women's movement, based on the inclusion of women and the exclusion of men. The phenomena of "Sisterhood" itself, advocating for the solidarity of all women, implies the existence of a movement of women, standing up for women and challenging social institutions that support men. While I have no doubt sisterhood is important, I have some reservations about the idea that feminism will achieve success through the exclusion of men'.

The disparity in academic outcomes between boys and girls at all levels of education has been apparent for some years. Reasons for this divide have been debated by various academics and within the popular press both of whom have offered a variety of resolutions needed to address the concern (see Lingard and Douglas [1999] and Martino and Meyenn [2001]). To the detriment of both boys and girls, the debate surrounding the underperformance of boys has too often been polarised around gender or politics or both and has in part been driven by the psychology of a competing victims' mentality (see Cox, 1996). The polarisation of this debate has resulted in broad, rhetorical statements articulated in a way that aims to reinforce the

argument in line with whichever political view the author favours. These statements have done little to clear a path along which reasoned, informed debate may travel. I will use my first section 'Clarifying the Rhetoric: Clarifying the Issue of Boys' Underperformance' to explore this rhetoric and in doing so set the stage for what I plan to be an unbiased, objective evaluation of the reasons behind boys' underperformance.

The debate has involved reinscribing binary oppositions between boys and girls, femininity and masculinity, where any success ascribed to one gender is seen to be at the expense of the other. The subsequent polarisation has done little to advance the cause of addressing the needs of boys and in some aspects the needs of girls who are equal stakeholders in this complex landscape. The result of the rhetoric espoused by the popular media and by right wing advocates within women's and men's movements alike, is a fundamental biological determinism and competing victims' syndrome which sets the interests of one group against the interests of the other at a time when clear objective debate is needed (see Martino and Meyenn, 2001). With advocates from both sides of the debate driving their own politic through a competing victims' narrative, what has evolved is a backlash arm-wrestle for ascendancy which has made any meaningful progress difficult to negotiate (see Faludi, 1991 and 2006 and French 1992). Writing on the National Organisation for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) website, pro-feminist, Brian Klocke (2014) argues that "Although I believe that men can be pro-feminist and anti-sexist, I do not believe we can be feminists in the strictest sense of the word. Men, in this patriarchal system, cannot remove themselves from their power and privilege in relation to women. To be a feminist one must be a member of the targeted group (i.e a woman) not only as a matter of classification but as having one's directly-lived experience inform one's theory." Whilst this backlash arm wrestle continues, one may argue the emphasis will continue to focus on the battle rather than the victory with boys and girls featuring equally amongst the casualties.

The over-emphasis of the central position of the female in gender equity policy has created a division on both sides of the debate which has resulted in an opportunity for 'femocrats' (see Lingard and Douglas, 1999) to enter the debate through the politicisation of education departments which has served to further polarise the debate. This move has provided impetus for authors (see Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, Faludi 1992 and French 1992) who have been given space and legitimacy within which to promote their notion of girls as the true victims. Despite the evidence that would suggest girls are doing better than boys across all levels of education, some authors continue to espouse the belief that if there is any disadvantaged position that boys and men find themselves in, it is the currency that needs to be paid for the superiority they hold in society (see McLean 1996). Connell (1995) touches on this principle through his concept of hegemonic masculinity. McLean writes; 'It is meaningless to argue that men are oppressed on the grounds of their gender. It is perfectly legitimate to argue that men 'suffer' as a result of conforming to gender stereotypes, as long as it is also recognised that this suffering contributes to the maintenance of systems that actually oppress others' (McLean, 1996). This quid quo pro argument attempts to normalise the underperformance of boys and the disparity in academic outcomes because they recoup when they enter the workforce. If there is a pendulum bias to one pole within the workforce, I do not believe education should be seen as a site for the justification of the opposing pole.

As a recognised leader within the gender debate, Connell (2011) adds that by fragmenting the debate into parallel policies for men and women and boys and girls, he acknowledges a wider scope of gender issues that weakens the equality rationale of the original policy. His argument forgets the relational character of gender and in doing so tends to redefine women and men or girls and boys simply as different market segments to serve some purpose which does little more than promote more gender segregation at a time when less is needed. Connell's notion of defining boys and girls into Epstein (1998) and Kenway (1995) reflect on these separate issues

in a rather derisory and off-hand way. The authors suggest the underperformance of boys may be related to three dominant 'poor boys' discourses, these being single (fatherless) families, female dominated primary schooling and feminism. Epstein polarises the debate further by suggesting; 'if it is not women teachers, it is mothers, if not mothers, it is feminists; most often it is a combination'. Ironically, it is a combination of these factors that I have used to underpin this article. Devaluing the narrative in this manner seeks through negation or denial to discredit the argument, and in acting to inhibit support from others. Cohen (1981) comments on this form of political control of truth which operates at a number of levels and through a range of mechanisms. Another semantic framework through which one discourse or belief attempts to neutralise the power of alternative narratives through the employment of interpretive denials, discretisation or the acknowledgement of the existence of an alternative argument.

The issues which inhibit boys from competing on an equal footing with girls are broad, complex and in some cases interlinked and need to be considered in total if the disparity in academic outcomes is to be addressed. Arnot, David and Weiner (1996) argue this point by proposing that any single issue lacks sufficient gravity to create the disparity we currently see between boys and girls. Rather, just as the perfect storm required a variety of factors to come together at a particular time to create the most destructive storm to hit the eastern seaboard of North America, so too have key issues around gender come together at the same time to create the divide in the academic outcomes that we are currently witnessing.

It may be argued that 1960s feminism provided the initial momentum which has seen the academic results of girls pass boys in most subjects at all levels of schooling for the first time. This feminism has also offered a new and inspiring set of role models for girls (see Nicholson, 1990). In this respect boys have been left behind. They still aspire to many of the same character traits amongst their role models and the same employment opportunities that their fathers aspired to. Despite those role models that encourage girls to be strong and assertive, stereotypically seen as traits for boys and men to aspire to, there are too few role models who encourage boys or men to be as compassionate as they are competent or as able to express themselves emotionally as they are to express themselves professionally. Feminism has provided girls with the confidence to play the part of a tomboy at a time that it is still unacceptable in mainstream masculine culture to be seen as effeminate. Feminism has also challenged the rules of conduct and girls' aspiration in schools and within the workplace with laws that prevent and punish sexual harassment. Subtle and overt forms of discrimination against girls whose place was once seen as within the home economics classroom have been challenged which now allow them to sit equally and comfortably in maths or physics classrooms. Whilst this feminism has offered a blueprint for a new outlook and aspiration for girls, the opportunity has passed by many boys who still see their rightful place within a narrow band of stereotypical subjects and men who aspire to an equally narrow range of professions. In this respect, the gains that have been achieved for girls and women have shifted the balance of power in many male dominated fields but have failed to create the same shift for boys and men. This shift has challenged hegemonic masculinity (see Connell, 1995) and it is, therefore, not surprising that feminists have been blamed for taking opportunities away from men and boys in trying to present alternative models of masculinity that have mutual benefit to boys and girls and men and women. There remains those whose mindset has not made this shift (see Gurian 1996 and 1998 and Biddulph 1998) who continue to attribute laddish anti-social behaviour as simply 'boys being boys'. In doing so these apologists promote a particular version of masculinity which is treated unproblematically as an effect of biological sex differences which fails to appreciate there are alternatives to this culture and it is these alternatives which can provide the impetus to challenge the underperformance of boys. Connell (1995) takes this point forward by suggesting that masculinity should be conceptualised in terms of relationships, that different masculinities are constructed in relation to other masculinities and to femininities through the structure of gender relations - a pluralist

approach to gender relationships. Thorne (1993) elaborates on this proposal by suggesting a move away from a reductionist role based on gender. Masculinities need to be conceptualised in relation to their class, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Furthermore, Brittan (1989) argues that masculinity should not have a one-dimensional identity; rather it should embody multiple dimensions, for example white, working class gay masculinity alongside Asian, middleclass heterosexuality.

The thrust of this paper will argue for a politics of alliance between men and feminism which may be achieved either through the acceptance of a strategic essentialism which both groups are able to present themselves through the acceptance of a pluralism which allows both sides to agree to multiple, even contradictory strategies to be adapted and maintained as possible courses of action. Connell (1995) follows this pluralist notion by proposing not so much a parallel men's movement to counter feminism, but rather an alliance of politics. Any project with the aim of developing a mutual benefit through social justice will depend largely on the overlapping of interests between groups rather than the mobilisation of one group's ideas around its primary interest at the exclusion of the interests of the other group. I hope to play some small part in demystifying the debate which is too often driven by emotive rhetoric, with parties on both sides acting to defend their position within the gender landscape and seeking out opportunities to discredit the alternative view whilst endeavouring to cement their position. What I hope to bring to this paper is the merits of a pluralist approach driven by a belief that headway can be made for boys that will not compromise girls' attainment through a conversation which provides space for the views of both sides. Whilst Lingard and Douglas (1999) present recuperative masculinity strategies as a possible solution and Martino and Meyenn (2001) propose physical education and school sport as a counterbalance to be used to connect constructively with current concerns about boys, it is not my intention to set out a model or definitive answer as to how the current disparity in academic outcomes between boys and girls may be addressed.

Working on this paper from London has drawn me to this location for much of my work. However, as the issues surrounding boy's underperformance is world-wide, I have consciously drawn in references for this topic from The United States and Australia in an attempt to provide the reader with a more balanced international perspective on the issues surrounding the underperformance of boys. I hope this paper might in some way add to the debate for continuing the emotive and sensitive discussion of theory, political and cultural change and education reform that will ultimately lead to the benefit of boys and girls who deserve equal access to the curriculum and an equal footing in the educational sphere.

Challenging the Rhetoric: Clarifying the Issue of Boys Underperformance

It is often said the devil is in the detail, it is also often reported that boys are underperforming girls, the inference being that all boys are underperforming all girls with no consideration given to the variety of characteristics surrounding these 'boys', whether they are in independent or government schools, be it their age, their socio-economic background or their race. Political rhetoric has deflected the true statistics behind the misinformation that espouses the viewpoint that boys are underperforming girls with no consideration being given to the variety of characteristics surrounding who these boys and girls might be. The rhetoric which underpins these oft reported statements is driven by those within the debate who are motivated by presenting a view that reinforces their politic and it does little to promote informed, objective debate of a pluralist nature. To reinforce this position, I will use this section to unfold the populist statements which have distracted the reader from the fuller picture of boys' relative underperformance.

The complexities of boys' performance in school has been documented for some years (see Teese 1995, Yates 1997, Murphy and Elwood 1998, Raphael Reed 1998 and Arnot 1999). What these researchers, amongst others, have shown is that boys are disproportionately represented amongst the lowest achievers but also amongst a small band within the highest of the high achievers. The least differences in academic attainment occur amongst the highest socio-economic groups; the greatest difference is noted amongst the lowest socio-economic groups and herein lies one anomaly that challenges the generic statement of boys underperforming girls. Gilbourne (1997) also points out that the inequalities generated by race are greater than those generated by gender. Lu (2014) supports this position by adding that relative disadvantage could accumulate and become significant when a student experiences multiple aspects of disadvantage. Many leading British independent schools have embarked on school partnerships and the sponsorship of academies to support underperforming maintained or government schools in low socio-economic areas. These independent schools offer financial and teaching support through sharing professional development opportunities, best teaching practice and the use of a wide range of their facilities. The notion of these wealthy independent schools, which include Eton and Wellington College, supporting underperforming schools in the maintained sector is tangible proof of the divide between the resources at the disposal of independent schools and those within the maintained sector. Whilst it is true to suggest these independent schools support underperforming schools in part to justify their charitable status for taxation purposes, it is equally true to suggest that the resources independent schools have at their disposal is far beyond the reach of those maintained schools in low socio-economic areas which they have chosen to sponsor.

