

**The way to a boy's heart? New mechanisms for making boys better  
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**Abstract:**

This paper situates the current educational focus on boys in the wider context of a workplace culture of performativity and enterprise. The authors argue that the present focus on reclaiming boys' emotions parallels important shifts in the corporate sector to privilege the 'soft skills' of service and social interaction over the hard skills of boss management. However, in a departure from an earlier generation of correspondence theorists, the authors do not understand this 'correspondence' of schooling and industry needs as merely repressive. The new work culture is a service culture, and boys are being expected to have the requisite skills (of social service) in order to have jobs in the future. The first part of the paper provides a critique of the new essentialism that appears to underpin many of the social and educational intervention programs being conducted on behalf of Australian boys. The second part of the paper explains how such programs work as part of a larger logic about the sort of skills necessary to the 'globalised' workplace. The argument is made here that, for better *and* worse, this work which teachers are being asked to do allows boys to be redeemed as victims of their biology rather than 'behavioural problems'. In being re-formed from villain to victim, boys can become 'better' and more productive at the same time.

## The way to a boy's heart? New mechanisms for making boys better

Erica McWilliam and Jillian Brannock

It came as no surprise to the authors of this paper that, at the very time of its writing, the Australian Federal Minister for Education requested an inquiry into and a report on the education of boys. In June 2000, the Minister invited any interested groups to prepare a submission on:

The social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling, and

the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness. (Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations Correspondence, May 2000, p.1)

This invitation is unsurprising because it comes hard on the heels of a burgeoning number of policy shifts and professional development initiatives being taken in schools in recent years to focus educators' attention squarely on boys – their hopes, their habits, their performance, their proclivities. Since the late 1990s, boys have become suitable cases for treatment at school. They are being identified as academically 'at risk' and socially disengaged, and so are deemed to be in need of special therapeutic and professional services<sup>1</sup>, services which are different from those which currently exist to manage entire populations of students (Biber, Sear and Trudinger, 1999). No school – and no boy – is now beyond the reach of the host of educational technologies that are currently being mobilised *to make boys better*.

What is really important in all this is the extent to which boys' *feelings* – not just their behaviours – are now objects of professional scrutiny. All child-care professionals - teachers, law enforcers, social workers are increasingly urged to understand the importance of finding "the way to a young man's heart" (Fletcher, 1998, p. 10). Our interest here is in asking: how is it that boys' hearts have become so important now? Put another way, how can we explain so much activity around what boys do, and - more importantly - what they *feel*?

One way we could understand this is that it is a backlash to the dominance of feminism in setting the agenda for 'gender equity and education' – ie, that for too long anti-discrimination initiatives in education have been the province of feminist identity politics, and it is now high time to restore the balance. Another way to frame the issue is that we are just now finding out how bad things are for boys and are responding appropriately to this crisis. We come at the issue somewhat differently. Our thesis is that the importance

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the new *The Boys in Schools Bulletin* (1998) produced by the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle, which refers to their "boys at risk" programs, which include the services of psychologists, fitness and outdoor education experts.

of reclaiming boys' hearts (not simply their minds) is precisely in tune with current thinking about the sorts of capacities that are increasingly being regarded as necessary to enterprising workers in corporate settings. New corporate settings demand that everyone be an entrepreneur. And, crucially, the emotions themselves are now being linked quite precisely to entrepreneurialism. We are witnessing in new management literature a blurring of the emotional/logical and the personal/public, a blurring which is producing new identities that are more closely aligned with enterprise culture. Such a blurring of categories is a powerful source of energy and motivation for making new interventions in the lives of young individuals. In particular, the domain of therapeutic expertise, with its techniques for managing the happiness of employees, can and is being mobilised to collapse the personal and the economic in new and unforeseen ways. It is not sufficient in a culture of enterprise that service providers provide good service – they must also *feel like doing so*. In so doing, they are self-regulating and self-sustaining as motivated and productive workers. As stereotypically 'unemotional' and 'out of touch with their feelings', males are now increasingly to be identified as 'lacking' in this new culture (Peters, 1989). Put bluntly, the new work culture is a service culture, and boys are being expected to have the requisite skills in order to have jobs in the future. And the requisite skills include the desire to provide service to others.

