

Masculinity, Violence and Schooling: challenging 'poisonous pedagogies'

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ABSTRACT *This paper has three major purposes. The first is to point to the connections between male to male, male to female and adult male to child physical and 'sexual' violence and such matters as masculinity, marginality, sexuality, intimacy and age. The understandings that arise from this discussion will be used to offer an interpretation of the connections between schooling and violence. In this context Alice Miller's ideas about 'poisonous pedagogies' will be applied to schooling. The second purpose of the paper is to identify the major orientations of mainstream, sociocultural and feminist anti-violence pedagogies and to offer an implicit critique of them, drawing from the ideas developed in the first section of the paper and from research about responses to gender reforms in schools. The third purpose of the paper is to identify the contours of an alternative anti-violence pedagogy. This will both draw from the above and from narrative therapy.*

Introduction

Violence is one of the major social problems of our times and so should be one of the major issues in current debates about education. As people have become more aware of the extent and consequences of domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment, homophobia and racial vilification, our understanding of violence has become more nuanced and the definition of violence has widened. It is increasingly understood that violence occurs along a continuum and involves physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuses of power at individual, group and social structural levels. Kelly (1987) argues that violence involves 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished' but that, nonetheless, these different events 'have a basic common character' (1987, p. 48). Our particular focus in this paper is on physical violence (sexual and other assault and homicide). However, the backdrop to our understanding is the Kelly continuum. In this context of understanding

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many social institutions and cultural forms have become implicated in discussions about both the causes of violence and its prevention. One such institution is the school.

There are several bodies of research literature which support the following contentions: that violence is widespread in schools, that most often such violence is perpetrated by males and can thus be understood as a violent expression of certain types of masculinity, that schools are implicated in the making of masculinities and that consequently they can be involved in the unmaking of the types of masculinity which are implicated in violence. It is increasingly accepted that schools have an important role to play in the prevention of violence. However, the connections between the matters noted and the exact role of the school with regard to the prevention of violence and how it might best be carried out are not at all clear. These are the difficult issues which we will begin to address.

Violence and Masculinity, Marginality, Sexuality, Intimacy and Age

Let us continue with a little evidence to support some of the assertions we have made thus far, drawing from the situation in Australia. The Report of the National Committee on Violence (Australian Institute of Criminology, 1990, p. 3) reached the following general conclusions.

Violent offenders in Australia are overwhelmingly male, primarily between the ages of 18 and 30 and predominantly from blue collar backgrounds.

Victims of violence most commonly tend to fall into two broad categories: men who become engaged in altercations with other men; and women and children who suffer at the hands of men with whom they have been living.

Men, especially those who are young, single and unemployed, are at far greater risk of becoming victims of all forms of violence than are women, except for the categories of sexual assault and domestic violence.

The majority of victims of violence, like perpetrators, come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. Homicide risk, in particular, varies inversely with occupational status.

Aboriginal Australians face a much greater risk of becoming the victims of violence than do members of the general Australian population, possibly up to ten times greater in the case of homicide.

A considerable number of violent crimes never come to police attention; foremost in this 'dark figure' are the majority of sexual assaults and incidents of domestic violence. (Australian Institute of Criminology, 1990, p. 6)

Masculinity, marginality, sexuality, familiarity or intimacy and age are central to these generalisations and suggest that a holistic understanding of violence is crucial if we are to develop adequate approaches to anti violence education in schools (Fitzclarence, 1995a). This therefore implies that an analysis of causes and suggestions for solutions must factor in gender and sexuality and the other asymmetrical relationships of power involved in race and social class dynamics and those between adults and children/adolescents.

What do analyses with such foci tell us? They suggest firstly that given that such stark, broad patterns of violence exist, violence cannot simply be understood as related to the deviance or deficiency of the personality of the perpetrator or victim or to the 'dysfunctions' of the particular family, culture or subculture involved—although these

may well be relevant. Secondly, such analyses tell us that violence cannot be understood as an occasional social aberration. Thirdly, they tell us that a broader sociocultural and a more refined psychoanalytic analysis is required; one which attends to dominant and subordinate cultures and to the ways in which these are represented in the psyche. We will begin our attempt at such an analysis by focusing on masculinity. Given that males are the main perpetrators of violence, this is not an arbitrary decision.

Masculinity

It is now fairly well understood that the social, cultural and psychic construction of masculinity is related to violence and that some kinds of masculinity are more directly associated with violent behaviour than are others. It is less well understood that particular types of masculinity are related to particular types of violence. Which masculinity is most associated with such physical violence as sexual and other assault and homicide and what are its key features? Answers to this question must be placed in the context of our current understandings of the construction of masculinity itself and its relationship to the politics of gender between males and females and between males alone.

