8

GENDER

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

After reading this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- In what ways does gender as a cultural construct condition the ways in which people make sense of themselves as men and women, and as boys and girls?
- How does gender operate as a social variable, opening opportunities and pathways for some but creating inequalities for others?
- How do schools function as gendered organisations? How does the gender order of the school shape the working conditions and experiences of teachers?
- How does gender play out in the social relationships of students in school? What is bullying and what can be done to prevent it or alleviate its effects?
- Why do girls do so well at school and why are they more likely to complete Year 12 than boys? Is it because most teachers are women so that boys are not motivated by them, or are there other factors at play?

Gender and schooling

Every day and at every level of the education system, teachers and students confront contentious issues that are gender-based. Parents may, for example, complain that there are too many female teachers at their school and many believe that their boys need male teachers as role models. Boys who appear effeminate may be taunted with being gay, even if they are not. While most teachers are female and in public schools, an increasing proportion of them are being promoted, it is still the case that higher-level leadership positions in schools are disproportionally held by males. These are the kinds of issues that form the focus of the field of gender studies, and this chapter aims to provide a simple introduction to this field and discuss how gender politics play into the lives of teachers and students, and the policies and practices that shape our schools and shape gendered identities.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER

People's sense of themselves—their identities—encompass many elements. These may include, for example, categories of age, race, class, gender and sexuality, all of which shape human subjectivity in profound ways. In Chapter 1 Debra Hayes introduced the idea that although the categories that help us construct our identities are 'often taken for granted and unquestioned, they should be understood as conditional and constructed by systems of language and relationships of power' (Hayes 2010, p. 11). In relation to gender, there are social and cultural mores that assert fairly clear differences between the identity of men and women, particularly in terms of the inequalities and constraints that these categories are taken to imply. These mores are socially constructed rather than static. They vary between societies, and they vary over time. **Gender**, therefore, can be defined as the lived experiences of men and women in a particular social context; experiences that are multidimensional and subject to change. The idea that women could exercise some control over the inequalities and constraints imposed on them was a significant motivating force behind the feminist movement of the 1970s. One of the revolutionary ideas that emerged from this movement was that a woman's biology did *not* inevitably prescribe her destiny. Sex is a biological fact—being male or female. By contrast, gender is a cultural and social phenomenon that refers to constructed differences between men and women.

The sex/gender distinction was a liberating breakthrough for the late-twentieth-century Western feminist movement as well as the gay liberation movement. The realm of the social was opened up, and as Connell wrote, 'this was a realm of freedom, where individuals or societies could choose the gender patterns they wanted' (2009a, p. 57). Within Western feminism—which encompassed Marxist, radical and liberal feminist frameworks—gender was seen to operate both as a set of cultural understandings that represents what it means to be a man or woman, and as a social variable that structures the opportunities and pathways that men and women are expected to follow. These two perspectives have been increasingly elaborated as gender scholarship has expanded globally since the 1980s. What is known as the **discursive or social constructionist perspective** focuses on the ways in which cultural understandings of gender (including definitions of manhood and womanhood) are constructed by systems of language and relationships of power. The **feminist-materialist perspective** focuses on issues of inequality, on the ways that gender dynamics are shaped by the opportunities or constraints that shape the lives of men and women in particular social environments.

During the early 1970s, theorising distinctions between these two positions was not a primary goal for activist feminists. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the important feminist texts from that time, including Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970/2003), suggests that the work done by these authors was theoretically nuanced in ways that are often not acknowledged in gender scholarship (see, for example, Eisenstein 1984, pp. 5–15). If there was less of an emphasis on differences in their early theoretical positions on the sex/gender distinction in the 1970s it is because this was a time of substantial focus on historical materialism and social change. Oppressive gender arrangements—such as unequal pay, regulations that excluded women from membership in influential organisations, employment discrimination, abortion rights and so on—became the main objects of organised feminist campaigns. Later in this chapter we look again at the materialist perspective and examine how gender continues to function as a tangible social variable. Before doing so, however, we examine some of the limitations of the earlier formulations and theories of Western feminism, reviewing critiques that have led to a substantial broadening of the field of gender studies.

In a useful text titled *Theorizing Gender*, Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon (2002) point out that becoming male or female can mean many things. There are myriad processes through which we may

GENDER
a socially constructed category that defines what it means to be a man or a woman within a particular community at a particular time.

DISCURSIVE OR SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE
a popular scholarly paradigm from the 1980s that focuses on the ways cultural understandings of gender are constructed by systems of language and relationships of power; also known as 'the linguistic turn'.

FEMINIST-MATERIALIST PERSPECTIVE
a combination of radical feminist and Marxist frameworks that focuses on issues of gendered inequality—the ways that gender creates opportunities or constraints that shape the lives of men and women in particular social environments.

become gendered selves (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon 2002, p. 3). They argue that 'our gendered selves cannot be detached from other aspects of subjectivity and positionality, such as race, class, sexual orientation, able bodiedness, and so on' (2002, p. 3). These categories of difference and inequality, they argue, are mutually constitutive (2002, p. 3). None of these factors can be ignored, nor can they simply be added together. And yet, despite some conspicuous successes, the predominantly white, Western feminist movement was severely critiqued because it was accused of not fully embracing this complexity, and tended to overlook the full range of factors that contribute to the struggles that women living in different contexts face, including different cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity (Ang 1995, pp. 55–73; Pritchard Hughes 1997, p. 17).

A powerful critique was mounted by developing-world feminists from the 1980s who argued that Western feminists had exported to the rest of the world a set of theories and strategies that were context-specific and worked best for white women living in developed societies such as the USA (Spivak 1988; Minh-Ha 1989). Their critique centred on the long-lasting effects of racism and colonialism, which they argued were fundamental to their subordination, and they objected to the fact that white feminists appeared to be speaking for them and making **universalising** claims that did not fit their experiences (Landry & MacLean 1996; McClintock 1995). They were joined by other voices that drew attention to the substantial differences between women in different social contexts: women who are black, or lesbian, or otherwise distinguished from the hegemonic white Western category. They argued that if the term 'woman' is applied in an unqualified way to everyone who is biologically female, then all women will be defined by their gender only, and their social class and ethnic identities will be sidelined. If the elements of identity that contribute to difference and inequality are mutually constitutive, then gender as a category must always be qualified in relation to these elements, including race, class and sexual orientation. Articulating the case against universalism and deconstructing the categories of male and female was a defining moment in gender studies (Scott 1986, pp. 1053–75). As Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon noted 'from the early 1980s the issue of difference within the category "women" has become central to feminism' (2002, p. 33).

UNIVERSALISM
the assertion of claims on behalf of an entire category (for example, all women) based on the experiences of a restricted sub-group.

With this increased focus on *difference* rather than *sameness*, the feminist project, particularly in the academy, expanded. Categories other than 'woman' became incorporated into the study of gender history and politics; and in many locations, particularly Australian universities, *gender studies* replaced or subsumed *women's studies* (Curthoys 2000, pp. 19–38; Threadgold 2000, pp. 39–48). It was now understood that in discussing how gender functions, one must always take care to consider how the experiences of black women or the experiences of working-class women, for example, differ from those of middle-class white women. This argument obviously applies to men as well as to women. For both men and for women, gendered categories are always race-specific and class-specific. The broadening of the field meant that alongside (and to some extent in response to) women's studies, men's studies emerged as a new genre, creating a space for debates about the nature of masculinities and the forms of social expression available to men (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985; Brod 1987).

The work of Australian gender theorist Raewyn Connell (1987, 2000, 2005) has made an exemplary and substantial contribution to the theorisation of masculinities, in both a local and global context. Hegemonic masculinity, Connell argued, is a culturally dominant construction that functions as an ideal type (2005). With its emphases on heterosexuality, economic success, providing for one's family, being able-bodied, being rational and keeping one's emotions under control, this hegemonic ideal is a construction that most men can never live up to. Rather, as Connell suggested, it is a type of masculinity performed by popular heroes and fantasy figures. Eschewing the idea that there is an inner masculine core that defines what a *real* man is, Connell and others who have developed the field

of men and masculinity studies argue that masculinities can be understood as varied, dynamic and constantly changing (Connell 2005; Ruspini et al. 2011).

An important achievement of this field is that it has unmasked the connections between hegemonic masculinity and homophobia. Observations and analyses of the everyday activities and discourses of men and boys, particularly in Western countries, suggest that homophobia is not just the fear of gay men, but rather it is the fear of being *labelled* as gay. In summarising the work of key authors in this field, Alsop et al. suggest: 'Boys who are subject to homophobic taunts are not exposed to taunting because of their sexuality but perhaps because they flouted other rules of masculinity, by not taking part in "boyish" activities, having close friendships with girls, perhaps being perceived as a swot' (2002, p. 144). This line of work is important because it has interrogated the assumption that one can only be *normal* through conformity to a culturally endorsed heterosexual ideal. Queer theory has taken this interrogation to another level.