Whilst I have used my *Introduction* to highlight the complexities that lie behind the reasons for the academic outcomes of boys and girls, I will use this section to clarify the issue of this disparity in outcomes and refer to Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) who legitimately ask; "Which boys are we talking about here?". One does not need to conduct too much research to come across blanket statements that point to the increasing discrepancy between the academic outcomes of boys and girls, the inference being that all boys are falling behind all girls, in all subjects, at all year levels and in all levels of education. However, when one takes a deeper view of the situation, it is not as clear cut as one might be led to believe. Gender aside, geography, ethnicity and a raft of socio-economic factors all play a role in differentiating outcomes and these need to be considered before generalised statements are made. What is true is that the academic outcomes for girls and boys have shifted in recent years and this has been noted in most Western democracies including the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. The shift in academic outcomes is not as straight forward as one might hope and it would be fair to suggest the devil is in the detail. To clarify this point and to give weight to the complexity of the issue, I would refer to a UK report by CentreForum, an independent think tank which develops evidence-based research to influence both national debate and policy making.

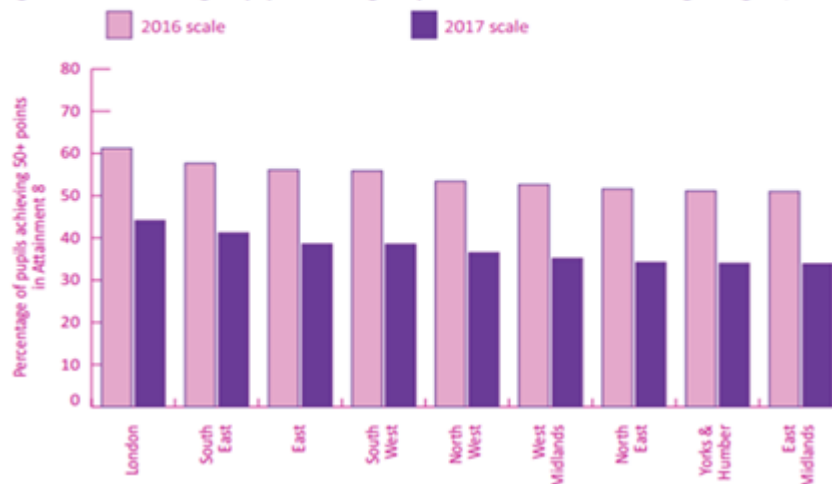
In January 2016, CentreForum set out what it considered to be world-class standards in education (for full details on the assessment criteria, see CentreForum Report, 2016). The English Report highlighted a stark geographical differential in achievement levels between pupils with 40% of schools in the lower socio-economic areas of the East Midlands and 30% in Yorkshire and the Humber failing to get 25% or more of their pupils to the proposed standard. In contrast, the more affluent areas of London had fewer than 10% of schools fail to meet the same benchmark with 61.2% of pupils achieving CentreForum's benchmark compared with 55.4% in Yorkshire and the Humber. To reinforce the socio-economic bias in academic results, the Report found London boroughs dominated their list of the 20 highest performing authorities whilst 25% of the lowest 20 performing authorities were found in Yorkshire and the Humber. The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in 2015 ranged from 71.9% in the South East to 64.0% in the North East. Based on performance on both

attainment and progress indicators, the highest performing local authorities at Key Stage 4 are in the affluent areas of Barnet, Kingston upon Thames, and Westminster, the poorest performing are Knowsley, Blackpool, Stoke-on-Trent, and Doncaster, all low socio-economic authorities.

Current regional performance

London outperforms all other regions against our secondary benchmark. In 2015, 44.1 per cent of pupils in London achieved 50 points or higher on the 2017 points scale, compared to the national average of 38.0 per cent.

Figure 1.6: Percentage of pupils achieving 50+ points in Attainment 8 across English regions, 2015



These results show a clear socio-economic and geographic divide, with the highest performing regions located in the more affluent areas of the south of England and the lowest performing regions located in the poorer regions in the North. The Report also found pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) are less affected by poverty which reinforces the socio-economic perspective of academic performance (Taken from CentreForum Report, 2016).

Figure 1.6 shown above highlights London's position as the highest performing region at both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 2, in terms of both attainment and progress. Gillborne (1997) takes this argument forward in a study he conducted on the intersection between race and ethnicity with gender and social class in terms of exam results at 16. Gillbourne's study found that irrespective of gender, colour or ethnicity, the higher social class of the pupil the higher their performance.

The disparity in academic outcomes by regions is compounded by the skewed allocation of government funding to these regions. According to Department for Education funding statistics (2016) London schools received £8,587 per pupil in the 2015/2016 academic year. Schools in York received less than half that amount at £4,202 per pupil during the same school year. In the 2003 school year, the two regions of England with the lowest GCSE attainments were London and Yorkshire. The capital, which has the benefit of the devolved Greater London Assembly (GLA), was able to address the issue through instigating the London Challenge, an initiative offering increased funding, specialised training for teachers and the sharing of best practice into underperforming schools in their region. In 2014 and 2015 the London region returned the highest GCSE results in the country while Yorkshire and the North-East continued to return the worst GCSE results. The GLA holds the London Mayor and Mayoral advisers to account by publicly examining policies, funding and programmes through committee meetings, plenary sessions, site visits and investigations. The Mayor is expected to respond to any formal recommendation made by the Assembly and this may include the

allocation or reallocation of funding aimed at addressing any disparity in academic outcomes across boroughs within the Greater London boundary. Regional political parties such as the North-East Party and the Yorkshire Party have called for an end to such inequality of funding. Chris Whitwood (Deputy Leader of the Yorkshire Party [2016]) has called for an end to the skewed allocation of funding which benefits London pupils in a way that regional pupils are not benefited. Whitwood has called for a more equitable model that will 'aid in addressing the underachievement of white, working class boys' in his electorate.

The correlation between socio-economics, race and disadvantage and academic underperformance is a consistent factor that is not restricted to the UK alone. (Aud et al., 2011) reports on the significant disparity in letter recognition disparity between differing socio-economic bands of American children at the same age ranging from 10% to 13% differentiation. Proficiency in recognising numbers and shapes also displays a noticeable disparity, in some cases up to 40%, between ethnic and racial minority groups and White and Asian groups. In mathematics achievement, 8% - 9% of fourth grade White and Asian children scored at the below basic proficiency levels, but 29% to 36% of African American, Latino, and Native Indian children scored below basic proficiency. It is noted that the pattern of disparities has been consistent over the last two decades and the patterns are similar across reading and mathematics for Grades 4, 8 and 12. On Advanced Placement (AP) tests, where a score of 3 or above is considered 'successful,' 62 - 64% of White and Asian students' scores met this criteria, 43% of Latino and Native American students and 26% of African American students were considered successful. Graduation rates also show a marked differential; 91.3% of Asian students, 80.3% of White students graduated from high school at a time when 60% to 63% of the Latino, Native American and African American groups graduated. Dropout percentages favour Latino and Native American children at approximately 17% at a time when the dropout rates for White and Asian pupils at the same age is 5.3% - 6.1% (NAEP, 2011).

Added into this American research on the socio-economic disparities in academic achievement and high school dropout rates, is work undertaken by Harvard economist Richard Murnane (2015) who reports that it is now widely acknowledged in the United States that girls are better than boys at school. Not only do girls achieve better grades than their male counterparts, they are excluded, suspended and expelled less from school have been more likely over the past forty years to earn high school and college diplomas. The high school graduation rate for males has stagnated around 81% since the 1970s while at the same time the percentage of girls graduating has risen slowly to a current rate of 87%. I believe there is significant relevance in the 1970 date. I have mentioned previously the impact that the women's movement has had on refocusing attention and resources into girl's education. The women's movement has undertaken an admirable role in offering girls opportunities at all levels of education that their mothers did not have and the consequences of this refocus can be seen in the aftermath of the 1960s and 1970s feminist movement.

In support of the socioeconomic factors offered by Aud (2011) Murnane's research also highlights the greatest differential in academic results being among the most disadvantaged children. David Autor (Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] Economics Professor [2015]) and colleagues analysed the records of over a million Florida children born between 1992 and 2002 who attended state government schools. Their research also found that young women had surpassed young men in schooling. They also noted the significant contribution that race and socio-economic status played in this disparity. Furthermore, the work of Raethel (1996), Capp (2000) and Cox (1997) has also highlighted the statistics which show the marked disparity between the academic outcomes and opportunities between American boys and girls.

I would ask are disciplinarian schools to blame? Crime and gang activity tend to draw in more boys than girls, so are disadvantaged neighbourhoods to blame? Many of the poorest boys and

girls grow up in single-parent families with mothers overwhelmingly filling the role of single parent, so are absent fathers to blame? To untangle these contributing factors, Autor and his colleagues (Figlio, Karbownik, Roth and Wasserman, 2015) pieced together birth and school records, combining them with information about neighbourhoods and school quality. Their research showed that all of these factors play a role at some point for most boys living in social disadvantage. Their research also found that girls living in the same settings are less likely to be adversely affected by their situation which supports the work carried out by Murnane (2015).