The most convincing discussions of the construction of masculinities, and it is difficult to go past Connell (1995) here, make the following points. They argue firstly that masculine identities are not static but historically and spatially situated and evolving. They arise through an individual's interaction with both the dynamisms and contradictions within and between immediate situations and broader social structures—gender regimes and gender orders if you like. It is this understanding which allows Connell to talk about masculinity as a *life project* involving the making and remaking of identity and meaning. It also allows us to understand the social and psychic complexity and fragility of masculinity. An appreciation of such complexity and fragility is essential to an understanding of male violence. It points to the vulnerable underbelly of all masculinities, to the driving force of such emotions as confusion, uncertainty, fear, impotence, shame and rage and to their expression in what Nayak & Kchily (no date) call *masculine performances*. These performances displace such emotions at the same time as they allow the performer to claim power and potency (Fitzclarence, 1992).

A second point arising from our best knowledge to date is that although there are many masculinities, these can be clustered on the basis of general social, cultural and institutional patterns of power and meaning and are built in relationship to each other. Connell (1995, ch. 3) calls these *hegemonic, subordinate, complicitous and marginal*. The concept 'hegemonic masculinity' is now widely used in discussions of masculinity and refers to those dominant and dominating forms of masculinity which claim the highest status and exercise the greatest influence and authority. It structures dominance and subordinate relations across and between the sexes and legitimates the broad structure of power known as patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity makes its claims and asserts its authority through many cultural and institutional practices—particularly the global image media and the state, and although it does not necessarily involve physical violence it is often underwritten by the threat of such violence. Subordinate masculinity stands in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity and is both repressed and oppressed by it. Indeed, as Connell (1995, p. 79) says, it is 'expelled from the circle' of masculine legitimacy. Gay masculinities feature in this category. Also represented are any forms which draw most elements of their core identity from beyond the core of the hegemonic. Any major attachment to 'the feminine' is likely to propel its owner into this category and to subject him to various forms of violence. Hegemonic masculinity is the standard-bearer of what

it means to be a 'real' man or boy and many males draw inspiration from its cultural library of resources. Nonetheless, few men can live up to its rigorous standards. Many may try and many may not, but either way, according to Connell, they benefit from the *patriarchal dividend*; the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women...without the tensions or risks of being the front line troops of patriarchy' (1995, p. 79). In this sense, he says, in the politics of gender, they are complicitous with hegemonic forms of masculinity even if they fail to live up to and do not draw moral inspiration from its imperatives.

Connell (1995, p. 80) says that the three masculinity dynamics mentioned so far are 'internal to the gender order. The interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities'. In order to explain the dynamics going on here he argues that there are masculinities associated with the dominant and subordinate or *marginal* races and classes. He further notes that these marginalised masculinities, which are associated with subordinate social groupings, may draw both inspiration and legitimacy from hegemonic forms but only wield structural power to the extent that they are *authorised* by the dominant class/race (e.g. Magic Johnson in the USA). Thus, while marginal masculinities may not be marginal within their own patch, they are unlikely to exert power beyond it without some sort of sponsorship by and only within the tolerance limits of the dominant. In summary, what we see here is the ebb and flow of masculinities in concert and contest.

It is commonly accepted that masculinities cannot be fully understood without attending to their relationship to femininities within the broader scope of patriarchy. It is therefore important to identify the sorts of femininities which unwittingly underwrite hegemonic masculinity. The literature suggests that this particular version of femininity involves compliance and service, subservience and self-sacrifice and constant accommodating to the needs and desires of males. This indicates that anti violence education is not a boys' only matter.

This emphasis on the fragile and fluid nature of masculinities in the context of dynamic power politics between males and females and between males points to the uncertainty of settlements about what constitutes masculinity in a given person, time and place and between and within groups. It also suggests that some masculinities may be more 'at risk' than others. Such settlements are challenged both intentionally and unintentionally by an array of life forces. The social movements associated with feminism, gay and lesbian movements and anti racism are amongst such forces, but so too are other and perhaps bigger historical sweeps associated with such major economic and cultural shifts as post-modernity. In turn this means that many masculinities are constantly on the offensive and the defensive and in need of regular maintenance, renewal, repair and adjustment (Kenway, 1995). Nonetheless, when insecure, masculinity is likely to 'lash back', to reinvent itself and to try to shore up either its old or new foundations.

It is now possible to make some specific points about masculinity and violence. Some potential flashpoints should already be evident. If we consider the ongoing *project* of sustaining male power and masculine identity, and the individual and group performances, repressions, oppressions and contests that this may 'require', then we can see why violence is mobilised. What also becomes evident is the general interest that compliant masculinity has in the violence which helps to sustain male/female power relations. An understanding of the why is crucial to an understanding of the role of schools in both producing and challenging violence. Let us now consider the characteristics most associated with physical violence.