Queer theory

Connell's analysis of the concept of hegemonic masculinity draws attention to the fact that many people see gender as the outward expression of an inner essence. Popular and idealised images of how a *real man* behaves suggest that there is a gendered core or inner essence—an essence that is deeply connected to male sexuality and identity. The same is true for depictions of the *real woman* in everyday society, or the *femme* in lesbian culture: her hips and breasts define her characteristic female body shape and she dresses in a way that accentuates these features. Her behaviour in her relationships is seen as demure and passive, seemingly expressing her *true* femininity. One's biology is often seen as fundamental to these gendered expressions, though such ideas have been problematised through the existence of butch-femme and transgender communities throughout history, as well as in lesbian and queer theory (Case 1988; Nestle 1992). It is commonly taken for granted that the human race is divided into two categories, male and female, and that one's sexual characteristics (that is, genitals) represent the starting point upon which one's gender (however one displays it) is prescribed. Queer theory questions and destabilises these fundamental, taken-for-granted assumptions.

Theory to Practice

Queer theory: gender as performance

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Nestle, J., Howell, C. & Wilchins, R. (eds) (2002). *GenderQueer: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary*. New York: Alyson Books.

Queer theory questions the idea that men and women's various gendered behaviours are an expression of an essential, biological male or female inner core (Jagose 1996). Judith Butler's theoretical work (1990) has led to the most extensive development of this position. Her writings are sophisticated, and difficult to capture in the short and inevitably simplified account offered here. In brief, her discursive account of gender construction is one that proposes that gender refers 'not to something we *are* but to something we *do*' (Nestle, Howell & Wilchins 2002, p. 24). Every day we enact performances that conform to the strict regulations of a binary divide, male or female. She argues that it is due to socially endorsed imperatives that women produce feminine behaviours and men produce masculine behaviours. It is from these repeated performances that gender materialises, subjectivity is constructed and society functions along

gendered lines. Gender activist and author Riki Wilchins provides a helpful illustration of this argument:

> I don't pull on certain clothes in the morning or style my hair a particular way because of something within me. I do these acts in a manner consistent with either a masculine or feminine norm because to do otherwise would render me socially unintelligible. People wouldn't know what I was or how to treat me, and I would be the target of a great deal of hostility (Nestle, Howell & Wilchins 2002, p. 24).

The gender system is a dynamic system of meanings and symbols. As Wilchins points out, gender 'produces meanings' and a carefully codified system, such that there are binary birth certificates, toilets, immigration laws and marriage laws (2002, p. 26).

The gender system entails the application of rules. There are privileges and punishments associated with accepting or violating these rules. Queer theory draws attention to repressive aspects of the gender system, pointing to the ways in which this system asserts the normality of the heterosexual binary. The term '**heteronormativity**' refers to this assertion. Being gay, lesbian, queer or transsexual represents a transgression of the rules of heteronormativity because they stand in defiance of the binary divide and thereby challenge the hegemony of heterosexist practices.

HETERONORMATIVITY the assumption that one can only be 'normal' through conformity to a culturally endorsed heterosexual ideal

For some proponents, queer theory is a social project. Gender activists working with this theory aim to broaden commonly accepted understandings of how gender is constructed, to move beyond the narrow confines of heteronormativity, and to reduce the inequity and violence experienced by so many young people—and also by many of their teachers—in our schools and in our communities. Activities reflecting the impact of this social project are taken up later in this chapter.

Schools as gendered organisations

A fundamental contribution of gender scholarship has been to frame organisations as systems of power relations that are embedded in gender, arguing that the working conditions of employees in organisations cannot be adequately understood unless the dynamics of gender are acknowledged. Building on these insights, organisational sociologists and management studies academics have collaborated with feminist scholars to develop 'gendered organisations' as a new inter-disciplinary field (Acker 1990; Martin & Collinson 2002). This field focuses on the central importance of organisational processes in reproducing gender inequalities and, on the flip side, on the role of gendered discourses in shaping how organisations function. Researchers in this emerging field argue that organisations themselves are gendered; that gender is not just a property of individuals. Gendering is not something that happens within a neutral organisational context when men and women arrive. Rather, gender relations are embedded in the historical origins, administrative structures and cultural traditions of organisations themselves. Connell (2009a) proposed that the pattern of gender relations that is characteristic of a given organisation may be called its 'gender regime'. Gender regimes are multi-dimensional. Table 8.1 provides illustrations of the many elements that characterise the gender regimes of schools and education systems.

Gendered patterns in the organisation of schools are not accidental, but rather are deeply embedded in the histories of school systems and their modes of operation. Although gender regimes may be subject to change, specific features of these regimes may persist for a surprisingly long time. For example, in all-boys elite private schools, constructed idealised images of masculine subjectivities (elite, masculine, successful) are used in school prospectuses to 'sell' the school to prospective parents (Gottschall et al. 2010, p. 19).

Table 8.1 The school as a gendered organisation

GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF ORGANISATIONS INCLUDE:	IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS:
1 The division of labour—for example, there are gendered jobs in the organisation's structure.	Only 19 per cent of primary school teachers are men, but they hold 53 per cent of primary principal positions. At the secondary level, 43 per cent of the teachers are men, but 68 per cent of secondary principal positions are held by men.[a]
2 Power relations—for example, men and women (and boys and girls) exercise power differently.	Most often boys are the perpetrators of bullying: they bully other boys as well as girls. Girls sometimes bully other girls, but they rarely bully boys. Male leadership styles are thought to be tough and directive, while female leaders are thought of as conciliatory and supportive.
3 Emotional relationships—for example, patterns of antagonism and solidarity are gendered.	Peer interactions often function to amplify and maintain boys' dominant behaviours. In secondary schools, male teachers may seek to maintain dominance in departments such as IT where they constitute a majority.
4 Organisational cultures—for example, beliefs about gender difference and equal opportunity are gendered.	It is often assumed that boys are better than girls at 'rational thought' subjects such as maths, physics and computer science. Girls are thought to be more intuitive and social than boys, and more verbally fluent.[b] Familiarity with male leadership styles means that men are often privileged when they apply for school principal positions.

a = McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon & Murphy (2011).
b = Fine (2010).

Gender regimes also involve significant unevenness. There are some parts of a school's life where gender is strongly marked, and other parts where gender is quite muted. This is important for understanding the school's role in the construction of masculinities. There are particular areas of school life where processes of masculinity formation are intensely active. For example, there are 'boys' subjects', such as physics, computer science and VET (Vocational Education and Training) studies connected with trades. These are tied to future occupations that are traditionally gender-segregated. They are often taught by men with backgrounds in those occupations. The science staff room or the maths staff room can often be locations where women teachers do not feel at home. Interpersonal dynamics like workplace humour and joking can reflect and reinforce damaging power asymmetries.

FOOTY: A REAL MAN'S GAME!

Competitive team sports such as football provide a classic example of an activity whose boundaries are strongly policed (and a gender regime enforced) by the men and the boys in schools (Keddie 2003a). Until recently, boys had an exclusive entitlement to play competitive rugby league football in high school, giving them control of much more playground space than girls were entitled to. In New South Wales it is rugby league that counts in the wider culture as a symbol of heroic masculinity. It is not surprising, therefore, that girls' rugby league only

became a high school sport as recently as 2008, and even then on a small scale, in a handful of outer-suburban high schools in Sydney's western suburbs. As with rugby league, Australian rules football has always been a 'real man's game', yet the Australian Football League (AFL) has embraced gender equity more readily than the National Rugby League. For example, the AFL in Victoria has been promoting women's football for many years, and by 2009 most co-educational secondary high schools in Victoria could boast that they had a girls' school team alongside their boys' team.

At the same time as recognising areas of school life that are gender-saturated and complicit in the regulation of gendered norms, we should also recognise other areas of school life that are relatively gender-neutral. Teachers may deliberately play down gender in classroom management; for example, by arranging mixed-group seating or by treating all children in a mixed classroom in common ways. (A familiar example: addressing a class as 'children' rather than 'boys and girls'.) There are occasions when children themselves will ignore gender boundaries and gender solidarities. The 'de-gendering' strategy is not unique to schools. Indeed, it is now a familiar strategy in organisational life, used for example by public sector managers as a way of implementing equal opportunity rules (Connell 2005). Whenever teachers say: 'I treat them all as individuals' or 'I don't treat boys and girls differently', they are implicitly adopting a de-gendering approach and may be creating a de-gendered zone of school life complicit with gender equity principles. This is not always the best thing to do from an educational point of view, since there are times when we do want to make gender an explicit theme of discussion and learning. But it is now a familiar and widespread strategy.