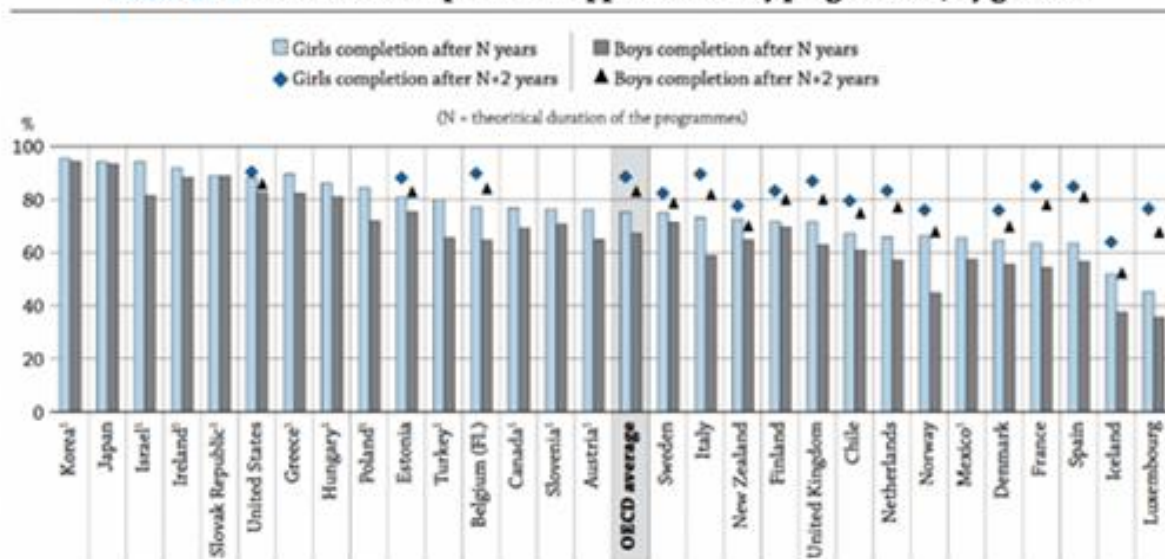
Autor, Figlio, Karbownik, Roth and Wasserman (2016) collected from Florida which showed on average 83% of students in that state were kindergarten ready at the appropriate age. Their research also revealed a disparity of 2% between boys and girls in advantaged communities were not ready to begin kindergarten with boys being less ready. Their study also revealed this percentage rose to 8% disparity for boys from broken families where their mother was the sole parent with the gap between African American boys and girls being significantly wider at 8.4%. In explaining this increased differentiation, the researchers revealed boys are less resilient and more sensitive to family disadvantages than girls. As the children in the survey continued to grow, the disparity in academic outcomes continued with boys never being able to close the gap (Autor, Figlio, Karbownik, Roth and Wasserman see Figure 2; Boy-girl Gaps in Absences, Maths Scores, On-Time High School Completion and Kindergarten Readiness by Family Characteristics). The report also noted that boys are 10% less likely than girls to graduate high school on time with the gender gap is half that among children born to college graduates revealing the socio-economic impact on graduation rates. The Report also reveals that amongst children born to married parents, boys outscore girls and that among children born to fathers who did not claim them on their birth certificates, girls outperformed boys. Research undertaken by Harvard economists Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren and Larry Katz (2015) reinforces these findings. Their work reveals that giving poor families vouchers to move into better neighbourhoods has had a large effect on young children who grow up to earn 30% more than their peers who they left behind in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Autor and his colleagues found that the biggest reason boys underperform their female peers is their family situation, that being family income, the mother's education and the presence or absence of a father. One may ask why boys from broken homes and disadvantaged communities are more disadvantaged academically and aspirational than girls from the same environment. I have noted that boys are more adversely affected by their environment, furthermore, it may be that boys naturally need more nurturing and are more dependent on appropriate male role modelling. Autor (2015) adds weight to this assumption by commenting that 'There's a lot of studies that show boys have trouble with what we call soft skills. They're more impulsive, they have more trouble containing themselves. It takes a lot of work to help boys overcome those behavioural traits. Where do they learn that? It starts with families, with parents role-modelling appropriate behaviours.' Because of their tendency to act out, boys may be in particular need of parental guidance but because poor families also tend to be single-parent families, time spent with their mother or father is a scarce resource. A further study from economists Marianne Bertrand and Jessica Pan (2015) showed that boys are particularly at risk when they grow up in single-mother households. When boys don't get enough parental attention, particularly from their fathers through appropriate role modelling, they misbehave. Girls, in contrast, are less likely to misbehave regardless of how much time parents spend with them, they are simply more resilient and less affected by adverse environmental factors.

The phenomenon of female advantage in school is not unique to the United States. In other wealthy countries there is also a gender gap between high school graduation rates. The pattern is consistent, as the following Chart 2.5 Successful Completion of Upper Secondary Programmes by Gender from the OECD shows. From Korea to Sweden, girls are slightly more

likely to finish high school than boys. The latest research from Autor (2015) and his colleagues shows that early-life adversity causes boys to struggle much more than girls. The gender differences are minimal in households with resources, but among poorer families, boys systematically fall behind female peers.

Chart A2.5. Successful completion of upper secondary programmes, by gender



1. N+2 information missing.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the successful completion of girls in upper secondary programmes (after N years).

Source: OECD, Table A2.4. See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933115331>

The Australian context presents a similar picture. In terms of social disadvantage, indigenous people have a lower rate of participation in the education system. A Report by The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS, 2016) presented by CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie, notes that 731,300 or 17.4% of all children in Australia are currently living in poverty, a rise of 2% in ten years. The Report notes that those at most risk of deprivation in living conditions, education and aspirational opportunities are those children in single parent families, the overwhelming majority of those families have mothers as the sole parent. Children within this group are three times more likely to be living in poverty (40.6%) than those living with both parents (12.5%). Since 2012, the poverty rate for Australian children in lone parent families has risen from 36.8% to 40.6%. Of these children, the Report notes indigenous children suffer more than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and highlights the significantly higher percentage of single parent families of which the mother or grandmother is the sole carer.

Age Range and Qualifications	% Indigenous People	% Non-Indigenous People
16 Year Olds in Full Time Education	57%	84%
18-24 Year olds In Post-Secondary Education	10%	28%
Attained Post-Secondary Qualifications	11%	30%

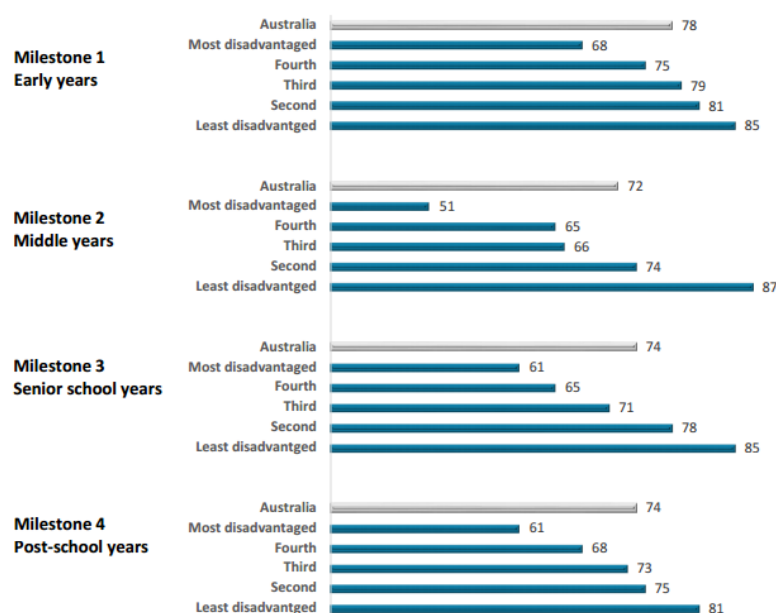
Attained Skilled Vocational Qualification, Undergraduate or Graduate Diploma	9%	20%
Attained Bachelor Degree	2%	10%

The table has been created from the 2000 Australian Census (2000) to highlight the disparity in educational outcomes.

As a result of social disadvantage and lower educational attainment amongst the indigenous population compared to the remainder of the Australian population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have reduced access to employment opportunities which has been shown to affect their motivation to participate in education beyond the compulsory years of schooling. Educational attainment limitations in turn affect the ability of Indigenous people to secure employment and has been shown to contribute to a cycle of poverty which impacts on successive populations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). This disparity is despite the significant funding that has been made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders by the Australian Government and may highlight a lack of aspiration as a consequence of a lack of role models.

The Australian Mitchell Institute (2015) reports that a student's family background plays a large role in determining his or her educational pathway. At every stage of learning and development there remains a strong and persistent link between a socio-economic status and educational outcomes as shown in the following table.

Proportion of students meeting educational milestones by socio-economic category



Taken from the Mitchell Institute Report on Educational Opportunity in Australia (2015).

The Feminisation of the Classroom

Those who argue against the notion of the feminised classroom being an environment that benefits girls and disadvantages boys, echo a competing victims mindset. An example of this is found in Skelton (2011) who writes; This articulation of the feminisation of teaching is a feature of the political usage of the term, specifically in terms of backlash politics. Nevertheless, the predominance of women in the teaching profession and any subliminal, engendered preferences they may bring to teaching needs to be opened up for discussion.

Since the introduction in Great Britain in 1870 of elementary state education, teaching has always been regarded as work for women, particularly the younger years and statistics would suggest this mindset continues today (see Coffee and Delamont 2000). Men account for less than 14% of teachers in nursery and primary schools in England and 2% of day nursery staff (Johnson 2012-2013). The exception has to this day been the independent sector which sees many more men employed, particularly in senior schools. One may ask if this gender divide within the classroom has always been the case. The percentage difference in male and female teachers, particularly in the primary classroom, has changed a great deal since inspectors in the early to mid-nineteenth century reported on teachers in their districts who noted: 'The majority were men who had tried other trades and failed. They had been semi-skilled craftsmen, shopkeepers, clerks or superior domestic servants, all occupations which either required knowledge of reading and writing or offered opportunity to acquire such knowledge' (Troop, 1957). In short, the predominant gender of teachers in the early part of the nineteenth century was male. However, Jacob Middleton (2012) notes that the split between the sexes in teaching in England began around 1860 shortly after an Act of Parliament instigated School Boards which set a starting salary for a board school teacher at £70.00 a year. At that time the recognised poverty line was £50.00 a year. This wage was significantly lower than that received by a skilled tradesman or a man who entered the civil service as a low-level clerk who could earn up to £500.00 a year. The exception, as it is now, were independent schools that could set their own independent wage structure which was above the minimum set by the School Boards which kept men employed in larger numbers as private schools do today. Women by contrast, had significantly fewer earning opportunities open to them. Consequently, they began to move into the teaching profession via government schools at a much higher rate than men who continued to be drawn to the higher wages offered in independent schools which also offered various forms of accommodation for additional duties. A teaching career for a woman in Victorian times was seen as a suitable profession in which a woman could earn a wage and bide her time until she could divert her attention to its proper focus, that being a family (Troop, 1957).

One position within the debate argues that the predominance of female teachers, particularly in the maintained or government primary sector has had a negative impact on the academic outcomes of boys whilst at the same time enhancing those of girls (see Dee, 2006).

This feminisation of the classroom implies that there have been fundamental and widespread effects on primary pedagogy and culture as a consequence of the predominance of women teachers. Included in these discussions are the beliefs that:

- Daily routines and practices favour the majority, those being women.
- Female teachers hold lower expectations of boys' abilities based on perceived generalisations and stereotypes.
- The absence of male role models in the classroom creates issues for boys in terms of motivation, discipline, positive same gender role modelling and social interaction.
- The way in which the curriculum is delivered and assessed favours girls' learning styles (Delamont, 1999).

One might also consider the restrictions that a predominant female staff has on delivering a co-curriculum that boys are drawn to or wish to engage in as one more factor that discriminates against boys.

Dee (2006) and James (2007) argue boys and girls have a preferred learning style. Simy and Kolb (2011) move this argument forward by suggesting that there is also a cultural bias in preferred learning styles between boys and girls. It follows that a classroom led by a woman which focuses on verbal, auditory and visual communication in a structured, defined space which restricts the movement of pupils and expects boys to sit quietly, still and remain attentive is unsuited to the way boys learn. The argument follows that this structure best suits girl's learning styles and it continues into tertiary education, particularly undergraduate classes which are often delivered in lecture theatres with large numbers of other students who are expected to sit quietly and take notes. Abigail James takes this argument forward by reinforcing her belief that boys are more successful with kinaesthetic activities, visual, spatial relationships, and competitive activities while girls are better with verbal/linguistic activities and auditory learning styles (James, 2007). To suggest boys and girls learn the same way and are equally suited to the same learning environments follows the path of reductionism that I highlighted earlier in this paper. The past few decades have seen tremendous changes in the world of education, particularly innovations in the delivery of the curriculum. These innovations have included charter schools, year round schools, differentiation of instructional strategies, various specialty schools, the diamond shaped curriculum and a number of others new concepts including Harkness and Assessment for Learning. Underpinning these initiatives is the drive for educators to provide all pupils, irrespective of gender, equal access to the curriculum to achieve, if not surpass, a minimum expectation. Given that current pedagogy recognises the need to present the curriculum in various forms to engage boys and girls equally, it follows that there exists amongst educators a belief that the curriculum needs to be presented in a variety of ways if it is to capture boys and girls equally and in doing so provide them equal access to the curriculum.