Predictably and in very general terms it is the characteristics most associated with hegemonic masculinity which are most likely to be articulated with violence, but not in the obvious way that simplistic discussions of 'macho values' might suggest. At this stage of Western history, hegemonic masculinity mobilises around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, self-reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity and rationality. It distances itself from physical weakness, expressive skills, private knowledge, creativity, emotion, dependency, subjectivity, irrationality, co-operation and empathetic, compassionate, nurturant and certain affiliative behaviours. In other words it distances itself from the feminine and considers the feminine less worthy. Violent males draw selectively from this repertoire, exaggerate, distort and glorify these values, attributes and behaviours and blend them into potent combinations. For example, rather than distance themselves from the feminine they might avoid and even fear it; rather than look down upon the feminine they might hold it in contempt and despise it; rather than consider women and children their inferior, they may regard them as less than human and more as objects and possessions to be used and discarded at will. To take some more quick examples, assertiveness may be exaggerated to become aggression, physical strength to toughness associated with physically beating others, bravery to bravado and cruelty, adventurousness to extreme risk-taking, self-discipline to disciplining others as well, self-reliance to isolation—preferably from above, emotional neutrality to emotional repression on the one hand and to extremes of rage and shame on the other, competitiveness to hostility, rationality to the rationalisation of violence, sexual potency to control over and contempt for women's bodies and so on.

Violent cultures, be they in the family, the school, the locker room, the pub, the workplace or the street, draw from, distort and exaggerate discourses from the discursive field of hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless, their emotional underbelly remains characterised by identity uncertainty, anxiety and fear; with unfortunate consequences. The consequences involve what Miller (1987a) labels a complicated psycho dynamic mechanism of splitting off from uncomfortable feelings and of projecting such feelings on to an externalised object or other person. Such splitting and displacement are key features of violence. Miller (1987b, 88–89) uses the notion of the *vicious circle of contempt* to explain how emotions that cause discomfort are projected on to others. She describes the process thus:

Contempt for those who are smaller and weaker thus is the best defence against a breakthrough of one's own feelings of helplessness: it is an expression of this split-off weakness.

Let us now consider some more specific examples of violence—male to male, male to female and adult male to child.

Male/Male Violence

The literature on boys and schooling is replete with examples of school boy tribalism and tribal rivalry. It shows that groups develop a distinctive style either in line with or against the criteria mentioned above. Boy groups offer their members peer friendship, pleasure and pride, identity development, excitement and status resources and goals. However, there is often a price to pay for both the individual and the group.

In and out of school life for many adolescent boys is characterised by constant attempts to sort out identity issues and dominance relations (Weisfeld, 1994, p. 56).

Dominance performances and contests occur at the individual and the group level, may revolve around issues of toughness, athletic ability, strength, popularity with girls, sexual achievements, risk-taking, fearlessness and fighting prowess. These will often include harassing girls, teachers and other boys, particularly those identified as 'gay'. Sexual harassment and homophobic violence can be seen to arise from the gender politics, hetero/sexist politics (Epstein, in press) and the fear of the feminine noted above. Such performances are directed towards reputation, towards being seen as strong, cool and in control and towards saving face, avoiding humiliation. Often dominance displays will involve a calculated rejection of school achievement and an anti-authority stance.

Male dominance/subordination relations are often worked out through the use of legitimate (sport) and illegitimate (brawling, bashing) physical violence. Again, such violence is premised on beliefs about the importance of aggressive and violent acts for gaining and maintaining status, reputation and resources in the male group, to sustain a sense of masculine identity and as a form of 'self' protection. Studies of violent older boys in the school and in out of school gangs show that much time is spent seeking respect and striving for positional power which is recognised by the group. However, power here is unstable and those who achieve positional power must work hard to sustain it. As a consequence, such groups often are characterised by intense male to male competition for dominance. Taking risks and fighting over drugs, territory, honour, girls, perceived insults, and ethnic tension can readily transform into assaults and homicides when access to alcohol, drugs and weapons is readily available and involved (Goldstein, 1994).

The boys and men from racial and class minorities who subscribe to the beliefs about violence outlined above and who use various forms of violence to demonstrate their power and potency may find that it pays off in group leadership, popularity, pride, friendship and excitement and other resources which may not be available to them in other settings outside, say, the group or gang. Indeed, there is an argument which suggests that it is the groups of boys who are most marginalised by society and by the school who are most prone to violence and who subscribe to such values and who, paradoxically, are victims of such values. They are Connell's 'shock troops'; those who do the dirty work of patriarchy.

The argument goes that for boys who are in poverty, from racial and ethnic minority cultures, who are educationally disadvantaged, homeless, unemployed, risky and violent behaviour provides almost the only way of obtaining status and cultural resources. In other words, physical violence may well be most pronounced among those who have more to gain and little to lose (in the short term at least), most likely to occur amongst those outside the mainstream of education, employment and stable relationships. Such behaviour provides 'an opportunity to exercise personal power under conditions of minimal structural power...a mode of influence of last resort' (Archer, 1994, p. 317). What we see in these examples is the consequences for individuals of belonging to groups with less structural power and status and the ways in which a lack of power and status at the structural level can result in the exercise of violence at the individual and group level. What we also see are the consequences of the failure of society and its institutions to integrate all its members. This is not to suggest that males from other social groupings are non-violent, rather it is to offer an explanation for the relatively high levels of violence among disadvantaged groups. However, the role of the privileged should not be overlooked in this context, as Giroux (1996, p. 66) points out with regard to the US experience:

Beneath the growing culture of violence, both real and simulated, there lies a deep-seated racism that has produced what I want to call a white moral panic. The elements of this panic are rooted, in part, in a growing fear among the white middle class over declining quality of social, political, and economic life that has resulted from an increase in poverty, drugs, hate, guns, unemployment, social disenfranchisement, and hopelessness.