Our thesis is that the task of training boys to engage with and serve others cannot be accomplished if boys are understood to be *wilful* or *deficient* in their schooling performance – ie, if they are blameworthy for disruptive behaviour, low levels of literacy and poor academic achievement. In order to 'redeem' boys from their current precarious reputation, teachers and other professional caregivers are now being mobilised to do the work of "reputational rehabilitation" (Gomm, 2000), that is, of moving the social category 'boy' from villain to victim, in order to reclaim 'boys' as potential success stories in the culture of enterprise. Roger Gomm argues that this process of identity reclamation is achieved through blame re-ascription (p.3). The work of "unblaming", as Gomm understands it, is work that shifts both "the attribution of causes" and "the attribution of moral responsibility" (p.4) in such a way that it becomes possible to think a social category differently. We argue that this is the precise nature of the work which is being asked of teachers and in which teachers are now being trained in the professional development programs and related professional activity.

In arguing this, we are not seeking to restore legitimacy to a former generation of arguments about the inevitable correspondence between inequality in schooling and in the economic sphere. The view of Bowles and Gintis (1976, in O'Neill, 1983, p.382) that "schools are destined to legitimate inequality" through the work of "limit[ing] personal development to forms compatible with submission to arbitrary authority", is a view that acknowledges only the *repressive* effects of schooling as identity formation. We insist that the work of 'making boys better' is productive in ways that are both positive and negative for the boys who are the targets of 'masculinity' programs.

To flesh out this argument, we engage in two tasks. The first is to map the sort of biological essentialist arguments which are an important theme of 'cause attribution' in the professional development activity being undertaken in schools and elsewhere in the

community. The second is to show how this work of ‘blaming biology’ allows the reclaiming of the category ‘boy’ as potentially valuable human resource in a performance-enhanced, service-oriented workplace.

### **The ‘essential’ boy**

A brief genealogy serves as a preamble to considering how boys’ difference in terms of under performance is being explained in a new generation of educational programs designed to meet boys’ needs. The mid to late nineteenth century witnessed a relentless search for the pathological deficits in females which would ‘explain’ their under-representation in academic disciplines and public decision-making. This search tracked along a number of pathways: notably, the pathway exploring structural brain differences and typified by the work of Broca (1861); the pathway which argued that women’s reproductive/physiological energy was threatened by rigorous intellectual effort (Clarke, 1873; Maudsley, 1874); and that which drew more generally upon Darwinian evolutionary theory to argue that males as a group had evolved a different suite of intellectual skills which coincidentally equipped them better to academia, politics, and the pursuit of power, a pathway which led to the theory known in the twentieth century as sociobiology (Wilson, 1975). All this activity coincided with a social period marked by moral panics. Such panics stemmed from a number of sources, including the political fallout from widespread liberal democratic reform, the tension between western religious orthodoxies and the “New Science”, the changing nature of work, and the impact of new technologies on everyday life. The search also coincided with what was referred to at the time as the rise of the “New Woman”, women who clamoured for entry into universities and the professions, and even economic independence. The anxiety generated by these changes can be seen in the popular writing of the time:

There are women ...whose brains are so analagous to those of men that they run nearly in the same channels, are capable nearly of the same toil, and reach nearly to the same heights; women ... of hard, sustained, effective power; women who live in and by their intelligence alone, and who are objects of admiration, but never of tenderness, to the other sex. Such are rightly and naturally single; but they are abnormal and not perfect natures. (Rathbone, 1862, cited in Murray, 1984, p. 51).

Fast forward to the year 2000. In many respects, we are witnessing similar sorts of anxieties, but bearing slightly different names. What is striking is the way this broader cultural anxiety has emerged in schools, shaping and re-shaping the agenda for schooling boys and girls. From the late 70s to 80s, much professional development work occurring under the rubric of ‘gender’ was largely driven by a liberal feminist agenda for challenging the under-representation of girls in maths and sciences, and moving more girls into tertiary education and the professions. Notably, the period of the late 1970s coincided with the halcyon days of an expanding higher education system and high employment. At the same time, our teaching colleagues in the five schools in which we both worked during the 1970s were focussed on boys as the most likely “disruptive non-learners” (Pesner, 1976). Moreover, they noted the relatively poorer performance of boys in English curriculum and the humanities.