To gain a clearer picture of the impact of differentiated learning I recently conducted an experiment involving pupils within one of the Preparatory Schools which feed into my senior school. I chose three sets of ten random items setting them out on three tables in three different rooms of the same building. The intention of choosing the twenty different items for each of the three rooms was to select items that were not closely related to each other in order to make it difficult for the pupils to create linked associations between the items. For example; if a pencil sharpener, a pencil, a sheet of paper and an eraser were chosen, pupils would be able to create a link between those related objects making them, as a group, easier to recall. The thirty items chosen across the three rooms were:

ITEMS		
Lightbulb	Screwdriver	Spectacles
Pencil	Spanner	Bath Plug
Rock	Dog Biscuit	Scissors
Calculator	Leaf	Small Trophy
Credit Card	Phone Charge	Spoon
Key	Cup	Table Clock

Headphones	Sweet	Tennis Ball
DVD	Toothbrush	Medicine Bottle
Toy Car	Golf Club	Bottle Top
Book	Jigsaw Piece	Flash Drive

Forty 13-year-old pupils were chosen at random for the experiment, twenty boys and twenty girls. Birth dates were not considered, therefore, there could have been up to twelve months difference in ages between the pupils. The group was non-selective so no attention was paid to academic levels of achievement.

Experiment 1 Auditory

The twenty girls were blindfolded and led into the first room containing the table with twenty items. I verbally listed all of the items individually to the girls leaving a five second pause between each item. Shortly after the last item was called out, the blindfolded girls were led from the room. After the girls had left the room, the group of twenty blindfolded boys were led into the room and the experiment repeated in the same format as the group of girls before them. After each group left the room accompanied by a fellow teacher, they removed their blindfolds and asked to write down as many items as they could recall. Absolute silence was maintained at all times; the pupils were supervised to ensure no cheating occurred.

Experiment 2 Visual

The twenty girls were then led in silence into the second room containing a table with twenty different items which were covered by a blanket. After the group had entered the room they were told that they were required to memorise as many items under the blanket as possible and given two minutes to complete this exercise in absolute silence under teacher supervision. The experiment was then completed with the twenty boys in exactly the same manner. After each group left the room accompanied by a fellow teacher they were asked to write down as many of the items as they could recall. Absolute silence was maintained at all times. The pupils were supervised to ensure no cheating occurred.

Experiment 3 Kinaesthetic

The twenty girls were then led into the third room containing another twenty items on a table covered with a blanket. The group were placed into a circle and handed a marble. I then asked them to hold the marble in their right hand and to pass it into the left hand of the person on their right. This task was completed so they could familiarise themselves with what was required of them during the experiment.

Having established this routine, the girls were then blindfolded and each handed one item off the table. After handling the item for ten seconds, they were asked to pass it to their right as they had practiced with the marble at the beginning of the experiment. After the last item was held, they were asked to drop it into buckets that were presented to each of them. The experiment was repeated with the group of twenty boys in exactly the same manner. After each group left the room they were asked to write down as many items as they could recall. Absolute silence was maintained at all times under strict teacher supervision to prevent cheating.

Results of Experiments

Results of Experiment 1 Auditory		
	Average Number of Items Recalled Correctly	Percentage Differentiation
Girls	11 55%	Girls recalled +15% more items correctly than boys on the auditory experiment.
Boys	8 40%	

This test of auditory recall showed that girls were able to recall 55% of the twenty items listed for them whilst the boys recalled 40% of items listed to them. The disparity between these two percentages show that in this experiment, girls were able to recall 15% more items than the boys in a similar experiment.

Results of Experiment 2 Visual		
	Average Number of Items Recalled Correctly	Percentage Differentiation
Girls	14 70%	Girls recalled +5% more items correctly than boys on the visual experiment.
Boys	13 65%	

This test of visual recall showed that girls were able to recall 70% of the twenty items on display whilst boys recalled 65% of the items on display. The disparity between these two results of this experiment reveals girls were able to recall 5% more items than the boys in a similar experiment.

Results of Experiment 3 Kinaesthetic		
	Average Number of Items Recalled Correctly	Percentage Differentiation
Girls	9 45%	Boys recalled +25% more items correctly than girls on the kinaesthetic experiment.
Boys	14 70%	

This test of kinaesthetic recall showed that girls were able to recall 45% of the twenty items listed for them whilst boys recalled 70% of items listed to them. The disparity between these two percentages show that in this experiment, boys were able to recall 25% more items than the girls in the same experiment.

The disparity between the boys' performance in recall and that of the girls of -5% on the auditory test and -15% on the visual test are not significant percentages. However, the +25% disparity in recall that boys have over girls in the kinaesthetic experiment highlights an overall net gain of 40% over the auditory experimental results (-15%) of girls and a 30% net gain over the visual experimental results (-5%) of girls. It may be argued that prioritising work on preferred learning styles is misconceived if it simply tries to identify and teach to students' dominances within a specific learning style to which the pupil shows greatest preference, to pursue any one specific learning style narrows learning. Rather, it may be argued that it is important to locate any discussion on preferred learning styles within an on-going professional

development process which addresses issues of classroom pedagogy if the notion of preferred learning styles is to be translated into teaching style and ultimately pupil performance. Within this framework, it is important for teachers to develop skills which will allow them to engage in a variety of teaching styles which will ultimately translate into their pupils being exposed to a range of access pathways to the curriculum. This may be recognised and addressed through peer mentoring and staff appraisal opportunities which seek, in part, to address opportunities to share best practice across departments.

Consideration given to the differentiation of learning styles and single gender education are amongst the most critical changes in the past ten years to come out of these initiatives. Although it might appear counterintuitive, the goal of single gender education is equality. Studies on the human brain and behaviour suggest that boys and girls develop and learn in different ways and separation within an educational setting is beneficial for both. Sometimes equality is not necessarily achieved through identical treatment; but rather, from giving people the best opportunity to succeed given individual circumstances. What may work for one group, may not for another (Gurian, Stevens and Daniels, 2009).

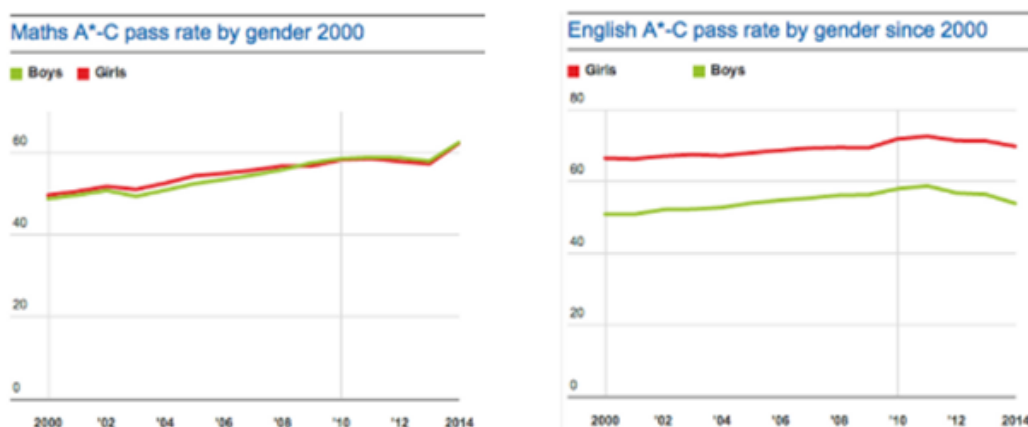
The notion of the benefits in single gender education formed the topic of study for Stephen Keast (1998), a researcher at Monash University, Australia. Keast based his study on a small rural co-educational secondary college in western Victoria which had identified low numbers of girls continuing with maths in the final years of school as a major problem. In an attempt to address this decline, after an initial investigation it was decided to introduce a single-sex maths class experience for all students in Years 7 and 8. It was noted that the boys in the single sex (SSB) class preferred to work individually with the teacher as the primary provider of information whilst girls were seen to prefer to work in small groups sharing information amongst members of their group. Boys preferred to work individually, girls preferred to work collaboratively.

To address the different method in which boys and girls chose to access the curriculum, in the following year, teachers adjusted their teaching style to accommodate the collaborative preference shown by the girls. By identifying how one particular group preferred to learn, the school was able to respond by moving towards an emphasis on group work and sharing knowledge in the SSG maths class which was noted to be the preferred style of learning for the girls. Given that the girls were observed to prefer a particular learning style; one might argue that women may follow on with a preferred teaching style based around their preferred learning style. If one was to take this argument further, it may be reasoned that the best teacher of a particular learning style is the teacher who themselves preferred to learn via that style.

Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), have offered a framework for analysing variants in learning styles which build on the findings of the Keast's (1998) research. Their work provides a further insight into reasoning and learning styles, the formation of knowledge and the construction of understanding and have proposed two types of 'knowers'. The first, which typically represents boys' learning, has been referred to as *Separate Knowers* who are people who develop their knowledge in isolation through their use of impersonal rules which they objectively and critically sort information by filtering out any subjectivity. The second group which typically represent how girls learn have been referred to as the *Connected Knowers*. These learners prefer to connect with the knower; they value learning and knowledge that is woven into their personal relationships, surroundings and environment. These people do not view knowledge as cold and impersonal but prefer to include the emotion and personality of the knower into their learning. Their knowledge of truth develops through an interconnection with others and the relationship they build with them.

Alan Smithers, Director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at Buckingham University England, expands on the physical disadvantages to boys in the current environment by commenting on the manner in which lessons are presented (taken from an article in *The Observer*, June, 2009). Smithers believes that the curriculum has been feminised by an emphasis on coursework, modular exams and extended essays which favours girls' learning styles and discriminates against boys whose preferred mode of learning involves the competitive nature and higher risk of sudden death exams. The greatest differential in performance has been in English where reading, writing, listening, oral communication skills and modular assessment carry the greatest weight. Not only is the physical environment of today's classroom best suited to the way girls learn, the manner in which the curriculum is assessed also benefits girls' learning styles.

Support for the belief in the advantages to boys in being examined differently to girls may be found in UK data of maths and English results by gender. When the modular assessment and coursework element of maths exams was discontinued in 2009, boys started to do fractionally better than girls as the following graph highlights. When these results are contrasted against the gap between boys and girls pass rate in English which has maintained its 60% controlled assessment, the gap in boy/girl attainment has been maintained. This may be attributed to the higher verbal abilities, on average, from an early age but the 60% weighting for coursework and modular exams which favour girls' learning styles cannot be discounted as a contributing factor in girls continuing to outperform boys in English which has maintained its 60% coursework weighting.



(Centre for Educational Research [CEER] 2014)

Further support for this notion may be found in the 2015 GCSE results (Year 11) of boys and girls in Great Britain. Whilst girls still lead boys with 73.1% of all subjects sat being awarded an A* - C, boys have closed the gap by 0.4% to 64.7%. Brian Lightman, the General Secretary of the UK Association of School and College Leaders, attributed this narrowing of the gap to a change in how assessment for some subjects have changed from coursework to examinations. Lightman reported that coursework, or controlled assessment, is more suited to the way girls work whilst boys tend to perform better under the pressure and competitive environment of final exam conditions (Lightman, 2015). The report also noted that girls in Great Britain have scored more A* - C grades every year since 1989 when the gap was 4.3%, rising to a peak in 2000 when the gap was 9.2% after which it dipped to 8.8% in 2014 (for further evidence of gender bias across differing exam conditions (see Gneezy, Niederle, and Rustichini, 2003 and Niederle, Carmit and Vesterlund 2008).