It is *young* men who are most likely to be violent and to be victims of violence. What is it, in particular, about young men that makes them prone to violence? There are many theories put forward and those of particular pertinence relate to the nature of adolescence itself. Adolescence is a time of striving for independence, searching for and experimenting with identity, challenging authority, and focusing away from the family to peer and sexual relationships. Exaggerated hegemonic values are likely both to appeal to adolescent boys and to spill over into violence for many possible reasons. These include the following. Firstly, as a function of their move from childhood to adulthood and their resultant push against authority and search for autonomy adolescent boys may be drawn to risk-taking. Secondly, the exercise of power is most likely to erupt into overt violence when status and identity are uncertain. Thirdly, inter-male competition is most pronounced when an interest in sexual activity is highest; at later adolescence it may become particularly pronounced due to the intensification of sexual activity and sexual competition.

Male/female Violence

Violence by males against females most commonly takes the form of rape and sexual assault, domestic violence and verbal and physical harassment. Most violence against women and girls occurs within relationships of one sort or another. Intimate relations and settings are more likely to result in violence than are stranger relations and public spaces, although clearly violence erupts there too. Even so there is overwhelming evidence to show that verbal and physical harassment, teasing and taunting relating to sexuality or gender against girls and women is rife in schools. Most boys either engage in this or comply with it.

The literature indicates that the males who are most likely to resort to serious physical violence against females subscribe to traditional and patriarchal views of male power and supremacy, traditional gender roles and to the view that violence is an acceptable way of resolving conflict. They believe that men are superior to women and have natural rights over them and natural dues from them. These include the following: the male's right to regard the woman as property and legitimately to control her through violence; the belief that it is legitimate to use physical violence when the rights and dues are not fulfilled and to resolve interpersonal conflict through the use of violence. When the male's status or power is threatened in some way, violence is regarded as an appropriate way of restoring the right and proper order—of keeping women in a subservient position. In this view the male's sense of his masculine identity is caught up in the exercise of power over women through violence.

Sex and sexuality are a key feature of this scenario. Misogyny easily translates into sexual violence. Denigrating women and girls legitimates such violence and allows violent males selectively to interpret their own behaviour around, for example, 'only joking' motifs and to ignore the feelings of others. Violent males' reputations may be based on obtaining sexual access to women but their self-worth is often caught up in the sexual

dominance and exploitation of women. Callous sexual attitudes are a common feature of the conversation of young males in schools, as are conceptions of sexual violence as manly—this is how ‘real men’ treat women (Wood, 1984). Belonging to a sexually exploitative peer group is more than likely to predispose a young man towards violence against girls and women. There are many generally accepted social beliefs which develop a cultural tolerance of rape and other sorts of violence against women and girls. These are called *rape myths* and prepare the male for his rape or harassment activities through a cultural library of excuses to forgive his misdemeanours.

There is a literature which argues that males and females have different orientations to aggression and violence. This suggests that to males, violence is instrumental to obtaining tangible or abstract benefits. As Anne Campbell (1993) p. 11) says:

men see aggression as a means of exerting control over other people when they feel the need to reclaim power and self esteem. Women see aggression as a temporary loss of control caused by overwhelming pressure and resulting in guilt.

To women violence represents an emotion and not coping rather than an exercise of power. This literature also suggests that men and women have different orientations to intimacy. It suggests that men who subscribe to traditional versions of masculinity find intimacy terrifying as it represents the feminine values about which they are so fearful. It ‘makes’ them feel vulnerable and puts their sense of control at risk. For women, intimacy is more the natural order of things and they find it difficult to understand and deal with such men’s distancing behaviour with regard to it. When one brings these understandings to the issues of violence between males and females in relationships we see a fundamental clash of styles and understandings with explosive potential. Further, as Jenkins (1990, p. 37) argues:

males have an exaggerated sense of entitlement and status in relation to females and children, an avoidance of social and emotional responsibility and a reliance on others (especially females) to take social and emotional responsibilities.

Adult Male/Child Violence

Childhood sexual abuse/assault is more difficult to explain than the other forms of violence discussed above. Nonetheless it is not too difficult to extrapolate from those values associated with violence against females—particularly those associated with entitlement and emotional irresponsibility. Most cases involve adult males aged between 35 and 40 years of age; however, as Andrews (1994) reports, they have no agreed profile. Even so, many have cognitive distortions about the acceptability of their behaviour, which often has traumatic consequences for survivors leading to severe psychological problems and next generation offences. This inter-generational process is well explored and explained by Alice Miller, formerly a practising psychoanalyst for over 20 years and currently a strong critic of both psychoanalytic theories and methods.