Organisational patterns of schools and education systems may have unintended educational consequences. In secondary and post-secondary education, different pathways open up as electives replace the common curriculum that prevailed in primary schooling. These pathways tend to be gendered in a number of ways. It is not surprising, then, that there are growing gender differences in subject enrolments through secondary school, and actual gender segregation in some areas of vocational education. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the doctrine of separate spheres dictated that women should not be in the same classes or study the same subjects as men. As a result, some school subjects (maths, science and technology) were offered only to boys while girls were excluded. This exclusion cast a long shadow and led to the assumption that girls were not suited to intellectual endeavours in these fields. Over many years these subjects were taught by men and the curriculum materials chosen embodied male interests and preoccupations. And yet, it is a mistake to attribute gender patterns in 'subject choice' to the magical influence of genetic differences between males and females. Rather, these differences are historically produced patterns, they can change over time, and they are connected with the wider patterns in gender relations.

MORAL PANIC: THE FEMINISATION OF TEACHING

In recent years, as part of a media-driven backlash against the public gains of the feminist movement (Faludi 1992), popular concern has been whipped up about the feminisation of the teaching force in Western countries and the supposed negative effects on boys due to the 'lack of male role models' in schools. Moral panic created around this issue in Australia has emerged largely because it appears that Australian girls are now more successful than Australian boys in terms of performance on tests, completion of school and admission to universities. It was not always so and, as discussed later in the

chapter, this phenomenon appears to be related to unique features of the Australian youth labour market, rather than to identifiable defects in our school systems.

At the beginning of the 1970s, boys outnumbered girls two-to-one in Australia's universities, and dominated enrolments in prestigious faculties such as medicine and law. Only a tiny proportion of girls studied the more difficult mathematics subjects or physics at the Year 12 level. At this time, boys were also more likely than girls to complete Year 12. The contrast between then and now is in part a testimony to the cultural and institutional changes brought about as a result of liberal feminist reforms, in so far as these have addressed the relative silencing and undervaluing of female contributions to the Australian workforce, society and culture. At the same time, the introduction of new technologies and the move from industrial to post-industrial modes of production has largely eliminated opportunities for low-skill male employment (Blackmore 2001) and therefore eliminated avenues through which many men were initiated into 'manhood' (Morton 1997, p. 39). And yet, over this same period the skilled trades continued to be dominated by men. Furthermore, Caro and Fox have highlighted that while 'more than half the full-time jobs for teenage boys have disappeared, an incredible two-thirds of full-time jobs for teenage girls have simply evaporated' (Caro & Fox 2008, p. 108)

During the second half of the twentieth century, the gender gap in terms of educational performance gradually closed in Australia and the UK, aided by a wave of feminist-inspired public reform that sought to redress the lack of educational opportunities for girls (Arnot, David & Weiner 1999; Collins, Kenway & McLeod 2000a). As this shift occurred, conservative forces started to turn the rhetoric of liberal feminism on its head by asking, often in strident tones, 'What about the boys?' Around the mid 1990s, a media furore broke out about the 'plight of our boys'; and boys' education, and in particular boys' literacy, was defined as being in a state of crisis throughout Western countries (Rowan et al. 2002).

Over the years since then, 'boy advocates' have presented their case against the social and cultural 'feminisation' of schools so passionately that anyone relying on media sources and popular literature could be forgiven for believing that schools are organisations specifically designed to help girls rather than boys. Writers such as Biddulph (1997) and Sommers (2000), for example, have argued that contemporary schools are 'feminised' institutions that disadvantage boys educationally and harm their development of an inner manhood (Alsop et al. 2003, p. 135). It is difficult to square these claims against the evidence over time. For example, until 1977 boys' Year 12 completion rates were higher than those of girls. Thus, boys consistently managed to out-perform girls through the 1960s and 1970s, despite the fact that, even at this stage, female classroom teachers substantially out-numbered males at this level. How was it that boys back then managed to do well in what were supposedly feminised contexts? The premise itself is questionable: although women have long constituted a majority of teachers, they are consistently under-represented at the leadership level in schools. In Australia in 2011, 81 per cent of primary teachers were women yet the proportion of women holding principal positions was only 53 per cent. At the secondary level, 58 per cent of teachers were women but only 31 per cent of the nation's secondary principals were women.

It is not always the case that women dominate the teaching labour force. UNESCO reports comparing primary school teaching data for sample countries of the Global North with the Global South suggest that teaching is not a feminised occupation in many developing countries and regions. This means that where teaching ranks among the best-paid and most prestigious occupations, it tends to be male-dominated. Understanding these differences requires analysing gender differences in teaching through a broader lens of gender equity issues in employment, women's rights, education and empowerment (Kelleher 2011). Differences exist within countries as well; these require an analysis of gender issues similar to those noted above. Within India, for example, teaching is a male occupation in Rajasthan but is dominated by women in Kerala (Kelleher 2011).

Another element of the 'feminisation' rhetoric is an essentialist belief in the 'natural order' of men and women that Biddulph and others argue has been distorted by the privileging of women's voices and experiences (through the Western feminist movement) at the expense of boys and men (Alsop et al. 2003, p. 135). However, the main difficulty with the moral panic positions over the perceived feminisation of teaching is that there is no hard evidence to indicate that female teachers are ineffective in educating boys (see 'Gender and school performance' later in this chapter). On the contrary, studies focused on teacher effectiveness have found that expert teachers are characterised by having deep content knowledge, and they are better at relating lesson content to prior lessons, to other school subjects and to underlying principles and students' interests. They also are more flexible and opportunistic in pursuing the learning needs of individual students (Hattie 2012). Teachers who have these attributes are effective regardless of whether they are male or female.

Research in Action

Teacher gender and student motivation

- Martin, A. & Marsh, H. (2005). 'Motivating boys and motivating girls: Does teacher gender really make a difference?' *Australian Journal of Education, 49*(3), 320–34.

In 2005, quantitative social researchers Andrew Martin and Herb Marsh looked specifically at the effects of teacher gender on student motivation and engagement levels, conducting a study using a large student sample of over 900 students drawn from five Australian government schools (Martin & Marsh 2005, p. 323). They administered a 'Student Motivation and Engagement Scale' to junior and middle high school students, asking them to rate their level of experience across a range of cognitive and behavioural dimensions (p. 324). For example, in order to gauge how they perceived their own levels of engagement and motivation, the scale asked students to rate their self-efficacy (a belief in their own ability to achieve academically), their valuing of learning a subject, their mastery of orientations (problem-solving skills), planning skills, study-management and persistence (pp. 324–5). The data was then collated in order to assess the interaction between student and teacher gender and grade level with student experiences, self-perception and behaviours in classrooms. The study also used 'mutlilevel modelling' to analyse whether the contexts of individual students (Level One), their class (Level 2) and school (Level 3) also affected student motivation levels (pp. 326–7).

What their data revealed was contrary to the moral panic associated with the supposed feminisation of teaching; that is, boys at the primary and middle levels did *not* fare any better with male teachers compared with female teachers. As Martin and Marsh highlighted, 'the only significant interaction that emerged was that girls reported a better relationship with female teachers than with male teachers, while boys reported fairly similar relationships with both female and male teachers' (p. 330).

The authors reviewed several other quantitative studies that reached similar conclusions: boys and girls are no more or less motivated or engaged in classes taught by men or by women. Rather, it is the quality of the teachers' pedagogical practices, rather than the gender of the teacher, that students are most concerned about and that impacts their attitudes and behaviours towards education (p. 331). Martin and Marsh thus concluded that their study further called into question stereotypical models or ways of conceptualising gender dynamics in education research, namely the idea that 'boys fare better academically in classes taught by males and girls fare better in classes taught by females' (p. 320). Instead, they revealed gender dynamics in

schools to be much more fluid and subject to variation across student, class and school levels. Indeed, they concluded that further study in this area would benefit from a focus on how student motivation and engagement might be further affected during the transition between junior, middle and senior high school (p. 332).

PAUSE AND REFLECT

1 Why is it important to take into account a student's personal circumstances, their class background, their grade level and their school context when assessing their level of motivation?

2 Have you ever felt the gender of your teacher has significantly affected your motivation or engagement?

While most people agree that it would be an excellent thing to have a more even gender balance in this part of the workforce, the economic and cultural forces shaping teacher recruitment into primary and early childhood education are overwhelming and make this highly unlikely (Cushman 2005). Even if the wider public thought it was a good idea to have more male teachers, this is not going to be fixed by asking more men to show up for primary teaching programs. This is because the gender imbalance in primary teaching—and on independent school boards—is part of a larger system and history of the gendered division of labour in the education system as a whole. As Margaret Baird, Associate Professor in the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney, highlighted in 2007: 'We are one of the highest occupationally sex segregated nations in the world. That may feed into why women go not into the operations areas, but they are in services and support. They are also in the jobs that get cut in organisations' (Baird, quoted in Caro & Fox 2008, p. 108).