It is essential that we recognize there is nothing “new” about this lament. Indeed as Cohen (1998) reminds us, it has a long history. John Locke, in his 17<sup>th</sup> century writing, pondered the phenomenon of girls’ greater facility at reading, writing, and learning foreign languages (Cohen, in Epstein, Elwood, Hey & Maw, 1998, p. 21). Much later, in 1921, the principal of the prestigious all boys Rugby school in England “complained that the English composition of a large proportion of boys entering his school was ‘clumsy and painful to the point of illiteracy’, and that boys were ‘unable to grasp a line of argument or assimilate or criticise the contents of a book’” (p.23). We are not arguing that because this criticism of boys’ inadequacy seems familiar, nothing has changed between the 1920s and the contemporary period. The point is made to highlight that this lament about boys’ problematic performance is both strange and familiar. In so doing, we need to recognize that one difference between then and now is the speed with which such laments can be amplified by the media, can be taken up in government policy documents, and can generate a flurry of research projects seeking to highlight the deficits of boys as a group.

A further significant change has occurred. In the 70s and 80s, teacher talk at professional development seminars drew on rhetoric about fairness, social justice, and creating better families/ workplaces/ societies by means of gender reform. In other words, teachers had access to a discourse of “educational liberationism” (O’Neill, 1983) - largely informed by the civil rights advocacy of liberal humanists, Neo-Marxists and third wave feminists - about schools as potential agents of cultural reform and social betterment. Our work in schools, in the process of facilitating more than 140 professional development seminars for teachers between the late 1970s and the current time, has allowed us to monitor closely the anecdotes of teachers, and the growing trend for these anecdotes to be founded in biological essentialism, and marked by skepticism, even pessimism, about the future. The discourse of biological essentialism is embedded in a new ‘pop’ industry of writing about the nature of maleness, including the ways we have been led astray by a generation of socially critical writing about gender difference. Having been blamed for the apparent gender inequities in boys are now being unblamed!

Moir & Moir’s (1998) *Why men don’t iron: the real science of gender studies* is a useful exemplar here. This volume purports to demonstrate that “men’s brains are wired very differently from women’s, so that their stimuli and reactions cannot be the same; and that the increasing feminisation of society, of food and of education is detrimental to men, and eventually to women too” (Back Cover). Nested within their title lies the heart of their argument that theirs is *real* science, as opposed to the dubious analyses of sociologists and feminists. Their thesis notwithstanding, it is a relatively easy task to deconstruct the “science” that underpins the Moir and Moir thesis, as easy indeed as Steven Gould’s task of dismantling the suspect science of nineteenth century brain sex theorists (Gould, 1980). It is not simply that these authors make a bizarre move to group postmodernists together with neo-Nazis on the grounds that both ask questions which unsettle our “certainty” within the disciplinary domains (p.19). It is also the bizarre implication that the only “real science”, that is, the only science capable of producing trustworthy

empirical data, is that produced by biologists and neuro-psychologists, and the exclusion of other domains of science (eg. medical, computer and social science).

The irony here is, of course, that many of the fiercest critics of biological essentialism are themselves biologists or neuro-scientists. Ruth Bleier, for example, has been strongly critical of much of the animal modelling used to support biological essentialist arguments on human sexual behaviour, family grouping, parenting, and aggression (Bleier, 1986). Her criticisms are echoed in the work of the biologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, most recently in the publication *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants and Natural Selection* (1999). Moreover, Lesley Rogers, who is both an animal behaviourist and neuro-scientist, critiques the methodologies (including positron emission topography and functional magnetic resonance imaging) used to support findings of so-called brain activity differences between males as a group and females as a group (pp.14-15) concluding that:

[f]lexibility characterises all levels of biology and behaviour. In other words, our biology does not bind us to remain the same, as implied by simplistic genetic and hormonal interpretations of our behaviour. We have the ability to change, and the future of sex differences belongs to us. (p.118)

The source of the problem of boys' underachievement is, according to Moir and Moir: "the increased 'cissification' of our schools"(p.152). Their remedy for the problem is alluring in its simplicity: single sex schools, or at the very least, single sex classes, because "[b]oys respond to competition and strict discipline, while girls need neither. Put the two sexes together, then remove competition and discipline, and the boys flounder" (p.150). One great irony contained here is that the same remedy was and still is suggested by some feminists<sup>1</sup>. The fact that similar strategies are endorsed by opposing camps in the debate should not surprise, given the lessons of history in relation to the strategies of Left and Right wing organizations.