Miller’s (1987a, 1987b, 1990) basic thesis is that from generation to generation the practices of child-rearing privilege the needs of adults over those of children. Based on her many years of counselling she argues that this often involves various forms of abuse—some obvious, some not so. Either way, the processes involved are aimed at breaking the will of the child in order that he or she can be controlled. Miller argues that when children are abused in this way they are ‘trained’ to be abusive and that as a result

they learn, subconsciously, how to 'train' others in turn. Miller calls this process *poisonous pedagogy*. She observes that the effects of this abuse are destined to be repeated by victims at a later time in their lives unless they have had an opportunity to acknowledge what has happened and to work through the associated feelings. The absence of such a conscious acknowledgement of the powerful feelings associated with abuse leads, she says, to the ongoing return of repressed anxieties and frustrations and this can sometimes lead to violent and destructive behaviours. Such behaviour is often rationalised in the perpetrator's mind and thus made 'legitimate'. This in turn leads to further repressions, and to the cyclical repetition of the behaviour. In order for a person to break out of the cycle and avoid violent and abusive behaviour, he/she has to be able both to acknowledge the situation and to understand and integrate anger/fear/frustration as part of him/herself.

'Schooling the Violent Imagination' [1]

What does all of this imply about school education? Here are the hard truths as we see them based on our preceding analysis. If schools implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity, particularly in their more exaggerated forms, then they are complicit in the production of violence. If they fear 'the feminine' and avoid and discourage empathetic, compassionate, nurturant and affiliative behaviours and emotional responsibility and instead favour heavy-handed discipline and control then they are complicit. If they seek to operate only at the level of rationality and if they rationalise violence then they are complicit. If they are structured in such a way as to endorse the culture of male entitlement and indicate that the needs of males are more important than those of females then they are complicit. If they are repressive in their adult/child relations and do not offer adolescent students in particular opportunities to develop wise judgements and to exercise their autonomy in responsible ways then they are complicit. If they operate in such a way as to marginalise and stigmatise certain groups of students then they are complicit. The following remark speaks volumes in this regard:

It is easier for politicians, educators and service providers to manage racism when it is defined in terms of visible, face-to-face incidents. What this implies is that the only perpetrator of racism is the racist aggressor and it exempts Australian systems, structures and institutions. It leaves invisible racism and racist structures in place and untouched. Common sense, day-to-day practises are never questioned, therefore we continue to offer services to all Australians without any thought of how, through these structures, we are reproducing inequality. (Indigenous Australians, 1995, p. 8)

It is our view that interventions which do not attend to all these matters will be limited in their effects and conversely that whatever schools do to address the issue of violence must attend to them (Fitzclarence *et al.* 1995). However, how schools might best do this is not at all clear. We do not know as much as we need to know about schooling and violence, let alone about making gender and related matters central components of educational challenges to it. That aside, the main difficulty in all of this is firstly that *gender, age and marginality* are central structuring features of school cultures and education systems, and secondly that *emotional neutrality and hyper-rationality* are core structuring values. Hence, to attend to the matters mentioned is to go right to the heart of school culture (Fitzclarence, 1995b).

Attending to school culture is not a popular approach in anti-violence programmes in schools. Most approaches draw their insights from psychology. This has meant that they have concentrated on the personal and interpersonal and the small scale. The dominant tendency here has been to individualise and pathologise and indeed infantilise the violence which occurs within schools and/or to blame the peer group, family and/or the media for violence both in schools and beyond. Such approaches have not encouraged schools to see themselves as amongst the many institutions which are complicit in the production of violent behaviour. More recently however, the focus has shifted, at least in some quarters.

This shift has resulted from insights developed in educational sociology and feminism. According to this view, the school is not the innocent victim of isolated incidents of violence, neither is it the safe haven for victims of outside violence; violence is embedded in its culture and power relationships. In many obvious and subtle ways schools model, permit and shape violent attitudes and behaviours, they encourage students to accept that certain levels and orders of violence are normal and natural. This means that violence often goes unrecognised and unaddressed. This set of perspectives has encouraged 'whole school' approaches to addressing violence at the level of administration and curriculum (see Salisbury & Jackson, 1996).

This general approach provides a necessary corrective to those which focus on the psychology of the individual or group. Clearly, an adequate understanding of patterns of violence in schools requires a holistic perspective. However, it is not clear to us that even the sociocultural or the psychological perspectives *together* offer such a perspective. As we have implied throughout, it is not a matter of putting the big picture alongside the small, it is a matter of seeing how each is represented in the other. It is also our view that the sociocultural perspective does not attend sufficiently to what we have identified above as the central components of violence. Indeed, we would go so far as to say that some of the approaches contribute to the very problems that they seek to eradicate. How could this possibly be? Some examples from the research into gender reform and education in schools by one of us will serve to illustrate the point. Further details of the research are provided in Kenway *et al.*, (1997) so suffice it to say that case, cameo and survey data were gathered in many schools which were selected because they were undertaking some sort of gender reform. The schools ranged over various types and locations and included students of different social and cultural catchments. This choice of example is apt as gender reform should be a central component of anti violence programmes.