PRIVILEGING MEN IN THE TEACHING WORKFORCE

Despite the lack of any sound empirical evidence to support the case, moral panic about the supposed negative effects of the feminisation of teaching continues to affect many parents, especially, it would seem, those seeking to locate their children in private schools. This is because of a well-established and popular discourse that frames the feminisation of classroom teaching as inherently problematic. In recent years this discourse has developed into a 'recuperative masculinity politics' (Mills, Martino & Lingard 2007) playing out in Australian schools (Kenway 1996). Examples of the emergence of masculinity politics are provided below.

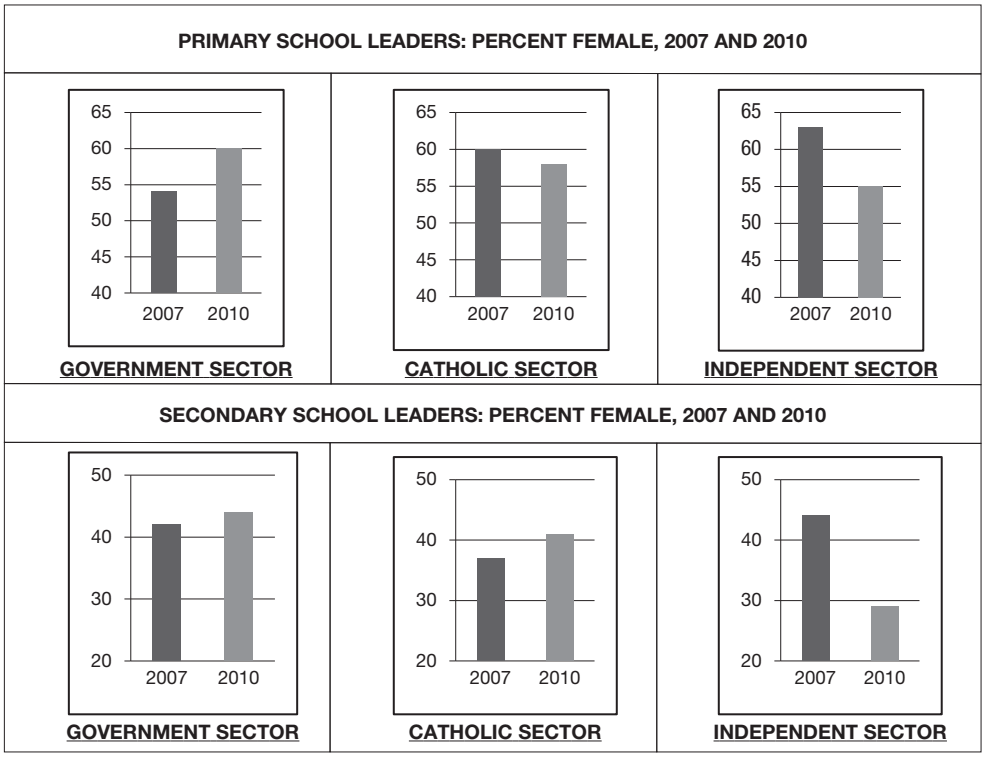
The backlash against feminisation and its effects on women in teaching

While the overall proportion of teachers who are women has grown steadily over the past decades, it is important to look at women's experiences in the teaching workforce to determine how they are treated as employees within schools and by the education system and authorities. As the proportion of women teachers grows, it might be reasonable to expect similar growth in the proportions of women in principal and deputy principal positions. Indeed, this shift has been steadily taking place in the government school sector (see Figure 8.1). In 2010, 60 per cent of the principals and deputy principals

in government primary schools were women. Female school leaders are no longer a minority, yet it needs to be remembered that since 80 per cent of primary teachers are women, there is still a problem of under-representation of women at the school leadership level. A similar pattern exists at the secondary school level, with the proportion of women who are school leaders being substantially smaller then the proportion of women at the classroom level.

As Figure 8.1 indicates, between 2007 and 2010 the proportion of female teachers in leadership positions decreased in Catholic schools and in independent primary and secondary schools. For the independent sector, the decrease in the proportion of women in leadership positions was dramatic. What this means is that in independent schools, relatively large numbers of male teachers are being promoted from the classroom level into leadership positions: this must be so since data presented by McKenzie et al. (2008) indicate that most promotions to leadership positions occur within the same school sector rather than across sectors. It is rare, for example, for a public school principal to gain a principal position in an independent school, and the reverse is also the case (McKenzie et al. 2008). With large numbers of men moving up the promotion chain in the independent schools, either the percentage of men at the classroom level will fall, or their schools need to vigorously recruit new male teachers in order to ensure that classroom teaching does not become more feminised. Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data (ABS 2011d) show that in the non-government sector, the proportion of male teachers increased by 25 per cent between 2001 and 2011. The equivalent statistic for the public sector shows a decrease of 2 per cent in the proportion of male teachers. It would appear, therefore, that the privileging of male classroom teachers for promotion to the leadership level in the independent sector is having a knock-on effect. Anecdotal reports from New South Wales teacher education institutions suggest that male teacher education graduates are finding it relatively easy to

Figure 8.1 Percentages of female school leaders in primary and secondary schools



Source: McKenzie et al. (2008); McKenzie et al. (2011).

become permanent full-time teachers, especially if they apply to independent schools. By contrast, many female graduates appear condemned to struggle on with casual and temporary employment, ever hopeful of moving up on the list towards a permanent teaching position.

The data in Figure 8.1 provide estimates of the percentages of females in leadership positions (principals and deputy-principals) in primary and secondary schools. These data are based on national surveys conducted in 2007 and 2010 by McKenzie et al. (2008) and McKenzie et al. (2011). Looking at primary schools across the three sectors, there was some growth in the percentage of female leaders between 2007 and 2010 in the government sector (54 per cent to 60 per cent), but a slight decline in the Catholic sector schools (from 60 per cent to 58 per cent). However, the decline in the proportion of female leaders in the independent sector was dramatic. In 2007, this sector was leading with 63 per cent of schools having female principals, but by 2010 this had fallen to 55 per cent, below the proportion of female leaders in the other two sectors.

In secondary schools across the nation, the percentages of female leaders increased slightly in both the government and Catholic sectors between 2007 and 2010 (42 to 44 per cent, and 37 to 41 per cent respectively). However, as the figure shows, there was a massive decline in the proportion of female school leaders in the independent sector, from 44 per cent in 2007 to only 29 per cent in 2010. This means that between 2007 and 2010 the independent school sector moved from being the best performer in terms of women teachers' promotion opportunities to being the worst. Substantial shifts of this kind demand explanation.

The 'Gender politics and principals' box presents one interpretation of the dynamics behind the reduction in the proportion of women in leadership positions in the independent school sector. Here, Amanda Bell, Principal of Brisbane Girl's Grammar, is commenting on the first-ever appointment of a male principal in to a prestigious girls' school in the same city. Another perspective on the privileging of males as educational leaders in the independent sector comes from research by Gottschall et al. (2010). Gottschall and her colleagues show how elite private schools deliberately convey idealised images of elite active masculinity through their promotional materials. The messages from Bell (2010) and from Gottschall et al. (2010) are consistent: it appears that male principals are preferred in leadership positions in the elite independent sector because they promote a masculine image of discipline and control that is seen as being essential for the academic success and appropriate character formation of the students in their charge.

The trends illustrated in Figure 8.1 not only have implications for schools as gendered organisations, but also for individual female teachers and the way they may internalise ideas about themselves as successful leaders in the education system. As Connell has pointed out, gender regimes regulate masculinities and femininities through labour management, which includes job allocation and the organisation of work; as well as through power relations, which are concerned with 'authority, control, and the construction of hierarchies … over and amongst people'(Connell, cited in Alsop et al. 2002, p. 138). Connell also uses the term 'Cathexis' to refer to the third component of gender regimes; this term refers to the structures of emotional relations in organisations (Alsop et al. 2002).

GENDER POLITICS AND PRINCIPALS

- Bell, A. (2010). 'The Eve Syndrome and school principals.' *The Drum*, 10 November. Accessed at www.abc.net.au/unleashed/40938.html.

In 2010 the Principal of Brisbane Girl's Grammar School, Amanda Bell, criticised the appointment of Dr Peter Britton as the first male principal of the prestigious Ipswich Girls Grammar School,

due to her belief that only 'strong *female* role models [are needed] to lead the women in their care' (Bell 2010, emphasis added). While Bell was suggesting that schools *should* be organised along gender-specific lines due to the different needs of boys and girls as part of their gendered socialisation, Bell also addressed the double standards and essentialist logic pervading the process through which school authorities designate leaders of gender-segregated independent schools. According to Bell, school boards and councils of major independent schools support male leaders of girls, while 'the reverse certainly does not happen—independent boys' schools are exclusively led by male headmasters, presumably because they are seen as strong role models for their students' (2010). According to Bell, this is due to the internalisation of the 'Eve complex' across the largely male-dominated, independent school boards. The Eve complex has been theorised as a cultural mythology that characterises women—particularly young adolescent women—as 'emotionally complex, manipulative, feisty and wayward' and thus in need of a firm, fathering hand (2010). This complex is what Bell argues is being espoused by school boards who seem to favour male leaders of girls' schools due to stereotypical understandings of men as 'decisive, controlled, stable, firm, in charge' (2010). This constructs female teachers as the 'Other': emotional, cautious and collaborative, and therefore antithetical to the specific masculine traits required of school leaders.