Apart from its dubious claim as 'science', biological essentialism has the further negative effect of removing from teachers their capacity for cultural and intellectual leadership, reducing them to the status of laboratory attendants. The teacher's task is akin to that of animal husbandry, allowing Nature to do its work. Teachers are to be assisted in this work by an army of neuro-psychologists, socio-biologists, and assorted behavioural therapists, who will intervene where Nature presents problems for the smooth running of the school. Such specialists may offer to remediate by means of drugs, such as Ritalin, the drug of choice in treating ADD/ADHD (Goldman *et al.*, 1998). They may offer separate classes and learning activities which purport to cater for boys' different learning styles, although there is little written about what precisely these 'styles' are. Indeed Lingard and Douglas (1999) argue that "just what boys' specific learning style actually is" is not canvassed "beyond positing it as energetic and robust" (p. 147).

<sup>1</sup> See for example Sarah, Scott & Spender, in Spender & Sarah (1986, pp. 55-66). As Willis and Kenway observed, "single-sex schooling, in some form, is offered by many feminists as one strategy for overcoming sexist educational practices" (Willis & Kenway, 1986, p. 132). Yet the recent evidence from a longitudinal study of 37 New Zealand schools, controlling for the variables of class and ethnicity, indicated that, for girls, no significant academic difference may be attributed to single sex schooling (Harker, 2000).

In many schools, sport continues to be seen as one way of channelling boys' energies and 'natural' aggression, following the logic of Moir and Moir: "Men need sport in ways that women do not..... He becomes one with the flow of the action: advance, retire, hold, pass - *attack, attack, attack*. This is him: his hormones and brain are at one - at peace" (Moir & Moir, 1998, p. 172). Where all else fails, a solution appear in the form of workshops aimed at raising the self-esteem of boys by means of glorifying what is often presented as a unitary, historically unchanging masculine psyche (Biddulph, 1994). Such workshops aim to "make boys feel good about themselves" (Vogel 1997, cited in Lingard & Douglas, 1999, p. 143) on the basis of this biologically endowed, and presumably, immutable masculinity.

So what is wrong with programs that help boys feel good about themselves? Much is wrong, according to a number of critical sociologists in the field. Lingard and Douglas (1999), for example, present a careful analysis of boys' programs in schools, and are critical of what they call "recuperative masculinist" programs, and the failure of such programs to acknowledge the way the world of work is changing (pp. 141-154). A further serious weakness of many such programs is argued to be their blindness to social and cultural dynamics, insomuch as these intersect with and mediate power relations. If such programs are to be genuinely effective on their own terms, they would not only highlight these intersections, but they would also highlight the paradoxes and internal contradictions within dominant masculinities, paradoxes nowhere more evident than in the gendered construction of work. Epstein (1998) highlights this paradox, noting that a significant number of working class boys must be seen by peers to avoid 'school work' since it is somehow feminising, but "among adult men, especially those of the professional middle classes, the harder a man appears to work within the public sphere of jobs and careers, the more 'masculine' he becomes" (p.106). Of course, the reverse is true for many women, for whom excessive dedication to jobs and careers is seen to threaten essential femininity and more importantly, women's devotion to home and family.

Just as Clarke and his nineteenth century contemporaries criticised school work that weakened girls' brains by exhausting their energy, the new biological essentialists such as Moir and Moir criticise teachers and schools for weakening the testosterone-energised brains of boys. However, the solution is not, and could not be, that teachers simply leave the boys to their own devices. With heightened concerns that "poor academic achievement" and "disengagement with learning" (Leadership in Boys' Education Forum Brochure, 1999) are more likely to affect boys in school, teachers are now called to engage in new practices which are more appropriate to the 'special needs' of boys. According to *The Boys in School Bulletin* (1998), there is currently an "array of boys' programs" being trialed in school, all of which 'urgently need' evaluation (p.2). Peer support and cross-age tutoring programs, informal mentoring beyond the school, personal development programs, discipline and management practices for more acceptable behaviour, recognition and reward for learning achievement – all these initiatives make up a new management regime which has important effects on the culture of schools, the work of teachers in schools and on how boys perform in schools.

### **The corporate heart**

The above flurry of concerns, theories and activities related to ‘boy trouble’, we argue, is aligned with significant changes being wrought in the nature of work and those who write about it and engage in it. Our evidence for making this claim derives from themes within the new management literature and from national and international policy developments undertaken in recent years to develop and encourage a culture of enterprise in the workplace.