We categorised strategies for gender reform in our research schools into two broad camps, one which demonstrated elements of authoritarianism and the other, elements of therapy. In the first instance the tendency was to ignore altogether the world of feelings and to resort to highly rationalistic and even authoritarian policies and pedagogies. Hyper-rationalistic solutions were offered to deeply emotive issues. In many cases these subverted their intentions and alienated many students and staff. Alternatively, when they did attend to such matters, it was often the case that the approach was more therapeutic than educational. Ensuring that students and colleagues enjoyed themselves and/or felt good about their gender became more important than helping them to become critical, informed and skilled advocates for a better world. Usually for the people on the receiving end, either too much or too little was demanded and at stake. In both cases gender reform in our schools was a heady emotional cocktail. The feelings which were mobilised included discomfort, uncertainty, inadequacy, defensiveness, anxiety, envy, insecurity, stress, anger, resentment, rejection, contempt, fear, grief, loss, pain, blame, shame, betrayal and abandonment. They also included feelings of pleasure,

courage, yearning, security, strength, comfort, amusement, delight, connectedness, excitement, gratification and even gusto, but, to be honest, less often. As a result the effects of gender reform were not easy to predict (Kenway *et al.* 1996). Nonetheless, on the basis of this research it is possible to make some points which pertain to anti-violence education.

This research suggests that approaches which preach rather than teach and which are destructive rather than deconstructive and reconstructive do not work. Adolescents do not like to be told and they particularly do not like to have the things they do and value criticised by older generations. Peer relations are generally considered far more important than teacher-student relations. The implication here is that a socially critical/deconstructive *negotiated* curriculum is preferable; one which guides and encourages students both to discover their own truths about gender, marginality and age and violence and to develop their own responsible preventative practices. This should be a curriculum which is oriented towards action. It should treat students as agents of rather than passive recipients of anti-violence reform. There is another implication here about discipline. As we indicated above, repressive practices help to produce violence and also prevent victims/survivors from addressing its consequences for them as individuals.

Equally counter-productive in our research schools were approaches which failed to recognise that adolescence is a time at which young people are shaping up their identities in the context of individual, and indeed economic and cultural uncertainty and instability. Destabilising gender can be very disruptive, particularly for those who have invested heavily in particular types of masculinity or femininity. This has implications for those anti-violence programmes which seek to encourage students to rewrite their gender identity through pedagogies which attend to the emotions. Arguably, it has particular implications for those boys who fear 'the feminine' and who see no worthwhile investment in emotional reworking; indeed, who may well see such work as risky in the context of the pecking order of schoolboy culture. Clearly a *pedagogy of the emotions* needs to be carefully thought through. It must attend to the ways in which the big picture is represented in students' emotional worlds and it also must help them develop the 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1996) to understand the implications of their emotions for the ways they behave. We will offer some suggestions for such a pedagogy shortly.

A final point to be made about the sociocultural perspective is that despite its sociological insights, this set of approaches generally fails to attend to one set of school practices which is particularly complicit in producing violence. We refer to the relations of power between adults and children, a particular feature of schooling, and particularly to the verbal, emotional and sometimes physical violence associated with certain disciplinary practices. Such understandings of violence are likely to make teachers and policy-makers uncomfortable. But let us take a closer look to see why.

Poisonous Pedagogy

Alice Miller's work offers new insights into the relationship between schools and violence. Generally, her ideas suggest that mass education, with its penchant for order and control and for privileging the rational and the instrumental over the relational and affective provides a fertile seed-bed for advancing the culture of violence through 'poisonous pedagogy'. Sendak commenting on Miller's (1987a) work says

She makes chillingly clear to the many what has been recognised only by the

few: the extraordinary pain and psychological suffering inflicted on children under the guise of conventional child rearing practices.

Miller's studies raise questions about the dominant idea that teacher-student relationships are based principally on care. The idea of breaking the will of the child by force or by connivance in order that he or she can be controlled is no stranger to education, which is structured around the power relationships between adults and children. Indeed, school organisation depends upon such control and almost invariably the needs of the organisation and the teachers take precedence over those of the child. In a sense then, schools repeat the poisonous pedagogies that many children have been exposed to in the home.

Miller's ideas also question the extent to which it is wise for schools to move down the late twentieth-century path of increasingly rational curriculum development encouraged by our economically rationalist curriculum policy-makers. Let us consider this issue a little more closely.

The structures and discourses of contemporary education are built on a foundation of rationality. Built into the organisation of learning is an overwhelming faith in the orderly pattern of human affairs. This extends from the dominant ideas about intelligence through to methods for teaching particular subjects. This faith is also reflected in approaches to violence. Take two examples. Some schools have relied on pedagogies of authority in an attempt to control 'outbreaks of violence'. Strict codes of behaviour have been enforced inspired by the regimes of discipline used in industry and the military. Other schools have used counselling methods designed to effect conflict resolution via approaches involving 'talking through the problems'. While apparently different, this draws on the same underlying faith in rationality. However, when it comes to issues of violence, this faith in human rationality becomes unstable. (Fitzclarence, 1992)

For Scheff & Retzinger (1991) any adequate interpretation of patterns of violence involves a consideration of complex emotional responses such as shame, rage, alienation, humiliation and repression and revenge. However, such a lexicon is hardly the conceptual material of 'rational' education discourses. Indeed it is alien to them. Nonetheless, the absence of an adequate pedagogy of the emotions has serious consequences. Miller's ideas imply that the replacement of the expressive and creative aspects of the curriculum with instrumental, cognitive-based regimes may actually *reduce* the capacity of education to break what Miller (1987) describes as the 'vicious circle of contempt' which characterises inter-generational patterns of violence. To ignore the emotional world of schooling and of students and teachers is to contribute to the repressions which recycle and legitimate violence.