The appointment of principals in independent metropolitan schools is thus not a gender-neutral or level playing field. As Bell notes, 'there are significantly more male principals than female principals … therefore the pool of potential female applicants is substantially smaller'. When the issue of appointing a female deputy—let alone a female principal—is broached among school authorities, it is typically framed as a source of potential risk, requiring 'advanced planning, resourcing and time investment' due to their dubious leadership status in the eyes of such authorities (2010).

These culturally ingrained and highly stereotypical understandings of male and female gender identity and traits are affecting the extent to which female teachers are able, or prepared, to put themselves forward for leadership positions in independent schools. As Bell also notes, a lack of female representation on independent school boards mirrors the 'statistics showing inequitable representation of women on corporate boards, despite all the assurances we have now about gender equity being common sense' (2010).

A lack of support for female principals is not only apparent in independent schools, but also in state schools. Many female state school principals have recently spoken out about the high level of physical and emotional abuse they have been subjected to, particularly from male parents, 'precisely because they were women in leadership positions … [claiming that] their male peers did not have to put up with the same level of threat' (Caro & Fox 2008, p. 114).

At an even more basic level, the school as an institution has historically shaped gendered norms and identities by constituting a social milieu in which hundreds of students are thrown together over long periods. Here a peer forum is created in which patterns of masculinity and femininity are experienced and performed. In such a setting, the issue of hegemony—relations between dominant and subordinated patterns of masculinity—is very likely to become an issue of concern in boys' lives, and a source of future turbulence in gender relations. Boys in school may struggle for dominance in the playground peer group, in the course of which bullying and exclusion can arise. Bullying of boys who are thought to be effeminate or homosexual is a very common source of tension and violence in schools.

BULLYING, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Bullying is a persistent and harmful feature of peer group relations in schools in Australia and in education systems elsewhere. It is defined by authors in this field as: 'a deliberate act designed to inflict physical and psychological harm … [that] is typically repetitive in nature … [and] involves a power imbalance between the bully and the victim characterised by the victim's inability to defend him or herself against the bully' (Marsh et al. 2004, p. 64). Numerous studies have examined the prevalence of bullying and the significant impact it can have in the socialisation of young children. From these studies a consistent pattern emerges, indicating that at least 50 per cent of Australian school children experience bullying at some point in their schooling, and approximately one in six are bullied every week (Rigby & Slee 1999). A large New South Wales study involving 115 schools and over 3900 children in Years 6, 8 and 10 found that only 42 per cent of children never bullied others and were never bullied (Forero et al. 1999). Other studies using large samples have found similar results: more boys than girls report that they have bullied others and have been victims of bullying; bullies tend to be unhappy with school; and bullying behaviour leads to troubling social and psychological symptoms that persist over time and often continue into adulthood (Marsh et al. 2004; Rigby & Slee 1999).

Much of the research on bullying, including the works cited above, has its origins in disciplines such as educational psychology, medicine and public health. Earlier work in this field tended to focus on individualistic and pathological understandings of the origin of bullying, but in more recent studies, researchers have found that bullying always occurs in complex social environments and is a complex social phenomenon that shapes gender identities.

Theory to Practice

Bullying and the regulation of Australian masculinity

- Marsh, H., Parada, R., Craven, G. & Finger, L. (2004). 'In the looking glass: A reciprocal effects model elucidating the complex nature of bullying, psychological determinants and the central role of self.' In C. Sanders & G. Phye (eds), *Bullying: Implications for the Classroom* (pp. 63–109). Orlando: Academic Press.
- Keddie, A. (2003). 'Little Boys: Tomorrow's Macho Lads.' *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *24*(3), 289–306.

Marsh et al. (2004) have theorised bullying in schools as a complex social process in which both bullies and victims experience negative self-perceptions that follow them into adulthood. Studies of peer group relations in schools in Australia have similarly drawn such conclusions, revealing bullying to be a pervasive reality in the Australian education system with far-reaching consequences for the social and psychological development of young people (Marsh et al. 2004; Rigby & Slee 1999).

Marsh et al. found that bullies often work in groups to determine who to target as a victim and that when witnessing a bullying event, girls appear more likely to advocate for the victim, while boys tend to join in or passively watch. Highlighting the competitive nature of bullying and its core reliance on a source or object of differentiation, their study also suggested that bullies may receive some admiration from their peers for engaging in behaviours that lead to the intimidation of an identified victim. What this suggested was that bullying can help form and solidify group solidarity among students, based on the victimisation of another group or individual, thus establishing their sense of power and dominance. In this way, bullying can help to create and maintain social hierarchies in a school context.

Social ethnographer Amanda Keddie has further elucidated bullying as a form of competition, differentiation and identity formation in 'Little Boys: Tomorrow's Macho lads' (2003). This paper details a study she conducted with a small group of 6–8-year-old boys in an Australian primary school context in order to ascertain how understandings of masculinity are expressed and formed in early childhood, thus challenging traditional assumptions in childhood pedagogy that young children are 'innocent' in their awareness or manipulation of gender politics (Keddie 2003b, p. 289). The most thought-provoking aspect of this study was its use of a feminist post-structuralist framework (p. 290) to analyse both children's and teacher's comments about boyhood and masculinity. Through interviews and interactive group sessions, these subjects revealed their understandings of gender to be highly contingent and socially produced, rather than fixed (p. 297). In this paper Keddie notes that such feminist frameworks and pedagogies allow for 'examining how the social dynamics and language practices position the boys hierarchically' (p. 292).

This linguistic and behavioural analysis challenged naturalistic assumptions about innate masculinity in boys and men, illustrating how a specific manifestation of schoolboy masculinity was constructed through aggressive and competitive behaviour and dialogue among male peers, the denigration of females or the feminine as 'other' (p. 289) and the idealisation of a 'patriarchal heterosexuality' (p. 295).

In this extract from Keddie's study we see four of the boys in escalatory dialogue, in which they are subordinating another male peer, 'Brian', in order to solidify their image of true masculinity as macho and aggressive and based on a denigration of girls.

Adam: *Brian*? He's as weak as water.
Matthew: Yep, he can't even …
Adam: He's always annoying, 'e always acts like a chicken, an' um 'e always screams like a girl.
Jack: Yeah, he screams like a girl, like he shows off 'n' that …
Justin: I seen him scream like a girl.
Adam: Yeah, and for 'chasies' he goes, 'Arhhh, don't get me, I'm running!' Arsehole!

By reading the studies of Marsh et al. and Keddie in conjunction we can see how bullying is not a simple or linear process—or a one-dimensional dynamic between bully and victim—but a highly volatile, discursively produced and socially contingent process with implications for gendered socialisation from early childhood through to adulthood. Further, Marsh et al. have shown that bullies and victims cannot be divided into separate categories. A large proportion of those who bully others also report that they have been bullied. More often than not, bullies and victims are either the same children, or are children with similar characteristics. In particular, whether they are bullies or victims, these young people mostly see themselves as doing poorly at school, do not like school, feel that their relationships with their parents could be improved, and generally have low self-esteem.

Longitudinal analyses by Marsh et al. also show that children who are victims at one stage often become bullies later on, and vice versa. The majority are boys who have negative perceptions of themselves and are not doing well at school. They bully others in an attempt to establish a personal sense of power and to affirm their understanding of a macho and aggressive masculinity which they have absorbed from wider society. And yet, while some of their peers may actively support their behaviour, they do not, over time, become more popular. On the contrary, many of them subsequently become victims of bullying. As longitudinal measures show, those who engage in the combined victim–bully role continue to have problems into adult

life, with a range of issues including anger management, depression and low self-esteem. Those who are victims but not bullies are also significantly affected in the long term, especially through high levels of depression and suicide ideation (Rigby & Slee 1999). These studies suggest that the effects of bullying extend beyond the schoolyard, affecting the social development and mental health of individuals well into adulthood, and reframe peer group relations in schools as pivotal to the shaping of wider society.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

1 What do Keddie and Marsh et al. reveal about bullying in schools and its role in shaping gender identity and social hierarchies? Why is this an issue which needs greater understanding, and possible intervention?

2 How might the idealisation of macho and aggressive masculinity affect the school experience and socialisation of boys?

Sexuality and bullying

As Keddie's work has illustrated, in both primary and secondary schools, the social dynamics of peer culture function to amplify restrictive understandings of masculinity, which position girls—as well as boys who are seen to be effeminate or are suspected of being gay—as the negative 'other'. The dynamics that are so evident in peer cultures in schools obviously draw on dominant discourses in the broader community. Such discourses—often expressed through the media and expounded by religious groups—permeate everyday conversations among the 'majority' heterosexual population: they function to normalise heterosexual relationships and marginalise young people who are same-sex attracted or who have gay or lesbian parents.