Enterprise culture appears to entail two distinct understandings. The first is the idea that the market is the best way to achieve effective organisational arrangements ie, that the market has ‘paradigmatic status’ for ‘any form of institutional organisation and provision of goods and services’ (du Gay, 1991, p. 45). The second understanding is about the most appropriate ethical comportment of the individual in a society, and what their relationship to the economy should entail. In this way of thinking, the creation of wealth, which is understood to be the final measure of success, is best achieved by a “highly individualistic form of capitalism” (Heelas & Morris, 1992, p. 3), with each individual working industriously and competitively to achieve their potential. Their autonomy is paramount, and dependence is frowned upon. According to such a view, individuals should be prepared to take risks and take responsibility to achieve bold, ambitious goals which are regarded as “human virtues” (du Gay, 1994, p. 45). A script from the OECD (1989) defines the characteristics of this sort of individual thus:

An enterprising individual has a positive, flexible, adaptable disposition towards change, seeing it as normal, and as an opportunity rather than a problem. To see change in this way, an enterprising individual has a security borne of self-confidence, and is at ease in dealing with insecurity, risks, difficulty and the unknown. An enterprising individual has the capacity to initiate creative ideas, and develop them individually or in collaboration with others, and see them through into action in a determined manner. An enterprising individual is able, even anxious, to take responsibility, and is an effective communicator, negotiator, influencer, planner and organiser. An enterprising individual is active, confident, and purposeful, not passive, uncertain, and dependent. (Towards an ‘Enterprising Culture’: A Challenge for Education and Training, OECD, 1989, p. 36)

This vision of the enterprising individual is very much a part of the significant and influential knowledge production of so-called ‘academic gurus’ such as Charles Handy, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, and Michael Porter, and ‘consultant gurus’ such as Tom Peters, Stephen Covey, and Peter Drucker (Huczynski, 1993). As significant players in the management-fashion-setting community, these people not only distribute their ideas through management texts, but are also often highly successful orators who specialise in persuasive communication (Clark & Salaman, 1998). In this literature, individual citizens are constituted as ‘desiring’ the opportunity to participate, thereby realising their ‘true’ selves.

Importantly, the literature argues for a ‘balance’ of the rational and the emotional. As Peters and Waterman (1982) argue, “we have to stop overdoing things on the rational

side” (p. 54). This incitement to *disorder* is an important step in putting the irrational to work. It is an incitement that is often unaddressed by those who decry ‘economic rationalism’ for its lack of a human face. Activity, passion, and self-fulfilment are to be the hallmarks of all enterprising workers. Tom Peters (1989), for example, lists eight characteristics of the leader “living” the vision, including “being inspiring” and being a “beacon and control”. He completes the list by insisting that “another part of living the vision is pure emotion” (p. 407).

### **Emotional commitment**

So what does all this mean in terms of skilling for work? According to journalist Lisa Southgate (2000), it means that the emphasis is now increasingly on the “good communication and interpersonal skills” which are necessary to “looking after the emotional health of the workplace” (p. 34). One effect of this, she argues, is to create a new market for personal coaches in social charisma:

In a survey of 34 leading Australian-based companies, career consultants RightD&A found more than half provided personal coaches to help with career development, retention, problem solving and situations such as promotion to senior ranks. (p. 34)

Given this scenario, it is hardly a coincidence that ‘emotional literacy’ is making an appearance in lists of generic attributes that ought to be possessed by graduates from schools and universities. ‘Emotional literacy’ is one of the qualities that our own university has named as a generic attribute to be fostered in its graduates. This term denotes a call to ‘expressiveness’, which is framed as a *social* art in pseudo-academic motivational texts such as *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (Goleman, 1996). In this work, Goleman directs the individual to the art of expressiveness through interpersonal relationships as the proper means through which to become “more fully human” (Goleman, 1996, p. 45); however the call to *expressiveness* does more than this. Goleman argues that the behaviours through which one *expresses* oneself can be taken as a measure of an individual’s emotional literacy (p. 341), and as such they can be evaluated, taught and learned. Moreover, Goleman argues, this measurement (‘EQ’) is a much more reliable measure than intellect (IQ) of an individual child’s future success.

One manifestation of EQ, according to Goleman, is “the degree of emotional rapport” between individuals, and the ability of one individual to orchestrate this rapport when engaging with another. Such an orchestration, if done correctly, produces “synchrony” and this “facilitates the sending and receiving of [proper] moods” (p. 116). Goleman elaborates with reference to the relationship between teachers and students:

The synchrony between teachers and students indicates how much rapport they feel; studies in classrooms show that the closer the movement co-ordination between teacher and student, the more they felt friendly, happy, enthused, interested, and easygoing while interacting. In general the high level of synchrony in an interaction means the people involved like each other. Frank Bernieri, the Oregon State University psychologist who did these studies, told me, “How awkward or

comfortable you feel with someone is at some level physical. You have to have compatible timing, to co-ordinate your movements, to feel comfortable. Synchrony reflects the depth of engagement between the partners; if you're highly engaged, your moods begin to mesh, whether positive or negative. (pp. 116-117).