Miller's work thus raises doubts about professional development and a curriculum on violence which only appeals to people's rationality and which assumes that teachers and students have rational control over their behaviours. Her work points to the probability that such reforms on violence are likely to touch deep psychic sensitivities and investments, particularly for certain students and teachers; victims, survivors, perpetrators and those who are complicit and in different ways draw on the patriarchal dividend. It thus casts some doubt on those reforms which overlook the powerful role of emotion in the teaching/learning process and suggests that we may well rely too heavily on students' and teachers' goodwill and rationality in attempts to effect change. The challenge here, then, is to work with and through the emotions and to look to other fields of inquiry which may help us to do this. This quest has led us to turn to therapy for ideas; not, we stress, to the sort of self-absorbed, ahistorical and culturally decontextualised therapy

which Connell (1995, pp. 206–212) critiques as ‘masculinity therapy’, in what he scathingly describes as ‘Books about Men’. Instead we have turned to narrative therapy in order to explore its implications for pedagogy.

Narrative Therapy and its Implications for Anti-violence Pedagogy

In an attempt to get beyond the limitations of social and psychological theories that are not sensitive enough to the reflexive and dynamic nature of humanity and social life, White & Epston (1990) have turned to narrative and have developed narrative therapy in their counselling practice at the Dulwich Centre in South Australia. They use the ‘story’ metaphor to explore the perpetual process of identity construction through meaning making. Their following statement explains this perspective:

In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them. Specific experiences of events of the past and present, and those that are predicted to occur in the future, must be connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account. This account can be referred to as a story or self narrative. (White & Epston, 1990, p. 10)

According to White (1992, p. 123), people live and shape their lives by stories. These stories, he argues, ‘have real, not imagined effects’; they ‘provide the structure of life’.

Narrative therapy offers individuals and groups a means for remaking the dominant story-lines which have governed their lives. It encourages them to search for alternative stories—to search for accounts that contradict or resist the dominant individual and socio-cultural stories through which their lives have been constructed and through which they have constructed their lives. This involves a process of ‘externalising’ the problem with its attendant feelings through the use of story and also of identifying critical moments which tell a different story. Through such a process it becomes possible for the dominant narrative to be resisted. White refers to such moments as ‘unique outcomes’. He describes these moments when an invitation to retell the dominant story of a particular problem is resisted and a new meaning is established. In the case of perpetrators of violence, this process also encourages them to accept responsibility for their actions and for the consequences of previous behaviours. In turn, this becomes a process of shaping a new and alternative story-line through which to rebuild identity and relationships. The following example is derived from an exchange between a therapist and a violent offender. It highlights the start of a restorying process designed to facilitate new action.

Can you remember a time when you took action to stop/prevent violence yourself? Can you remember a time when you made a stand against your own violence and did not expect your partner to do it for you? How did you do it? (Jenkins, 1990, p. 87)

In our view there are several advantages to be gained in using ideas drawn from narrative therapy to address the problems of violence in schools. Firstly, as Kehily & Nayak (no date) vividly demonstrate, storying is a key feature of schooling and of students’ and teachers’ ways of making meaning about their place in schools. Secondly, the indeterminate nature of storytelling suggests that collective and individual stories and identities are fluid and can therefore be rewritten or retold—albeit not easily. For both perpetrators and victims of violence, alternative stories point to the possibility of

changing direction. To make the link to violence in education more concrete, consider the following self-narrative of Adam from one of the research schools referred to earlier.

I have been harassed at eleven schools now. At every school I have been to I have been the ten pound weakling. Like, I am the only kid I know with backwards elbows! And, like, because in my job in the school I deal with the locker grills and all that. I get harassed guaranteed at least every morning. They just feel like throwing rocks at me, pushing me around, shoving me, throwing me into walls.

Adam's story is one of a good humoured victim. But what might it look like if he rewrote it and himself as a courageous survivor and emphasised the strengths he has had to draw on to maintain his sense of humour? A word of caution is necessary here. This is not to suggest that tangible, material practices can be simply thought or talked out of existence. Adam's story makes clear that stories of violence represent harsh realities. It is to say, however, that he is able to see himself differently in this context.

A third advantage of the narrative approach is that it enables a person's experience to be considered within wider frameworks of meaning. It encourages them to consider the impact on their lives and relationships of wider cultural and social power relations. For example, a personal story can be linked to a more general cultural story. This helps to develop an appreciation of the ways in which a person is situated within the dominant story-lines of a culture or a society. Let us take some other examples of this process. The following 'story' of 15 year-old Colin contains some identifiable socio-cultural themes.