Despite the difficult methodological problems involved in gathering data on gay and lesbian issues, two large Australian studies have taken on the task of examining the well-being of same-sex attracted adolescents (see Hillier et al. 1998; Hillier, Turner & Mitchell 2005). Hillier and her co-researchers developed a survey that was made available on the internet and also mailed out to young people, aged 14–21, who saw the survey advertised in youth magazines or through the daily media. Overall, 750 valid responses were collected in 1998 and 1748 in 2005. Both surveys found that gay and lesbian young people were subjected to alarming levels of verbal and physical abuse. The results from both the 1998 and 2005 surveys are remarkably similar. Approximately half the young men in both samples reported verbal abuse. They were most often labelled, being called a 'poofter' or a 'faggot'. In terms of both verbal and physical abuse, young men were targeted more often than young women. Schools were identified as the most hostile environments that these young participants ever experienced.

In both 1998 and 2005, 70 per cent of those who reported being abused said that the abuse occurred at school. Perhaps the most disturbing finding from these reports is that gay and lesbian youth find they have no one they can turn to for advice or support, experiencing alienation on multiple fronts. All too often they are caught between silence and denial on the one side, and risking rejection and abuse on the other (see the Sexuality and bullying box). It is also important to recognise that teachers who may be gay or lesbian, or identified as such, face considerable harassment within school settings where a gender hierarchy exists and privileges hetereonormativity as 'normal'. The institutionalisation of heterosexuality in schools means that perceived deviations in teachers, as well as students, are subject to discrimination and exclusion throughout the school community, and from a variety of perpetrators including fellow teachers and students (Ferfolja 2009).

SEXUALITY AND BULLYING: PERSONAL TESTIMONY

My childhood up until I reached high school was pretty good. I wasn't sporty or outgoing, but I had a couple of close friends and I enjoyed doing the stuff you do when you live in the country, yabbying, swimming in the river, etc. I loved reading and I was top of the class academically. When I entered high school everything changed. On my first day a boy who was from out of town decided, because I wasn't wearing the same shoes as everyone else, that I would be his target to pick on. From that point my life very quickly became a nightmare. This boy … soon had those who mattered on his side and against me. Fairly quickly his focus came around to my sexuality. I'd known at that point I liked men, even fantasised about them, but hadn't realised what it really was … When the name calling started I started to hate myself because although I was denying everything they said, I knew it was probably true. I believed at the time it was evil and sinful and dirty and people like that would die from AIDS. I didn't want to be a faggot, but every day other kids were reminding me that I was (whether or not they believed it themselves). I never felt I could discuss this with any adults including my teachers. The only time I ever told anyone that I was having problems was when I had a nose bleed that wouldn't stop (another kid had hit me in the locker rooms and the teacher had seen him). The teacher had told me to forget about it.

Source: Extract from Hillier et al. (1998, p. 12).

As we have already noted, bullying has damaging effects on its perpetrators as well as on its victims. The struggle among boys to establish a dominance hierarchy at school is often connected to the denigration of gay males, as discussed above. Yet bullying can also be a source of significant educational problems for all parties. For instance, especially in working-class communities, there are groups of boys who attempt to establish dominant positions in the social hierarchy of the school through bullying because they are unable to do so through academic competition. By enacting what Connell (2005) calls 'protest masculinity', these young men style themselves as macho-males, deliberately entering into conflict with the school and sometimes becoming violent towards other boys or towards teachers. Poynting, Noble and Tabar's (1998) important study of Lebanese youth in Sydney shows how protest masculinity arises, in part, as a response to racism and social exclusion. Boys following such trajectories may abruptly end their educational careers and go into the labour market without qualifications, and with very weak employment prospects.

GENDER AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE: THE BOY TURN

Responding to heightened public awareness about gender issues and masculinity politics from the mid 1990s, the conservative Liberal–National Coalition federal government began seriously tackling issues of boys' and men's welfare during the 2000s. Conceptualised by Weaver-Hightower as the 'boy turn' in gender equity and educational reform (Weaver-Hightower 2003), bipartisan initiatives such as the 2002 Australian Federal Inquiry into Boys Education, as well as the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools (BELS) program (2002) and the Success for Boys (SFB) program (2004), created an economy for boys' education (Weaver-Hightower 2008). Aside from an awareness of gender politics as articulated by the past two decades of feminist activism, what these schemes indicated was

a growing consensus on both sides of parliament (although mainly among conservative politicians) that Australia's education system had swung too far in favour of girls. Further, these schemes had an underlying anti-feminist and anti-'special-interest' group agenda, suggesting that academics, women, Indigenous Australians and gay and lesbian people, among others, had co-opted government spending for their own private interests (Mills, Martino & Lingard 2007, p. 8) and that boys and men now formed the disadvantaged of the feminised/feminist economy (Sawer & Hindess 2004).

The Federal Minister for Education from late 2001 to the end of 2005, Dr Brendan Nelson, was an enthusiastic supporter of the boy turn in public policy. Nelson chaired the bipartisan inquiry into boys' education, *Boys: Getting it Right* (Standing Committee on Education and Training 2002), and introduced the BELS (2002) and SFB (2004) schemes, which were allocated a massive $8 million and $19.4 million of government funding, respectively. The high level of support and funding for these schemes was in stark contrast to the absence of federal grants for other purposes, including university education, women's centres and welfare support services (Maddison & Partridge 2007). This gave unprecedented cultural and political legitimacy to the notion of 'boys' rights' in Australia and such nationwide schemes were allowed to bypass the more critical eye and regulation of state government systems. Indeed, the boys' education initiatives that developed in Australia and the UK during this period are now internationally recognised and applauded (Rosin 2012, pp. 164–7).

Nevertheless, the reasoning behind the establishment of such schemes—that boys' academic standards and well-being were falling behind that of girls'—became a self-fulfilling prophecy, promoting faddish and problematic ideas about the differences in boys' and girls' learning abilities. As Weaver-Hightower wrote, BELS became a 'central engine for the manufacture of ideas about boys' education in Australia, particularly practice-based knowledge' (2008, p. 127). While it initiated a national focus on enhancing teacher professional development, the *BELS Stage 2 Final Report* (see Cuttance et al. 2007) revealed an array of misguided strategies for developing boys' educational success. For example, some of the education consultants employed to direct BELS programs suggested to teachers that there were physical differences in male and female *brains*, and that the colour of the walls in classrooms needed to be 'adapted' to provide an appropriate context for boys' educational success. Less faddish, but equally concerned with the idea that boys are 'wired' differently and require a different approach to schooling in a feminised economy, the *Boys: Getting it Right* report (Standing Committee on Education and Training 2002) promoted the idea of 'masculinising schooling' (Mills, Martino & Lingard 2007, p. 7). This meant creating 'boy-friendly curricula, assessment and pedagogical practices in schools, and the need for employment of more male teachers' (Mills, Martino & Lingard 2007, p. 7).

The initial justifications for focusing government policy and spending on boys' education was based on the assertion of that there was substantial evidence indicating that boys were seriously falling behind girls in terms of educational performance. (In the following section, these assertions are examined and alternative arguments about gender and educational performance in Australia are developed.) Although media commentary still tends to suggest that girls now regularly outperform boys, the evidence for this claim is patchy and exaggerated (Vickers 2005). Furthermore, it has often employed dangerously simplistic—and misleading—representations of gender relations, in which boys and girls are represented as homogenous groups in opposition to each other, thus favouring 'the interests of the current patriarchal gender order' (Mills, Martino & Lingard 2007, p. 6). For example, *Boys: Getting it Right* (Standing Committee on Education and Training 2002) reported boys as uniformly failing (which they are not) and girls as uniformly winning (which is also untrue). In suggesting this, the report virtually ignored three decades of feminist literature

that illuminated gender as a *relational* construct, as well as the myriad complexities of male and female experiences across axes of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability. A more useful approach to analysing the current and future state of boys' education, suggested by Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2000b) and by Mills, Martino and Lingard (2007), is to ask: which girls and which boys are succeeding or underachieving? As Mills, Martino and Lingard wrote, this approach 'is necessary for disaggregating and understanding the educational performance data of males and females in schools' (2007, p. 11).

