

Gender Construction and Optimism

By Ian Lillico



We need to have boys understand that the world has changed and that they must be aware of the fact that their gender is being constructed for them! They need to have, I believe, a notion of masculinity, which is empowering and an understanding of womanhood and of how gender is constructed. This should be discussed at home and explicitly taught through stimulating and challenging experiences in schools. We need to address the issue of valuing all learners and learning areas - not just to imply that all subjects are just as important, but also to demonstrate it. Many schools tend to value sport above all else and boys who are not sportsmen tend to be marginalised by their peer group. We should value all other kinds of learning.

Things can and will change drastically in the next 20 years. There is evidence that the 'boy code', which has been passed down from generation to generation, is now being linked with the problems that our boys are now facing. The "boys will be boys" myth - where parents lament their wrecked houses and furniture and teachers say, "well my class is just a zoo that's because it is 70 percent boys" is no longer acceptable. By confronting the boy code we can actually change things for boys.

Above all we must give our boys hope. Australia has a negative media and we often ask our children to watch the television news and keep up with current affairs. Young boys and girls, however, are not able to filter the media like we can as adults and, after watching the gloom and doom, death and dying, war and pestilence worldwide, young people often tell me that they don't want to grow up into an adult world that looks rather gloomy. They often prolong their adolescence for fear of having to face what seems a bleak future.

Please debrief them and let them know that most people around the world are kind, generous and loving and that a minority of people who do the wrong thing get all the media publicity. Try to make it a ritual that at least once a week the television is turned off, that the family has dinner together and that negative issues over the last week are discussed and our children debriefed on the negativity they have witnessed. Give them hope for the future!