Being big is great. [Laughter] No, I just walk down the road and people dodge out of your way, 'cause they think I'm going to hit them. Sometimes I do if they get too close to me. So they let me go first, unless there's a girl, I let her go first. It's better than being one of those school kids that keep getting pushed around you see. I save the rest of them, so when they get pushed around, I just grab the other kid and smack him against the wall or something.

The story-lines represented in Colin's self-narration have widespread currency. 'Big is best' and 'take control by force and fear' are cultural themes that apply in the world of business and in law enforcement systems. Quite possibly Colin has modelled his behaviour on one of the current stock of independent law enforcers depicted in Steven Segal or Sylvester Stallone warrior movies. This next example shows how a teacher of a single-sex class of 'tough' boys and two members of that class formed an alliance around exaggerated hegemonic masculinity. In commenting on his relationship with the class, the teacher notes that:

When I'm there and I'm relaxed I'm also one of the boys. You know if you had an inexperienced man or an effeminate man or a bloke who's too academically inclined or something like that, then that might not work. You might end up with a 'them and me' situation.

In turn Ben, a student, comments, 'I can swear more (referring to having no girls in the class) and Matthew, referring to how it might be different if they had a female teacher, says:

But if say a nice woman walked past, like we couldn't say 'Ooh, look at her' 'cause she'd look at us and say 'That's sexism' and all this. But Mr Kennedy, he'd just laugh and say 'I'd buy that for a dollar'.

Again we see represented some of the features of violence which we mentioned in the first part of the paper. What has narrative therapy to offer in these instances? At a

minimum it would help Colin, Mr Kennedy, Ben and Matthew to identify the entitlement story-lines they are living their lives by and would also invite them to search for others that are more socially and emotionally responsible. Let us consider further the implications of narrative therapy for school's anti-violence education programmes.

While narrative therapy has been pioneered by therapists working primarily outside of the education system, the possibility of adaptations for work in school is now being recognised—but not of course by the hyper-rationalists who drive school systems. At this stage the suggestions for pedagogy which we think have the most potential are those developed and employed by Sydney's *Men Against Sexual Assault Group* (MENSA). Their approach also builds on the strengths but avoid the weaknesses of the authoritarian and the therapeutic approaches we outlined earlier. It also operates outside of the rationalist frameworks which we mentioned earlier and seeks to work with and through the anxieties of young males in particular. Without going into detail, in an environment characterised by respect and support rather than by blaming and shaming, it explores with students their experiences of violence and encourages them to identify the dominant narratives which have shaped such violence (rape myths, for example) and to unpack the cultural library of excuses which are used to justify it. However, this approach does not stop there. It then assists students to find some positive counter-narratives; to draw out and upon alternative sources of strength and status and to build new communities of support for alternative ways of being male and female. Witness the following example.

David Denborough's (1996) work on narrative therapy has been used in working with male students in a programme designed to address emerging problems in junior secondary schools. The process, designed to address issues of sexual harassment/violence and by implication power relations and contested identities, demonstrates a whole-class approach for working through issues that are clearly embedded in the dynamics of society more generally. The process includes mapping experiences of violence, naming the effects, inviting an articulation of the need to change and naming a counter plot. In more specific detail the approach which Denborough advocates can be summarised as follows:

- Beginnings—considering notions of respectful practice; a game of sex and lies; addressing the climate.
- Mapping the extent of the violence in their lives.
- Eliciting an articulated invitation to discuss these ideas.
- Identifying the gendered nature of violence. Identifying messages and beliefs about the dominant masculinity and exploring why it is that men are the ones who are violent in the vast majority of instances. Looking at some key gendered messages and how boys are encouraged and coerced into positioning themselves within them.
- Naming this dominant plot, e.g. 'being tough'.
- Mapping the effects of this dominant plot on different social groupings.
- Inviting an articulation of the need for change.
- Finding exceptions—exploring what it means to exist in terms of hope and in terms of what it says about them.
- Naming the counter-plot.
- Asking for an articulation that moving towards this counter-plot, a plot of resistance, would be a good thing (for men, women—hetero- and homosexual, young people, children).
- Building on exceptions: building on strengths—exploring how they did it; building on histories—instances in the past that would support thinking of themselves in this new

way; building communities of support—who supported them, how they could find other support.

- Reflecting on strengths: what it says about them; what significant others would think.
- Broadening the responsibility—taking their suggestions as to how they could be supported in their attempts to move towards ‘being themselves’, by staff, the school, families, and the local community.

The approach outlined here is part of a layered pedagogy. This involves discussions at a number of different levels in the school and including parents and community members. Of particular relevance is the focus on developing respectful dialogue between boys and girls.

We need to work with our boys *and* our girls—together. They have much to learn from each other, we have much to learn from all of them. The potential for programs in which boys and girls listen to one another’s experiences, and develop strategies to work together against out-dated notions of gender, are perhaps the most exciting of all. (Denborough, 1996, p. 26)

As we see it, the goal of anti-violence education is a future in which males and females, males and males and adults and children can live alongside each other in safe, secure, stable, respectful and harmonious ways and in relationships of mutual life-enhancing respect.

NOTE

- [1] This title is taken from Schostak (1986).

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