After the election of a Federal Labor Government in 2007, BELS was allowed to lapse in 2008. Since then the preoccupation with the boy turn has lessened somewhat in public schools, though it may be alive and well in the non-Catholic private sector. One cannot argue that gender is irrelevant to student performance and educational outcomes, yet as the evidence below indicates, differences in literacy and numeracy scores are much more strongly influenced by family socio-economic status and parental education levels than by gender. This highlights the need to re-examine the educational performance of Australian boys and girls; to look critically at gender-based score gaps, asking where they occur, whether they increase or decrease as girls and boys move through school, and how large they are compared with score gaps based on other factors such as parental education and parental occupation status. This is a crucial aspect of the 'Which Girls/Which Boys?' approach to evaluating education systems in Australia. Through contextualising educational performance of boys and girls, along axes of socio-economic status and family background, we are able to reframe our understanding of gender, not merely as defined by biology but also by the multidimensional and volatile relations of class, race, inequality, oppression, access and opportunity.

A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE ON GENDER-BASED SCORE GAPS

In Australia, the state and territory ministers and the federal minister engage in joint policy development through the Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Employment, and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). In 1997, MCEETYA established the National Assessment Plan—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). This led to the development of national benchmark tests for reading, writing and numeracy, which were implemented in schools from 1999. Since then these tests have been extensively revised to create measures of reading, writing, grammar, spelling and numeracy that have been used each year by schools in systems across Australia—at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9—since 2008. Thus, while data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) series provide an indication of the levels of student performance at the junior secondary stage, the NAPLAN tests provide nationally comparable data for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Whereas the benchmark tests that were used from 1999 to 2007 only provided data on literacy and numeracy achievements, the NAPLAN program includes family background data, so that it is now possible to examine variations in scores by variables that include parental education, location (that is metropolitan versus rural) and Indigenous status. The following summary, based on the 2012 Report (NAPLAN 2012), draws on the data for student achievements in reading, writing and numeracy, and describes the outcomes by gender at each year level. While there are some consistent differences in the mean scores achieved by males and females, these are of a much smaller magnitude than the score differences associated with the parental education levels of students taking the tests (see Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 National results in reading, writing and numeracy, Australia

The data	Nationally consistent assessments are conducted annually in each jurisdiction at the Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 levels. These assessments report the full range of student achievements against a single continuous scale, which comprises ten bands. These bands cover the full range of student achievement in each domain (reading, persuasive writing, language conventions and numeracy levels) from Year 3 to Year 9.
Measures	NAPLAN Reports provide mean scale scores for each domain, disaggregated by state/territory, sex and a range of background and geographical variables. They also report the percentages of students whose achievements fall within each band level, and the percentages of students achieving below, at or above the national standard, by domain and grade level.
Gender effects	Comparing the mean scale scores for reading in Year 3 suggests that girls perform better than boys. Boys' mean = 413.0, girls' mean = 426.6; a difference of 13.6 points. Although this mean remains steady, with a slight increase over time, the proportion of boys and girls reading at or above the national standard—Year 3 (boys = 91.9 per cent, girls = 95.5 per cent) and Year 9 (boys = 89.4 per cent and girls = 93.5 per cent)—had a much smaller margin and was quite similar. Male–female differences are more pronounced for writing, and this increases over time. For example, in Year 3 the mean score for boys was 402.8 and for girls 429.5 (26.7 point difference). In Year 9, the mean score for boys was 533.9 while for girls it was 574.4 (40.5 point difference). In numeracy performance there are only small differences between boys and girls. Between Year 3 and Year 9 the proportion of boys and girls who have numeracy levels at or above the national standard remains similar. In Year 9 this was boys = 93.9 per cent and girls = 93.5 per cent.
Family background effects	Comparing the reading results of students whose parents have a Bachelor-level degree with students whose parents have not completed Year 12 suggest much more significant differences in achievement and learning, related to family background. For example, the mean reading score for Australian Year 3 students with highly educated parents is 461.7, compared with 366.5 for students with less-educated parents: a large gap of 95.2 points. The gap between the mean reading scores of these two groups is seven times larger than the male–female reading gap. This gap does seem to decrease between Year 3 and Year 9, suggesting that Australian schools have programs in place to compensate for the initial disadvantages some students may face in their learning due to low parental education levels. However, in Year 9 there is still a 75-point difference in the mean reading scores of students with highly educated parents and those with less-educated parents (five times higher than the Year 9 gender differential in reading).

Source: Adapted from NAPLAN (2012).

The results reported here are consistent with the data from earlier MCEETYA benchmark tests. The national reports, which began in 1999, provided several consecutive years of data for Years 3, 5 and 7 (NAPLAN 2012). Across all these data, no significant differences emerged between boys and girls in the numeracy benchmarks. However, there were some differences between boys and girls in achievement of the national reading benchmarks. More substantial differences emerged from the

national reports in their data on writing performance. On these, more girls than boys achieved the benchmarks, at all grade levels.

Using 2012 NAPLAN data, it is possible to ask: 'How big are gender effects, in comparison with other variables?' As Table 8.2 shows, the mean achievement scores of males and females on the NAPLAN reading and mathematics tests are of a much smaller magnitude than the score differences associated with the parental education levels of students. The influence of family background upon student academic performance is also obvious when one looks at the proportions of students who achieve the national standards. Commenting on data for the Year 9 level, the 2012 NAPLAN national report states that 'in all domains, mean scores are higher for students whose parents have higher levels of education [a Bachelor degree or higher]' (NAPLAN 2012, p. 256).

International surveys

Since 2000, Australia has been a participant in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This program assesses the achievements of 15-year-olds in literacy, numeracy and scientific literacy in over seventy industrialised countries. PISA surveys samples of 15-year-olds enrolled in schools and operates on a three-year cycle, so that PISA results are now available for 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009. In addition to administering measures of academic performance, PISA obtains student responses to questions about home and family background, which provides the basis for measuring economic, social and cultural status index (ESCS; see Table 8.3). PISA now also measures differences in educational achievement based on school sector; government, Catholic and independent.

Table 8.3 International surveys conducted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The data	Large nationally representative samples of 15-year-old students completed PISA tests over seventy participating countries that are affiliated with the OECD.
Measures	Mathematical literacy measure—results available for 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009. Reading literacy measure—results available for 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009.
Gender effects (Australia)	Mathematics—In 2000 and 2003, there were no Australian male–female differences in mean scores, but in 2006 males performed more highly than females, a trend that has been occurring across OECD countries. The male–female difference in mean mathematics score was 14 score points in 2006. In 2009 PISA results again suggested that boys were outperforming girls in mathematics in Australia, although the difference in mean scores had decreased to 10 points. Reading—The mean reading score for females in Australia is superior to that of males: this result has been evident in each PISA assessment since 2000. In 2009 the difference in mean reading scores between boys and girls was 37 points. Science—There were no significant differences recorded in the mean scores achieved by male and female students in scientific literacy in 2009.

International comparisons of gender effects	Australia's overall scores in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy place us among the best-performing OECD nations on the PISA tests. However, the 2009 PISA report also indicates that Australia's level of reading proficiency has significantly decreased in terms of its overall rank among other OECD countries and in its average student performance—among males and females—which decreased by an average of 15 points since the 2000 report. Reading—According to the 2009 PISA report, Australia, along with New Zealand and Japan, are the only three OECD countries in which more than 2 per cent of boys performed at Level 6 (the most advanced level) for the *integrate and interpret* and *reflect and evaluate* reading subscales. Sixteen per cent of female students and 10 per cent of male students in Australia performed at Level 5 or 6, compared with 10 per cent of females and 6 per cent of males across most OECD countries.
School sector effects (Australia)	PISA 2009 was the first time that differences in learning outcomes were compared across school sectors; government, Catholic and independent. On average, government schools were outperformed by Catholic and independent schools, with independent schools achieving slightly higher results for reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. In government schools there was a higher proportion of students (19 per cent) who did not reach Level 2 in the reading literacy proficiency scale, compared with Catholic schools (8 per cent) and independent schools (5 per cent).
Family/socio-economic background effects (Australia)	Differences in students' socio-economic backgrounds (measured by an index of economic, social and cultural status; ESCS) significantly affected PISA scores. For instance, once both the students' and school's socio-economic background were taken into account, differences in students' mean scores for reading, mathematical and scientific literacy were made redundant across the different school sectors. There is a significant gap in the literacy proficiency levels of students from the highest to the lowest socio-economic quartile: an average of 90 points difference in mean score points and a gap equivalent to either one proficiency level or about three full years of schooling. When measuring reading literacy proficiency, students from the highest socio-economic quartile achieved a mean score of 562 points, whereas students from the lowest socio-economic quartile achieved 471 points: a difference of 91 points. When measuring mathematical literacy, students from the highest socio-economic quartile outperform students from the lowest socio-economic quartile by 90 points. In scientific literacy, the difference between these two quartiles is 96 score points, with the higher socio-economic quartile again outperforming the lower.

Source: Thomson & De Bortoli (2008); OECD (2010); Thompson et al. (2009).