To understand relationships this way is to understand them as produced by means of precise, learnable social *skills* (eg, a talent for rapport, the ability to delay gratification) which foster and preserve relationships (p. 118) while keeping the individual focused on goals. These skills ought to be observable in the daily interaction of any individual if they are part of "communities that care" (p. 279).

In the light of this reasoning, girls and boys become framed as either the product of a parent or teacher with a low EQ, or as individuals who do not have sufficient emotional skill to delay gratification - or both. Given what we 'know' about the essential nature of boys, they are likely to be the ones perceived to be 'more at risk' in this case. In the new main game of "emotional brilliance" (p. 126), it is important that the boys are not left carrying the drinks.

This concern is exacerbated by some emergent trends in employment opportunities for young people. Current Australian statistics show that, in the last two decades, the service sector (office and counter employment) has grown at the expense of the industry sector, a traditional employer of young males. The office sector has grown by 55% to 3.3 million jobs, while the counter sector ('face-to-face' work) has grown by 111% to 1.4 million jobs (Doyle *et al*, 1999). The industry sector has seen a 7.7% decline in full-time jobs in 2 decades, while the the industry sector has also seen a 10.9% decline in part-time jobs in 2 decades. Interestingly however, while traditional full-time employment continues to decline, full-time employment of more than 40 hours per week is on the rise, but this employment is almost exclusively managerial, professional and supervisory, much of which is office and counter work (Heiler, 1998). The brute message here is that job seekers who do not have service (social interaction) skills will either have no jobs or will be consigned to the shrinking, less-skilled sectors of the economy.

When long-term cultural inhibitors of the 'service is sissy' kind are combined with special programs underpinned by biological essentialism, the perception that Australian boys are most socially and economically vulnerable is enormously strengthened. This perception is exacerbated by concerns that education has been feminised both in terms of the curriculum content and gender composition of teaching staff. Fears are frequently expressed in media reports that boys now suffer from a lack of suitable role models because male teachers are discouraged from working with children by fear of being identified as potential abusers of young children (*e.g.*, "Sex Fears Deter Male Teachers", *Sunday Mail*, Jan 12, 1997; "Suspicious Minds Set Against Men in Schools", *Courier Mail*, 6 July, 1999).

All this needs to be set alongside another set of statistics about the nature of contemporary work. The findings of a recent study by Price Waterhouse Coopers indicates that the gender gap that advantages men over women in terms of salary and

working conditions and women did not appear to be closing. National Salary Survey 2000, an Australian Institute of Management Survey of 556 large and small companies, has found that the average female management accountant earned 20% less than her male counterpart (Targett, 2000, p. 5).

Clearly a case can now be made for the vulnerability for just about any section of the community, including those who have been historically the most privileged. Our interest in this paper is not to argue that boys *en masse* are more or less vulnerable now than they were a decade or even a century ago. Rather we have attempted to argue that, when generic ‘what about the boys’ concerns are legitimated by pseudo-biological arguments about the intrinsic nature of boys, the reputation of the social category ‘boy’ is rehabilitated, and that this, in turn, has the effect of rendering boys more employable in a workplace culture of enterprise. The effect of this is the production of boys as a category of social and emotional risk – as victim rather than villain. As victims, boys become the potential recipients of a wide range of therapeutic services to be provided by psychologists, counsellors, mentors, academics and teachers. What boys must learn are more productive ways to *feel*, and this can be done through precise forms of training in ‘emotional literacy’ (Goleman, 1996) .

The point here is that teachers’ practices and positioning in relation to masculinity debates and to boys’ well-being programs cannot be innocent or neutral. The work of arguing an essential biological difference which makes boys a victim to their (schooling/schooled) identity is crucial to the task of reclaiming the reputation of boys. It is at the same time dubious science, but science that makes a claim for a different allocation of educational and social resources than currently exists, and this must have implications for the education of girls in a ‘more for less’ funding climate. Nevertheless, once the task of reputational rehabilitation is done, the social category ‘boy’ can be put to work as potentially of service to the community, both inside and outside the workplace. And where possible to think so positively about boys and their feelings, actual bodies can and do follow. Having made boys more vulnerable, there are good reasons for helping them to *feel better*.

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