The presumption is that women's predominance within the classroom is a recent phenomenon which coincides with an equally recent decline in the academic attainment of boys. DiPrete and Buchmann (2013) state that girls have performed better than boys for well over 100 years. Indeed, the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke expressed a concern for boy's problems with language and literacy (Cohen, 1998). Girls more recent rise to the top of academic league tables may also be attributable to societal changes and expectations in recent years which has resulted in girls, and women, being freed of the pressure to choose between completing an education or having a family. Societal pressures and expectations prior to 1960s feminism placed a greater onus on girls prioritising motherhood over academic achievement so the desire to do well at school and achieve their academic potential was less of a pull factor for many than becoming a good mother and wife. Girls could have one or the other, but not both. Employment was something that girls tended to do till they were married and started a family; consequently, there was no pressing need for girls to perform to their academic potential at school in order to achieve the results needed to enter university or a vocational pathway. It may, therefore, be suggested that boys' access to higher academic grades and university places was easier to attain as girls were not competing equally against them.

Even after joining the workforce, the widespread practice of marriage barring in Western countries restricted the employment of married women in general and in particular within acknowledged professions or occupations rather than in unskilled or lowly paid jobs. Within many public sectors the practice of marriage barring called for the termination of employment of a woman on her marriage, especially in occupations within the public service. There was little economic justification for this practice which, when rigidly applied was disruptive to workplaces. It was justified during depression years as a social policy to increase employment opportunities for men, but the policy persisted beyond such economic times. The practice was common in Western countries from the late 19th Century to the years immediately after the gains brought about by second wave feminism. Marriage bars have less impact on employment in lower paid unskilled jobs which had an additional impact on lowering incentives for women to acquire the level of education that would provide them access to higher paid work. Marriage bars were widely relaxed in wartime when the availability of working men was severely compromised but re-imposed immediately after these conflicts. Since the 1960s, the practice has been discontinued or outlawed by anti-discrimination laws which may also deal with discrimination based on marital status.

The impact of marriage bars and societal expectations of young women to prioritise marriage and motherhood had a double impact on their involvement in higher secondary and tertiary education. With boys only having to compete predominantly against each other to gain entry into university or a high skilled profession, they could get away with lower academic results because the pool of applicants was less, as was competition for places. Martino and Meyenn (2001) argue against the popular and simplistic view that stresses the need for boys to reclaim lost territory. An alternative argument may support the notion that this 'territory' was never truly theirs because of the bias in the landscape.

It has only been in recent years since more girls have remained on at school has a valid comparative study been able to be produced that maps the performance of boys and girls in a common setting, with similar numbers and equal motivation for academic success. One may argue that this shift in the landscape has allowed the disparity in achievement levels between boys and girls to develop and subsequently be identified. An argument may be initiated that presupposes that this disparity has always existed and we have post 1960s feminism to thank for providing the opportunities for girls to expose this differentiation through their new found access to higher secondary and tertiary education and greater access to the workforce. However, to simply assume that the feminisation of the classroom and the greater access that

girls now have to higher education and the workforce is the sole deciding factor leading to the underperformance of boys is an oversimplification of a more complex arrangement.

I have created the following table taken from the UK's Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA [2016]) on Russell Group Universities to highlight the point I have made regarding the gender skew in university applicants.

University	Gender % of Applicants
King's College London	64% Female 36% Male
Leeds University	60% Female 40% Male
Edinburgh University	59% Female 41% Male
Glasgow University	58% Female 42% Male
Cardiff University	58% Female 42% Male

These statistics reinforce the concern over the falling number of boys applying for university places. The HESA also released figures on the number of applicants to all English universities in the autumn of 2016 which saw approximately 90,000 more women applying for a degree course. Alan Smithers, Professor of Education at Buckingham University, also notes that for the first time 2016 saw the number of applications from male school leavers fall against the number of female applications. Furthermore, although not shown, the same HESA report revealed the majority of students in 2016 enrolling in the once traditional male dominated fields of medicine, law, dentistry and veterinary science are now predominantly female. One may argue that the concerns over fewer males going on to university is a symptom of an outdated psycho-social economic mindset which places too great an emphasis on pupils having access to higher education.

This mindset places too little regard on the alternatives which may be the most appropriate option for their skills set and motivation. If boys are failing to move into tertiary education, one may ask where they might be choosing to move when they graduate school?

British Airways, the Dorchester Hotel, Rolls-Royce and English National Opera are among companies offering apprenticeships to school leavers as an alternative to university at a time when many employers are investing heavily in internships, scholarships and traineeships. Crossrail created more than 400 apprenticeships during the construction of the new railway. The apprentices working on the project have been trained in a range of skills including construction, accountancy, quantity surveying and business administration. Frank Field (2016) Chairman of the UK's Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee blames universities and the government mindset of setting a 50% target of school leaver entering into universities for the emergence of a graduate 'precariat'. Field continued by claiming: 'There has been a huge miss-selling by universities. Partly it is a terrible British snobbery which implies that if you earn money with your hands, you can't be as good as somebody who supposedly earns it with their brains'. One may see this as a very positive alternative career pathway for boys graduating from school in providing them with alternative career pathways to meet the need of a greater cross section of male school leavers. In what may be interpreted as a typical backlash, competing victim's mentality, the Young Woman's Trust (YWT) sees this

development differently. The Trust reports that young women are missing out at every stage of apprenticeships, including being underrepresented, achieving poorer outcomes and being paid less (YWT Report, 2016).

The report found that in sectors such as engineering, women make up a lower proportion of apprentices than a decade ago, for every female apprentice working within engineering there are 25 male apprentices. In construction, there are 56 men to every woman and in plumbing there are 74 men to every woman. One may argue that the thrust of such feminist arguments which are based around equality of access, lose some credibility when the same authors, being aware of a similar gender imbalance in teaching, nursing and the care sector, choose to withhold similar proportional access comments.

A 2016 Report from the Independent Panel on Technical Education notes that the UK has a serious shortfall of technicians in industry at a time when over 400,000 16-24 year olds are unemployed. The Report highlights the UK's lack of a skills base by noting that by 2020, the UK is set to fall to 28th out of 33 OECD countries in terms of developing intermediate skills. Furthermore, the Report notes that the size of the post-secondary technical education sector in England is extremely small by international standards and this has an adverse effect on productivity. The UK currently lags behind its competitors Germany and France by as much as 36 percentage points. The Report presented 34 recommendations to the UK Government in a bid to draw greater investment in the country's technical base. The Report noted that the UK has a long-term productivity problem, although some sectors such as the automotive industry have enjoyed stronger productivity growth in recent years. In 2014 the UK had a productivity gap of around 30 percentage points with its competitor countries France and the USA, while the gap with Germany was 36 percentage points. The UK productivity was 18 percentage points below the average for the rest of the G7 economies which was noted to be holding back the economy. Across the globe, countries have realised that investing in the development of technical skills, especially at intermediate and post-secondary levels is essential to enhancing productivity and improving living standards. Yet, by 2020 the UK is predicted to rank just 28th of 33 OECD countries in terms of developing intermediate skills. If as statistics show, fewer boys are entering tertiary education, one may suggest that the issue is not one that we should be overly concerned with given the many opportunities available to boys within the wider workforce. The issue will be for those unaware or unwilling to accept these opportunities.

Furthermore, the size of the post-secondary technical education sector in England is extremely small by international standards. As a result of years of undertraining at these levels, the UK faces a chronic shortage of people with technician-level skills. In engineering and technology alone, Engineering UK data show an annual shortfall of 29,000 people with level 3 skills and 40,000 with skills at level 4. Given that these occupations have traditionally been the preserve of males, the impact amongst this group has been the greatest. Among 16-24 year olds, England and Northern Ireland together now rank in the bottom four OECD countries for literacy and numeracy – key prerequisites for access to intermediate and higher level skills training. A 2016 Report commissioned by the UK Government of the Independent Panel on Technical Education found, 'our education and skills system is failing to develop the skills employers seek. Unless we take urgent action, our economic competitors will leave us even further behind'. If initiatives are to be considered that engage boys in the education system, one argument would be for the UK Government to invest in those areas within the workforce that boys have traditionally moved into. Given that there is a shortage in these sectors, this investment would be of benefit to both boys and the UK economy.

Finally, I wish to cover one further point linked to the predominance of females in teaching that has is linked to boys, namely the issue surrounding appropriate male role models. Martino (1995a) and (1995b), Heywood and Mac an Ghail (1996), Jackson and Salisbury (1996), Gilbert

and Gilbert (1998) and Letts (1999) all argue that it is the ways boys learn to be male which presents teachers in all subjects with one of their greatest challenges. Young people do not need any role model because many of these are inappropriate, young people need role models who affirm correct behaviour and to whom they may aspire to in a way that enhances their lives and those with whom they come into contact. Young people need role models in their lives who allow them to develop within themselves an appreciation of their place within the wider community in which they live that enhances their ability to make a positive contribution to that community through thought and action.

The dilemma facing many young men in the 21st Century is where these role models might come from. I have shown they do not necessarily come in the form of male teachers for a great number of these boys and this is borne out in the following table that I have created to highlight the percentage of male and female teachers in the primary and secondary sectors of government schools in Australia.

Males in Teaching		Trainee Registrations in the Academic Year 2008 -2012					
Primary Teaching		Gender					
1992	2003	Academic	Male Number/Percentage		Female Number/Percentage		Total Number of Registrations
25.8%	20.9%						
Secondary Teaching		2008 -2009	2567 15%	14,284 85%	16,751		
1992	2003	2009 - 2010	2824 16%	14,671 84%	17,495		
49.4%	44.7%	2010 - 2011	3262 18%	14,507 82%	17,769		
		2011 - 2012	3743 19%	15,750 81%	19,501		

(Figures taken from; Males in Teaching and Teacher Education; Australian Bureau of Statistics and DEST Higher Education [UK Department of Education Database for Teacher 2005] Statistics 1992 - 2003).

Although I have accessed Australian data for this table, the disparity is found across the Western world. Smithers (2009) reveals that more than 25% of state primary schools in the United Kingdom have no male teachers. This denies a significant percentage of boys with a male role model throughout their primary education. The additional concern of this gender disparity in the classroom only serves to reinforce the belief that teaching is a feminised profession and it is a conundrum that universities grapple with in their endeavour to attract more males into teacher training and degree courses. Professor Smithers' report is reinforced by the 2009 data released by the General Teaching Council of England which reports that only 123,827, or 25%, of the 490,981 registered working teachers within maintained or government schools are men, with the majority of those men occupying secondary teaching and further education posts. Male teachers make up 13% or 25,491 of state primary teachers and 3% or 43 state nursery school staff. Of the 16,892 state primary schools in England, 4,550 or 27% have no male teachers. Given that 92% of all children educated in England attend maintained or government schools, the chance of any boy being taught by a man within this sector at any time throughout their primary schooling may be slim.

Beyond the United Kingdom and Australia, a similar pattern is evident from data published by the OECD in 'Education at a Glance, 2003' which highlights few significant differences amongst OECD member nations. The OECD 2003 report noted that in 2001 the mean proportion of female teachers for primary education was 78.6% and for lower and upper secondary education 64.8% and 51.4% respectively (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training [DSET] Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Educational and Vocational Training Enquiry into Teacher Education, June 2005).