The data reported in Table 8.3 clearly indicates that the differences in performance related to socio-economic status are much greater in magnitude than the gender-based differences in performance for both reading and mathematics. Whereas the gender-based differences in reading scores was 37 points, there was a 91-point difference between the average reading scores of students in the highest and lowest socio-economic quartiles in Australia. And while the gender-based difference in mathematics scores was quite small (10 points, in favour of boys), there was a 90-score point difference between the average mathematics scores of students in the highest

and lowest socio-economic quartiles. These international data support the conclusion drawn from our examination of the Australian NAPLAN data. Clearly, the proposition that boys are uniformly failing while girls are uniformly winning is seriously misguided. As Cuttance et al. (2007) argued in reviewing the results of the BELS program, 'boys' in general do not need help. The students who do need help are the boys and the girls whose skills are not well established, and who lack effective learning strategies.

The gender gap in high school completion rates

It has become a general assumption across Australia that girls are more likely to complete high school than boys. However, this was not always so. Until 1976, boys' retention rates were consistently ahead of retention rates for girls. The shifts that occurred after 1976 can largely be attributed to the impact of labour market changes on teenage males and females. Between 1977 and 1995, the number of full-time jobs available to Australian teenagers fell sharply. Labour market data assembled by Wooden (1996) indicates that over these twenty years, while more than half of all full-time jobs for teenage males disappeared, more than two-thirds of all full-time jobs for teenage females disappeared. Girls were, therefore, more substantially affected by the economic changes associated with neoliberalism and globalisation than were boys (see Chapter 3). In 1966, only one-third of each teenage cohort completed high school and two-thirds of all teenagers were in the labour force, most of them working full time. Teenage unemployment was negligible.

During the 1980s, high school completion rates doubled. By 1991, over 70 per cent of all teenagers were completing high school, and fewer than 20 per cent of 15–19-year-olds had full-time jobs (Wooden 1996; Lewis & Koshy 1999). Ever since 1991, the overall national high school completion rate has remained above 70 per cent and it is now considered normal to expect that three-quarters of all students in each cohort will complete Year 12. A gender gap in favour of girls emerged and this has become a stable feature of the current pattern: while male retention rates tend to hover around 70 per cent, female retention rates typically hover at around 80 per cent. Thus, for the past 22 years female high school completion rates (or more precisely, apparent retention rates; see Chapter 3) have remained 10 percentage points higher than those of male high school completion rates.

It is possible that one of the factors contributing to the gender gap in Year 12 completion rates is that girls are outperforming boys academically. Research studies by Lamb, Hogan and Johnson (2001) confirm that the rate of early leaving is indeed greater among young people with weak Year 10 results. However, there is a *gender gap* within this phenomenon. Girls who perform poorly in Year 10 are more likely to stay on at school than boys who perform poorly (Lamb, Hogan & Johnson 2001). One of the most plausible explanations for this difference between the behaviour of poorly performing boys and poorly performing girls is that boys who do not enjoy school are more likely to find a job to go to than are the girls. In part, this is because of the gender bias in traditional apprenticeships. The electrical trades, construction, motor mechanics and so on remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, reflecting the continuing gender segregation of the labour market. Males traditionally entered these occupations immediately after reaching the minimum school leaving age, and a majority of new apprenticeship commencements still go to males who have not completed Year 12 (NCVER 2001; Toner 2005). Although girls can take up traineeship positions, only a small percentage of them enter traditional apprenticeships. Unlike their brothers, most girls cannot leave school and enter a secure pathway that combines training with employment. As the study cited above suggests, low-performing girls tend to battle on at school, while boys with similar levels of ability leave.

In Australia, young men who leave school without completing Year 12 have much better labour market options than young women. Using longitudinal data for a national sample that were in Year

9 in 1995, Lamb and Mason (2008) examined the labour market status of early leavers and Year 12 completers seven years out of school (that is, in 2005). Compared with female early leavers, male early leavers were far more likely to be in full-time work seven years out of school (70.3 per cent for males compared with 41.3 per cent for females). Female early leavers were significantly marginalised in the labour market: 22.0 per cent of them were working part-time (compared with 10.8 per cent for males) and 26.5 per cent of them were unemployed or not in the labour force (compared with 10.2 per cent for males).

Long-term declines in full-time teenage job opportunities have affected both males and females. As already noted, over two-thirds of full-time jobs for females disappeared over the twenty years from 1977 to 1997 (Wooden 1996). Labour market opportunities for young women have continued to decline since then. In the annual series titled 'How Young People are Faring', the Dusseldorp Skills Forum reported that over half a million 15–24-year-olds are not in full time work and not studying. Whereas 40 per cent of these are young men, 60 per cent of them are young women (Long 2005). Among 15–24-year-olds who are not enrolled in full-time study, it is the boys who appear to be winning. The figures from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum cited above suggest that girls have fallen further behind over the past decade. The 60–40 gap cited above is the largest male–female gap in the labour market and educational participation since 1989 (Long 2005). As Richard Teese (2002) points out, young people have been squeezed out of the full-time labour market and have had to seek opportunities by remaining in school. This pressure, Teese suggests, has been directed much more at girls than at boys.

To conclude, while most girls in Australia seem to be doing better than boys at school, many of them are not doing better at work. On the contrary, it appears that girls who leave school early are more likely than early-leaving boys to drop out of the labour market altogether, and young women's earnings lag behind those of similarly qualified young men (Marks 2008; Collins, Kenway & McLeod 2000a). At the same time, working-class boys are also facing problems as they think about their future careers. Technological and structural changes in the workforce have led to a dwindling supply of the kinds of traditional jobs that relied on heroic 'macho' labour (Dolby & Dimitriadis 2004). It is becoming important in this context to ensure that the school curriculum helps boys think about what kind of men they might become, and to encourage them to consider what Connell (2005) calls 'alternative masculinities'.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 3, we examined Paul Willis's classic study that explored the ways in which British working-class youth in the 1970s left school to enter tough, working-class jobs, through their own apparent choice. In 2004, Kenway and Kraack revisited this question in the very different economic context of the early twenty-first century, where much blue-collar work has vanished. They examined the effects on families of the closures of mines and mills, bans on fishing and logging, and the automation of manual labour. In one part of their study they provide a compelling account of social and economic change in a traditional fishing town on the south coast of New South Wales. Working men are grappling with the near collapse of the local fishing and logging industries, and among many families there is a loss of heart. Many of the timber getters and fishermen disparaged the fledgling tourist industry. One long-term resident commented: 'This town is made up of hard-working types … they work with their hands and can't be turned into office boys' (p. 105). Yet it is tourism—being a chef or running cruise boats for visitors from the city, for example—that particular teenage males have decided will be the best bet for their futures. Not all families support this cultural shift in the nature of men's work. As one father asked, 'What future is there for boys with aprons?' (p. 103).

Through this research, Kenway and Kraack have identified one of the central issues that gender policy should concern itself with. What boys and their families now need to do is construct new definitions of masculinity that can accommodate what twenty-first-century work is likely to entail. As Kenway and Kraack (2004) note, the problem we face is that *some* young working-class males are inventing themselves as 'new workers' while others are not. These young men are negotiating the difficult problem of getting around the identity issues that arise in what are seen as 'feminised' labour markets. The term 'feminisation of work' refers to the trend for an increasing number of workplaces to take on characteristics formerly associated with the 'female' retail and service sectors.

The challenge for teachers and schools is to work out how to deal with resistance to this trend among young men who subscribe to working-class 'macho' masculinities. The young men and women whose futures are most compromised by these social and economic changes have the most to gain if they are able to move beyond the constraints gender stereotypes impose on their imaginations and ambitions.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. In what ways has the global feminist movement and its diverse array of theories about gender and identity redefined our understanding of human development?
2. The late-twentieth-century feminist movement encouraged a reimagining of many girls' identities and aspirations: in Australia young women who went through school in the 1980s and 1990s went on to university in unprecedented numbers compared with their mothers and grandmothers. Many of them took on what had previously been thought of as 'boys' subjects' (for example, mathematics and physical sciences). And yet, it can be argued that today girls are expected to walk a double-track; succeeding at 'boys things' while cultivating a distinctly feminine identity. Do you agree with this idea? Do boys today also have to walk a double track? What might this look like?
3. Schools are an essential part of Australian society and provide a space for young men and women to learn and develop their identities. How does the notion of schools as gendered organisations fit with this idea? Are there some parts of the schooling process that might be harmful or reductive for young people as they come to terms with their place in the world?
4. To what extent are schools egalitarian spaces? Are boys or girls, in this new millennium, in need of greater attention and assistance from the education system? Which boys and which girls do you think need the most attention and why?

FURTHER READING

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INTERNET SOURCES

Australian Gay and Lesbian Association: http://agala.com.au
National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy: www.nap.edu.au/naplan/naplan.html
National LGBTI Health Alliance: www.lgbthealth.org.au
New South Wales Teachers Federation: www.nswtf.org.au/files/glbti_teacher_ref_feb2011_2.pdf
Rainbow Network of Victoria: www.rainbownetwork.net.au/schools
Safe Schools Coalition of Victoria: http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au