If, as I have argued, schools may not be relied upon to provide all boys with appropriate male role models because of the high percentage of female teachers, then surely one might expect boys find their male role models in their homes . . . or can they? The role models who influence adolescents tend to change over time (Glover, 1978). Early in life, young children look to their immediate family to provide positive role models. Within the first five years parental influence has the greatest impact. When children begin schooling there is a subtle shift in the people they look to for role modelling and aspirational guidance. Once children begin school, they begin to change their role models with friends and teachers beginning to fulfil the role that immediate family members once held. As we grow, our role models begin to originate from a range of other areas including athletes, coaches and television, pop and movie stars (French & Pena, 1991).

A Report for the Tavistock Institute (2014) found family breakdown affects both individuals and the immediate and extended residual family unit in terms of short term acute outcomes and longer term residual issues. These issues include hostile parental animosity towards each other at the detriment of the parent / child relationship and parents who choose to use their child to play out their perceived position of victim through isolating the other parent and casting them in a poor light in front of the children. The issue of competing victims is a recurring theme in this landscape of gender relations that serves to isolate one group, and in this case an individual, from the other through a victim mentality. Furthermore, insidious chronic problems impact on the long term future mental and physical health of the children and in many cases their ability to maintain healthy relationships. Further concerns involve the negative impact on the extended families. On the contrary, there are significant mental and physical health benefits for couples and their children by maintaining their married status and with that their circle of friends, support networks and extended families.

The UK pressure group Fathers4Justice cite that there are 87,000 children involved in contact orders in the UK, of these 30% will lose contact with a non-resident parent within two years. The group further cite that 94% of residencies are awarded to mothers and 50% of all contact orders for fathers are broken which denies children access to the many benefits that fathers and male role models offer both boys and girls. One million children have no contact with a non-resident parent three years after separation, with the overwhelming majority of non-resident parents being the father. It is the child/father relationship which is lost in the majority of cases.

Research would suggest that boys from broken homes are less likely to live with their same sex parent as their sisters. Furthermore, during the course of my research into this issue, I interviewed Mr Guy Barlow, a Partner in the family law firm Charles Coleman LLP in Windsor, England. When I asked Mr Barlow to reflect on the number of successful fathers who he had represented during his 23 years as a family lawyer in residency applications, he responded that in all his years of practice, he could only recount two cases in which the father was awarded a residency order over the children's mother: "One involved a woman who was residing at Her Majesty's pleasure, the other woman was an inmate at Broadmoor Psychiatric Hospital" (Woodrow, 2014). Similar statistical evidence of custodial orders may be found in the US Census Bureau's report by the Office of Child Support and Enforcement of the Department

of Health and Human Services which states there was 13.4 million custodial parents in the United States in 2002. In the spring of 2002, these custodial parents had residency of 21.5 million children under 21 years of age whose other parent lived somewhere else. About 5 of every 6 custodial parents were mothers (84.4%) and 1 in 6 were fathers (15.6%), proportions which have remained statistically unchanged since 1994. Overall, 27.6% of all children under 21 living in families had a parent not living in the home (Data taken from the 1994 - 2002 April supplements to the Current Population Survey, CPS).

Moloney (2000) conducted a study of Australian Family Court judgements of residency from a gender perspective and found that only 18% of judgements resulted in custody being awarded to fathers, 79% went to mothers and 3% resulted in shared care arrangements. Of the shared residence orders the results provide some support for separated siblings living with the same-sex parent, a slender majority of sons (53.3%) lived with fathers, but the vast majority of daughters (70.5%) resided with mothers. In Britain women head 90% of single parent families (OXFAM, 2005). One cannot discount the outdated Victorian belief held by the Family Law Court that the parenting and nurturing process of children is the primary responsibility of the mother, not the father.

I have used the following table to highlight a selection of the top 20 out of 46 countries in terms of percentage of that country's divorce rates across their population of married couples (UNESCO, 2007).

Divorce Rate Percentage Per Population									
New Zealand	Australia	Canada	Netherlands	France	Germany	UK	Russia	USA	Sweden
17%	41.2%	37%	38.3%	38.3%	39.4%	42.6%	43.3%	54.8%	54.9%

The women's movement has brought with it many considerable advancements which have proved mutually beneficial for women and indeed men (see Fernandez and Cheng Wong, 2011). However, women's access to independent income, greater access to child care, a streamlined divorce system, the de-stigmatisation of divorce, no-fault divorce bills, women's shelters and changes in the benefits system that supports, and some may argue rewards, single mothers with housing and financial assistance by way of government benefits and garnishing the wages of the children's fathers, has all played a role in the dramatic increase in divorce since the early 1960s. In the United States from 1960 to 1980, the divorce rate more than doubled from 9.2 divorces per 1,000 to 22.6 divorces per 1,000. Less than 20% of US couples who married in 1950 divorced, approximately 50% of marriages in 1970 ended in divorce. Approximately half of the children born to married parents in the 1970s saw their parents part, compared with approximately 11% of those born in the 1950s (Wilcox, 2009).

The psychological revolution of the late '60s and '70s was largely fuelled by a post-war prosperity and a user society that allowed people to give greater attention to non-material concerns (see Bradford Wilcox [2011]). This lifestyle shift played a key role in reconfiguring men and women's views of what constituted marriage and family life. Prior to the 1960s, people within Western societies were more likely to look at marriage and family in terms of duty, obligation, self-sacrifice and long term commitment. A successful pre-1960 home built around the notion of the advancement of marriage and family life was one that was reflected through meaningful employment for the husband, a well-maintained home by the wife, mutual spousal aid and child-rearing responsibilities valued by both father and mother and a shared religious faith. But the psychological revolution that the post 1960s brought with it refocused people on individual fulfilment in a way that did not previously exist. Increasingly,

marriage was seen as a vehicle for a self-oriented ethic of romance, intimacy and fulfilment and in an increasing number of cases, a means to an end rather than an end in itself. In this new psychological approach to married life, one's primary obligation was shifted from a focus on the primacy of one's family to one's self. This mind-set shift brought with it a new definition of marital success being defined not by successfully meeting obligations to one's spouse and children but by a stronger sense of subjective happiness. Whilst it must be accepted that the women's movement brought with it considerable gains for women, one cannot discount the fact that these gains have come at some cost to the concept of and viability of the nuclear family.

Should we be overly concerned about children in single parent families in the 21st Century where our communities are more liberal and accepting of the wider variety of families that have developed beyond the traditional model of heterosexual parents living in a monogamous lifelong marriage? Ermisch and Pevalin (2006) argue that children's pathways to inequality and social disadvantage are interconnected; children who experience family breakdown and the consequential loss of an appropriate male role model in their lives are significantly more likely to achieve lower life outcomes. Too often this is a cyclical event as young people mirror the role models of dependency offered by their parent. Daughters of single teenage mothers are considerably more likely to become single teenage mothers themselves. The stigma once attached to single motherhood has evaporated. More recent studies have shown that the likelihood of a teenage birth to a single mother in Britain is 2 to 2.5 times higher for the daughter of a teenage single mother and that intergenerational factors were a major thematic finding (Whitehead, 2009).

If, as I have argued, schools and homes can no longer be automatically considered to be the stereotypical bastions of male role modelling for young boys, one may justifiably ask where these young males might look to find the male role models missing in their lives? Altman (1995) believes boys and young men are increasingly drawn to gangs and their pseudo family hierarchical culture as an alternative to the traditional family unit. Traditional independent boarding schools also offer this structure in the absence of a boy's family. Boys belong to Houses that develop a bond of collective union and ownership, they provide a structure, discipline and routine that is lacking in many young boys lives. Boarding schools provide a breadth of opportunities for boys to engage in community service activities that link them into the broader communities in which they live, these schools provide a breadth of education that enriches the academic, cultural and spiritual lives of those young men who are lucky enough to attend such schools. Boarding schools provide a communal environment and instil a respect of self and others including peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. Although not entirely, but nevertheless considerably, the Children's Act of 1989 has resulted in the development of institutions where bullying and fagging are no longer an obstacle that needs to be negotiated. These traditional establishments now have a moral and legal obligation to provide the necessary pastoral care and support that boys living away from home need. The calibre of teaching staff has moved well away from the strict disciplinarian to pastoral leaders who provide a genuine concern for and care of their pupils. However, as mentioned previously, despite their charitable status and the many means tested bursaries offered each year, fewer than 5% of boys have access to these types of independent boarding schools.

Boys and young men are increasingly joining gangs which provide them with an authority figure as an alternative to a father figure. The gang provides boys with security and a self-identity that they would normally be offered within a family unit and gang membership provides boys with a support network, a code of conduct and expectations that they would normally be given within their family unit. In these ways, gang culture is the only alternative many boys and young men have to a traditional family culture. Decker and Van Winkle (1996) and Baccaglioni (1993) believe there are push and pull dynamics for boys who join gangs. Pulls

involve the attractive dividends in belonging to a gang such as enhanced prestige or status among friends, especially girls who play a significant role in reinforcing stereotypical interpretations of masculinity which are highly destructive to those boys who choose to follow those models. Gangs provide attractive opportunities for excitement and to make money through illegal activities including the sale of stolen goods or drugs. These pull dynamics result in many boys making a rational choice to join a gang and the personal advantages attached to gang membership. Wilson (1987) believes young males are drawn or pulled into gangs for social relationships that give them a sense of identity that would normally be provided by their biological families. Similar pull dynamics are in play with cults and communes that offer isolated, vulnerable people an opportunity to belong to something better, something that offers them a sense of purpose and belonging not found within their current existence. Social, economic, and cultural forces may work to push many adolescents into gang membership. Protection from other gangs and a perceived general well-being are also key push factors. Family members who are also members of gangs also act in pushing young males into the gangs of which they are members. To many young males living in socially isolated and deprived communities, gangs provide the only perceived route to a better existence and a possible way out of their deprived situation.

A 2008 report commissioned by the Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) of the United Kingdom reported that the lack of positive role models, the absence of a father in the home combined with too much unsupervised freedom to behave without prescribed boundaries and expectations of behaviour resulted in young people with no respect for their elders. These young people with common ideals around this lack of boundaries are attracted to others with similar unsupervised lifestyles. Teaching staff who were interviewed as part of the report claimed that existing gang members were actively singling out recruits who lacked an identity and a sense of belonging as a consequence of them not getting that affirmation from homes that lacked a father figure (Broadhurst, Duffin and Taylor, 2008).

There are a variety of factors that contribute to a boy joining a gang but there is a common theme amongst these factors which relates to dysfunctional relationships within the boy's family and includes such themes as a lack of parental guidance, a lack of love and respect from within the family, a deterioration of the family unit and poor or absent parent role modelling, particularly fathering. When combined, these factors lead boys elsewhere to find an environment that satisfies their need to be accepted and to belong (Campbell, 1992). In general, poor family management strategies increase the risk for gang membership by adolescents (Friedman, Mann, and Friedman, 1975). More specifically, low family involvement, inadequate or inappropriate parental discipline and control, monitoring or expectations, poor affective relationships between the child and their parents put youths at much higher risk of becoming gang members. This is particularly pertinent in communities where there is a gang culture. These family-based risk factors are leading contributors to an increasing risk of involvement in delinquency and gang membership (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986).

Rob White (2009) presents three propositions as to why young males join gangs in an Australian context:

- The gang offers a substitute family-like role for its members, regardless of specific social composition, particularly when it comes to material support, emotional refuge, psychological wellbeing, physical protection and social belonging.
- In some cases, particularly in regard to ethnic minority youth, the gang is mainly comprised of family members and or members from a distinctive and frequently tight-knit community, which means that there already exist strong filial bonds within the context of gang formation.
- In the case of indigenous young people, the gang and family connection is unique insofar as the colonial experience reinforces an 'othering' process that is distinctive and specific to this group.

Gangs take root in schools for many reasons and gang members specifically target these institutions for recruitment, but the primary attraction of gangs is their ability to satisfy needs not otherwise met by their families. Young recruits are particularly sought as their age is seen as a low risk factor if caught committing an illegal act. Whilst there is no national standard in determining at what age a child can be treated as an adult in the criminal justice system in the US, the younger a child is the less likely they will be held responsible for their illegal activity and the more attractive they are to recruitment into gangs. To clarify this point, gang homicide victims were significantly younger than non-gang homicide victims across the US. Whereas 27% - 42% of the gang homicide victims were school aged boys between the ages of 15 - 19 years, only 9% - 14% of the non-gang homicide victims were in this age group (taken from the US National Violent Death Reporting System [NVDRS] 2008).

Gangs provide the disaffected with a sense of family and an acceptance that comes with belonging to a group with shared interests and ideals (Burnett and Walz, 1994). If the nuclear family is absent, dysfunctional or if there is a competing value systems being presented to a child which creates conflict and confusion, the transmission of mainstream cultural values may be compromised. Appropriate values may not be transmitted or those which are transmitted may run contrary to the values of the mainstream culture.

Conclusion

Pro-feminists (see Yates [1997], Lingard and Douglas [1999]) support the notion of a backlash against their position within the debate by right wing, reactionary men's groups, particularly those supporters of the mythopoetic or masculinity therapy models (see Bly, 1991, Doyle, 2010 and Tacey 1997). It is suggested that these reactionary lobby groups employ essentialist constructions of male and female students, arguing in part that all females are now outperforming all males in all sections of education, which I have shown to be inaccurate. Those pro-feminists on the left argue that this approach attacks their position within the debate and attempts to undermine further resources aimed at improving the position of girls within education. Unfortunately, the emotive and self-serving accusations employed by both sides which seek to discredit the other argument does little to move the issue of boy's underperformance forward in a way that will result in mutual benefit to boys and girls. Pro-feminists argue that a critical approach to facilitate a reconstruction of masculinity needs to be combined with a recognition of the underlying stubborn, yet not immutable, bodily and emotional attachment of men to their masculine heritage. Kimmel (1998) moves this notion forward by arguing that there is another important element in some men's feelings of powerlessness and that relates to the notion of entitlement, men's feeling of their right to preferment and power within the public sphere which is challenged by feminism. Too much of the debate about boys' performance in schools reads as a competing victims' response to a fear of losing ground in a gender-centric struggle to promote girls in schools and women in the workforce and counter responses by opposing politics at a time when a mutually beneficial, pluralist discussion is needed about boys and girls.

In order to move forward in addressing the issues of boy's education the debate needs to move away from this competing victim mentality as seen through backlash politics (see Mills, 2010) states 'making boys welfare a social justice issue may encourage the diversion of funds away from girls' social justice programmes' and 'gender equity for girls is quite clearly under threat from these concerns about boys'. I have argued a pluralist position which acknowledges how much may be learnt from the advancements made for girls and women by the women's movement. Many of these lessons should be followed particularly those which have resulted in the increased representation of girls in tertiary education, their place at the top of academic

results across many subjects and the movement of women into areas within the workforce which were once seen as the domain of men. Given my earlier stated belief that schools are socialising agencies, I would support Connell (1995) who argues that the questions surrounding boys' education are questions of major importance with education being a key site for the type of alliance politics that unite us as mutual beneficiaries, this being a contrasting view to those within the debate who espouse a reductionist theory.

Despite the rhetorical responses from pro-feminists (see Douglas, 1994, Flood, 1997 and Messner, 1997) that girls should retain our focus of attention, statistics compiled around the world indicate that girls are continuing to outperform boys across primary, secondary and tertiary settings. I would, however, temper this statement by reiterating the socio-economic and cultural considerations that need to be factored in when making these assumptions. Concerns raised by pro-feminists include a rejection of any refocus of resources away from their priority for the education of girls (see Lingard and Douglas, 1999). This argument pushes forward the notion of addressing hegemonic masculinity (see Connell, 1995). The pro-feminist evaluation of the issues surrounding the differential in academic outcomes between boys and girls rejects post-feminist politics which seeks an engagement between feminism and other contemporary theories, including postculturalism, postmodernism and postcolonialism which portray an anti-essentialist politic of difference in pursuing equality and difference. Opponents of this pluralist theory include Yates (1993) who believes that as a result of post-feminist ideology, the politics of feminism generally and specifically in education have been weakened and complicated to the detriment of girls and women.

Despite Connell's (2011) comments on how the changes in girls' and women's education around the world in the last two generations and the reduction in class inequalities in access to secondary schooling have profoundly changed learning outcomes for girls, pro-feminists continue to promote the notion that the education of girls should maintain our focus and priority in schools. Furthermore, the argument discourages any re-focus of resources onto the difficulties that boys might face. This is seen as a backward step for the ongoing success story of the education of girls. Despite the assertions (see Lingard and Douglas, 1999) that the debate about boys has been characterised by a strong backlash against feminism, schools and policy writers need to avoid this alarmist populism which seeks to assert a binary oppositional and competing victims' perspective on the factors impacting on the social and educational experiences of boys and girls. Recent developments in identifying the disparities in the academic outcomes of boys and girls has resulted in pro-feminist writers feeling the need to defend their positions, but such stances will only serve to homogenise and normalise boys and girls on the basis of sex and in doing so reinforce the disparity in academic outcomes, and many stereotypical versions of masculinity and femininity will have detrimental consequences for both. Bleach (1996) asserts that males are now having to reconcile themselves to a reversal of roles. Boys and men face the erosion of their traditional roles of leaders in their domestic and occupational roles. They have no formal men's liberation movement, no informal male equivalent of the 'sisterhood' to help them cope with the increasing loss of identity.

The current situation in education should not be seen as a *fait accompli*, but rather an opportunity to move the debate forward in a fresh and new direction that will be mutually beneficial to boys and girls which will lead on to similar benefits for men and women. It would, therefore, be feasible to suggest that pro-feminists have a great deal to gain by engaging other politics in meaningful, mutually beneficial conversations. To those who are of the opinion that feminism has created the current divide in academic outcomes between boys and girls, research would indicate that the disparity in these outcomes has always existed. Feminism's role in the past two generations has been to simply expose what was already there (see Troop, 1957). Therefore, the blame should not lie with feminism in creating this divide, but it must take some responsibility in refusing to move their fight beyond the singular which

would allow an opportunity for mutual benefit to boys and girls rather than a fight that has proved to be beneficial to girls alone. Pro-feminism must also take some responsibility for the debate having to negotiate a landscape which is scarred by a backlash, victim mentality which has resulted in a fight for space on two fronts. This battle has served to split resources and our focus on a system that must set party politics aside to the mutual benefit of boys and girls who deserve our collective and undivided attention.

A greater appreciation is required of a fuller picture and of the issues that currently impact on the academic outcomes of boys. I have presented an exposure of engendered rhetoric and the concerns with the feminisation of the classroom as two key inhibitors to boys gaining academic parity with girls. However, they should not be seen as issues holding separate ground within the context of the larger issue. They need to be addressed collectively and with a pluralist mentality. I have presented the women's movement model as a matrix for reference when beginning to address the relative underperformance of boys. Women's fight for equal access to education and areas of the workforce traditionally seen as the domain of men has been successful, although more work needs to be done, because of the support they have enlisted from influential men in political positions that few women occupied. An argument may even be raised that the platform from which the women's movement lifted itself was a platform set down by men through the Chartist movement of the mid-19th Century (see Chase, 2015). A great deal of what women achieved was through the support and acquiescence of men in influential positions who had the authority to legislate in a way that provided women with more equality. It may, therefore, be argued that emancipation was successful because of the pluralist approach taken by men in positions of power who were sufficiently open minded to appreciate the important role women had to play in society. The argument may, therefore, be made that the success of the men's movement relies in part on the support of women in influential positions within the debate through the type of pluralist conversation and convictions that men held in the earlier part of the twentieth century that began to improve their positions and roles in society.

Had women fought for a raft of issues at the same time, success and momentum may have been compromised by the complexity of the debate. Whilst the manner in which feminism succeeded in addressing issues individually, addressing the complex issue of the relative underperformance of boys presents a more complex, multi-dimensional conundrum which needs to be confronted on several fronts through the pluralist support of a diverse group of people on both sides of the debate. The issues of boy's education are far more complex and present a range of concerns which are interlinked to produce what I have referred to as a perfect storm. In this sense, the blueprint offered by the women's movement in successfully addressing single issues does not provide a perfect matrix to follow in order to address the multi-faceted concerns of boys, nevertheless, it is one that provides some model of optimism.

Any one issue amongst those I have covered in this paper will not offer a full picture of the problems that needs to be negotiated. It is only when the issues are appreciated as parts of the whole does one begin to understand the scope of work that needs to be undertaken and where the focus of our attention needs to be directed through a new pluralist, meditative approach. In this respect, new pathways need to be chartered through which the debate needs to pass in order that the issues of boys' underachievement may be resolved and these must be negotiated in sympathy with the ongoing issues that girls and women continue to face.

'There is clearly no single cause for boys' relative under achievement in education, nor is there a simple solution' (Boys: Getting it Right Report, 2002).

References

- Allen, R. (2014) School performance and parental choice of school: secondary data analysis Research Report - Institute of Education, University of London and Burgess, S. and McKenna, L. Centre for Market and Public Organisation, University of Bristol.
- Altman, N. (1995) *The Analyst in the Inner City: Race, Class, and Culture Through a Psychoanalytic Lens*. Relational Perspectives Books, Routledge, New York.
- Arnot, M. David, M and Weiner, G. (1996) *Educational Reforms and Gender Equality in Schools*. Equal Opportunities Commission, Manchester.
- Arnot, M. (1999) *Closing the Gender Gap: Postwar Education and Social Change*. Polity Press, London.
- Australian Council of Social Service (2016). *A Report on Child Poverty*.
- Autor, D. Figlio, D. Karbownik, K. Roth, J. Wassermank, M. (2016). *Family Disadvantage and the Gender Gap in Behavioral and Educational Outcomes*.
- Baker, D. P., Riordan, C., & Schaub, M. (1995). The effects of sex-grouped schooling on achievement: the role of national context. *Comparative Education Review*, 39(4), 468-82.
- Barrett, M. and Phillips, A. (1992) *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Belenky, M. Clinchy, B. Goldberger, N. and Tarule, J. (1986). *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bertrand, M. Kamenica, J. Pan, J (2015) *Gender Identity and Relative Income within Households*. An article in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- Biddulph, S. (1998) *Raising Boys. Why Boys Are Different - and How to Help Them Become Happy and Well-Balanced Men*. Penguin. Random House, New York.
- Bleach, K. (ed.) (1998) *Raising Boys' Achievement in Schools*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Bly, R. (1991) *Iron John: A Book about Men*. Shaftesbury: Element Press.
- Bradford Wilcox, W. (2009) *The Evolution of Divorce*, an article in *National Affairs*. Issue No. 1.
- Brittan, A. (1989) *Masculinity and Power*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Broadhurst, K. Duffin, M. and Taylor E. (2008) *Gangs and Schools: Interim Report*. An interim report for the NASUWT.
- Brooks, A. (1997) *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. London, Routledge.
- Burnett, G. and Waltz, G. (1994) *Gangs in the Schools*. ERIC Digest 99.
- Campbell, A. (1992) *Black Single Female Headed Households and Their Children's Involvement in Gangs*, Unpublished thesis, California State University, Long Beach, CA, U-M-I Dissertation Services, A Bell and Howell Company, Ann Arbor, MI.

- Carby, H. (1982) *White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*, in Centre for Contemporary Studies; *The Empire Strikes back: Race and Racism in the 1970's Britain*. Hutchinson, London.
- Chase, M. (2015) *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies*. The Merlin Press Ltd.
- Chetty, R. Hendren, N. Katz, LF (2015) *The Effects of Exposure to Better Neighbourhoods on Children: New Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment*.
- Coffey, A. and Delamont, S. (2000) *Feminism and the Classroom Teacher: research, praxis and pedagogy*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Cohen, L J. (1981) *Can human irrationality be experimentally demonstrated?* In *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 4 (3):317-370.
- Connell, R. W. (2011) *Confronting Equality Gender, Knowledge and Global Change*. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Connell, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities*. Sydney, Allen and Unwin.
- Cox, E. (1996) *Leading Women: Tactics for Making the Difference*. Random House, Sydney.
- Decker, S.H., and Van Winkle, B. (1996) *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends, and Violence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Dee, T. S. (2006) *How a Teacher's Gender Affects Boys and Girls*. An article in *Education Next*.
- Delamont, S. (1999) *Gender and the Discourse of Derision*, *Research Papers in Education*, 14, pp. 3-21.
- DiPrete T. and Buchmann C. (2013) *Rise of Women, The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What it Means for American Schools*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York.
- Bleach, K. (ed.) (1998) *Raising Boys' Achievement in Schools*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Douglas, P. (1994) *The Body and Social Theory in Connell's Masculinities*. Discourse.
- Doyle, R.F. (2010) *Save the Males; Masculinity and Men's Rights Redux. It's About Time*. Poor Richard's Press, Minnesota.
- Epstein, D. (1998) *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ermisch, J. and Pevalin, D. (2003) *Who has a child as a teenager?* University of Essex.
- Faludi, S. (1991) *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Vintage.
- Faludi, S. (2006) *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. Three Rivers Press, New York.
- Fernandez, R. and Cheng Wong, G. (2011) *The Disappearing Gender Gap: The Impact of Divorce, Wages and Preferences on Education Choices and Women's Work*.
- Field, F. (2016) In an article in *The Sunday Times*, September, 2016.

- Flood, M. (1997) Frequently asked questions about pro-feminist men and pro-feminist men's politics, unpublished paper. Australian National University.
- French, J., & Pena, S. (1991). Children's hero play of the 20th century: Changes resulting from television's influence. *Child Study Journal*, 21(2), 79-95.
- French, M. (1992) *The War Against Women*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Friedman, C. J., F. Mann, and A. S. Friedman (1975) "A Profile of Juvenile Street Gang Members", *Adolescence*, Volume 10.
- Gilbert, R. and Gilbert, P. (1998) *Masculinity Goes to School*. Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards.
- Gillborn, D. (1997) Young black and failed by school: the market, education reform and black students. In the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
- Gilbourne, D. (1997) Racism and Reform: New Ethnicities/Old Inequalities. *British Education Research journal*, 23 (3): 345-360.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Glover, E. D. Modeling (1978) A powerful change agent. *The Journal of School Health*.
- Gneezy, Uri, Muriel Niederle, and Aldo Rustichini. (2003). "Performance in Competitive Environments: Gender Differences." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 118(3): 1049-74.
- Gurian, M. Stevens, K. and Daniels, P. (2009). *Successful single-sex classrooms: a practical guide to teaching boys & girls separately*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Gurian, M. (1996) *The Wonder of Boys*. New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Gurian, M. (1998) *A Fine Young Man*. New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Heywood, C. and Mac an Ghail, M. (1996) *Schooling masculinities*, in Mac an Ghail, M. (ed.) *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*. Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Jackson, D. and Salisbury, A. (1996) Why should secondary schools take working with boys seriously? *Gender and Education*, 8 (1): 103-115.
- James, A.N. (2007). *Teaching the male brain: how boys think, feel, and learn in school*. Washington, DC: Corwin Press.
- Keast, S. (1998). *Gender Issues and Single Sex Maths Classes*. Paper presented at the *Mathematics: Exploring all Angles: Thirty-fifth Annual Conference of the Mathematics Association of Victoria*, Melbourne.
- Kenway, J. (1995) *Masculinities in Schools: under siege, on the defence and under reconstruction?* *Discourse*, 16 (1): 59-79.
- La Paglia, H. (2013) feminism needs to include, not exclude, men. An article in 'Lip'.
- Letts, W.J. (1999) How to make 'boys' and 'girls' in the classroom: the heteronormative nature of elementary-school science, in W.J. Letts and J.T. Sears (eds) *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue about Sexualities and Schooling*. Rowman and Littlefield, New York.

- Lingard, B. and Douglas. (1999) *Men Engaging Feminisms Pro-feminism, Backlashes and Schooling*. Open University Press, Buckingham, Philadelphia.
- Loeber, R., and M. Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) "Family Factors as Correlates and Predictors of Juvenile Conduct Problems and Delinquency," *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*, Volume 7, edited by M. Tonry and N. Morris, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Lu, L. (2014) *Value added models for NSW government schools*. A technical paper for the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. The New South Wales Government, Office of Education.
- Mackey, W.C and Coney, N.S. (2000) *Gender Roles, Traditions and Generations to Come. The Collision of Competing Interests and the Feminist Paradox*. Nova Science Publishers.
- Martino, W. and Meyenn, B. (2001) *What About the Boys? Issues of Masculinity in Schools*. Open University Press, Buckingham, Philadelphia.
- Martino, W. (1999) *Disruptive Moments in the Education of Boys: Debating Populist Discourses of Boy's Schooling and Masculinities in Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. Volume 20, Issue 2.
- Martino, W. (1995a) *Boys and literacy: exploring the construction of hegemonic masculinities and the formation of literate capacities for boys in the English classroom*. *English in Australia*, 112: 11-24.
- Martino, W. (1995b) *Deconstructing masculinity in the English classroom: a site for reconstructing gendered subjectivity*. *Gender and Education*, 7 (2): 205-220.
- McLean, C. (1996) *Boys and Education in Australia*, in C. McLean, M. Carey and C. White (eds) *Men's Ways of Being*. Westview Press, Boulder Colorado.
- Messner, M. (1997) *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Middleton, J. (2012) *In History Today*, Volume 62, Issue 11.
- Mills, M. (2003) *Shaping the Boy's Agenda: The Backlash Blockbusters in International Journal of Inclusive Education*, Vol. 7, Issue 1.
- Moloney, L. (2000) *Do fathers 'win' or do mothers 'lose'? A preliminary analysis of a random sample of parenting judgements in the Family Court of Australia*.
- Munford, R. and Waters, M. (2013) *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique: Explorations in Post-feminism*. Tauris and Co. London.
- Murphy, P. and Elwood, J. (1998) *Gendered learning outside and inside school: influences on achievement*, in Epstein, D. Elwood, J. Hey, V. and Maw, J (eds) *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*. Open University Press, Cambridge.
- Nicholson, L J. (ed. 1990) *Feminism/Post Modernism*. Routledge, New York.
- Niederle M. Carmit S. and Vesterlund L. (2008). "How Costly is Diversity? Affirmative Action in Light of Gender Differences in Competitiveness." NBER Working Paper 13923.

- Noble, C. and Bradford, W. (2000) *Getting it Right for Boys - - and Girls*. Routledge, London.
- Park, H., Behrman, J.R. and Choi, J. (2012) *Causal Effects of Single-Sex Schools on College Entrance Exams and College Attendance: Random Assignment in Seoul High Schools*.
- Perera, N. Treadaway, M. with Sellen, P. Hutchinson, J. Johnes, R and Mao, L. (2016) *Education in England, Annual Report: 2016*. Prepared by CentreForum.
- Raphael Reed, L. (1998) *Zero tolerance, gender performance and school failure, in Achievement*. Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Redwood, F. (1994) *Now Let's Give Boys a Boost*, Daily Telegraph, 7 December, p. 23.
- Reay, D. and S.J. Ball. 1997. 'Spoilt for Choice': The Working Classes and Educational Markets. *Oxford Review of Education* 23(1) pp 89-101.
- Salomone, R. (2003). *Same, different, equal: rethinking single-sex schooling*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sikora, J. (2013). *Single-sex schools and science engagement*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Occasional Paper.
- Simy, J. and Kolb, D.A. (2011) *Are There Cultural Differences in learning Styles? An article for the Department of Organisational Behaviour, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University Illinois, USA*.
- Skelton, C. (2011) *The Feminisation of Schooling or Re-masculinising Primary Education in International Studies in Sociology of Schooling*, Routledge / Falmer, 2011.
- Smith, I K (2013) [<http://kareningalasmith.com/>] on Wordpress.com.
- Smithers, A. and Robinson, P. (2003) *Factors Affecting Teachers' Decisions to Leave the Profession*. Research Report 430, Department for Education and Skills.
- Stock, L., Corlyon, J., Castellanos Serrano, C., and Gieve, M. (2014) *The Tavistock Institute: A Report prepared for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation*.
- Streitmatter, J. (2002). *Perceptions of a single-sex class experience: females and males see it differently*. In A. Datnow & L. Hubbard (Eds.), *Gender in policy and practice: perspectives on single-sex and coeducational schooling* (pp.212-226). New York: Routledge Falmer
- Tacey, D. (1997) *Remaking Men: The Revolution in Masculinity*. Ringwood, Victoria. Viking Press.
- Tajfel, H. (1981) *Human Groups and Social Categories Studies in Social Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Teese, R. (1995) *Who Wins at School? Boys and Girls in Australian Secondary Education*. University of Melbourne Department of Education Policy and Management, Melbourne.
- Thorne, B. (1993) *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*. Open University Press, Buckingham.

- Tropp, A. (1957) *The School Teachers: The growth of the Teaching Profession in England and Wales from 1800 to the Present Day*. William Heinemann LTD, London.
- Walby, S. (2011) *The Future of Feminism*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Walby, S. (1992) Post Post-modernism? Theorising Social Complexity; in Barrett, M. and Phillips, A. *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Wark, H. (1997) *The Virtual Republic: Australia's Culture Wars of the 1990's*. Sydney; Allen and Unwin.
- White, R. (2009) Indigenous Youth and Gangs as Family, in *Youth Studies Australia*, Volume 28, Number 3.
- Whitehead, E. (2009) Understanding the association between teenage pregnancy and inter-generational factors. A comparative and analytical study in Midwifery.
- Wilcox, W. B. (2009) *The Evolution of Divorce*. National Affairs, Issue No. 1.
- Wilson, J. (1987). *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Woodrow, GIB. (2014) An interview with Mr Guy Barlow, Solicitor. Charles Coleman LLP Windsor, Berkshire, England.
- Yates, L. (1997) Gender equity and the boys debate: what sort of challenge is it? *British Journal of the Sociology of Education*, 18 (3): 337-347.
- Yeatman, A. (1994) *Feminism and the politics of difference*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Young Women's Trust. *Making Apprenticeships Work For Young Women*, a commissioned Report, 2016.