2.
what the existing literature says

COMMON THEORIES AND PRACTICAL ANALYSES

It is important to note firstly that when speaking of boys' underachievement, much of the literature does so in a comparative context relative to girls' achievement in terms of indicators such as examination results, transitions to secondary school, repetition and adult literacy. This definition of underachievement has presented its own problems within the overall debate. Gorard, Salisbury and Rees (1999) challenge the methodologies used to produce calculations on achievement gaps in the United Kingdom between girls and boys. Acknowledging the problems around indices has led to recent literature including the term 'apparent underachievement' more often within the dialogue. This has been further informed as research has progressed to show that the statistics themselves – when disaggregated by other factors that go beyond the gender divide, such as region, ethnicity and parental income – show more complex results than a purely comparative approach between boys and girls would warrant.

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The debate on boys' underachievement is not a new one in several Commonwealth countries. Discussed since the 1970s, it particularly came to the fore in the mid-1990s within the Commonwealth's developed countries of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Debates on the matter were also gaining increasing focus in the Commonwealth

Caribbean. Outside of the Commonwealth, theories were being formulated in other countries such as Germany, Japan and the United States. These discussions were taken up at both popular and academic levels, and the period has since been viewed as one of "moral panic" around the incidence of boys' underachieving (Gorard, Salisbury and Rees, 1999). As noted by Epstein et al (1998), discussions prominent at the time need to be understood within their historical context. They outline the existence of material that goes back to the 1970s on working class boys' alienation from middle class schooling values, and also look at the prevailing arguments debated at the time: 'pity the poor boys' – which attributed boys' underachievement to 'lost control' and rising feminism; 'failing schools failing boys' – which challenged school effectiveness in the provision of education for boys; and 'boys will be boys' – which tackled the issue from an essentialist position of inherent differences of gender compatibility with schooling.

In sub-Saharan Africa, although there have been reports from some countries of boys' underachieving (which seems to be largely tied to drop-out rates rather than to poor performance), the continued problem of girls' lack of access and resultant academic underachievement means that the literature is still very much in its infancy. Similarly, despite recent reports from some Commonwealth countries in the Asia-Pacific region of boys' underachievement, literature on relevant countries has been difficult to locate except from Australia and New Zealand. Assuming that the literature on these areas is in fact scant, this suggests either that the phenomenon is very new or that the issue has so far stayed away from both the journalistic and academic radars.

Out of the plethora of these inter-locking arguments, backlashes and already existing reviews on the literature, this chapter seeks to locate the most common strands within the material available on Commonwealth countries. As noted, the literature on the situation in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom is substantial. At the policy level also this issue has been thoroughly addressed in these countries. In Australia, an inquiry into the issue led to a report called *Boys: Getting it Right* (House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002), while the New Zealand Education Review Office produced a publication on the *Achievement of Boys* (Aitken, 1999). In the UK, the Office for Standards in Education published *The Gender Divide: Performance*

Differences Between Boys and Girls at School (OFSTED, 1996), which focused primarily on the increasing visibility of boys' lower exam scores than girls'. The debates in these countries have resulted in the rise of programmes targeted at increasing boys' achievement levels. This is true in the Caribbean as well, where the Jamaican Government, for example, conducted a study and developed programmes in response to its findings to address issues such as adolescent disaffection.

Theoretically, there has been a strong focus on masculinity within gender identity. These theories have evolved significantly over the last decade, going from the 'poor boys' and 'boys will be boys' arguments that couched much of the discussion within the framework of disadvantage (due to disaffection from increasingly girl-centred school systems), towards calls for an acknowledgement of multiple masculinities within society and the classroom context, and the recognition of further societal factors affecting results-based underachievement. Within the overall approach of masculinity studies, there are various sub-sections that present themselves quite clearly for analysis.

Further theoretical considerations that take into account the interplay of socio-economic factors and gender identity are also prevalent. The authors of these writings put much of their analysis within situational contexts that allow the discourse on boys' underachievement in general to be unpacked by asking more specifically: which boys? This has allowed in-country specificities to be more deeply analysed. Pulled from this broad topic are three key, integrated themes that have recurred regularly within the literature across several Commonwealth countries: economic disadvantage and class; ethnicity and language; and economic alignments within gender roles. An additional area of research that has emerged in this context relates to school processes. A case study of an Australian school (Lingard et al, 2002) falls in this category. The same school was revisited by the present research, and the case study on Australia presented later in the report looks at the observations made by Lingard et al in detail. Since not many case studies discuss school processes as a separate causal aspect of boys' underachievement, this review looks at the issue only within other contexts of gender identity and masculinity.

GENDER IDENTITY: DEBATING MASCULINITY

Concepts of the impact of masculinity on boys' performance have been popular throughout the debate on boys' underachievement. Studies that tackle the impact of gender stereotyping and set values of masculinity within society and the classroom are found throughout the available literature. The Caribbean experience in particular has been tackled from this standpoint. A study conducted by CARICOM and the University of the West Indies (Bailey and Bernard, 2003) shows strong indicators towards boys' academic underachievement in terms of performance and drop-out rates. Figueroa (2000), in his study on male academic underachievement in the English-speaking Caribbean, starts with the premise that male underachievement is an ironic outcome of male privileging: men have traditionally occupied a wider social space in Caribbean history, but are now the victims of this privilege as women "carve out for themselves spaces which they hegemonise and within which the freedom of the privileged group is restricted". This "dialectic of privilege" is also referred to by Davis (2002), who argues that the problem of boys' underachievement in Trinidad and Tobago, "like in other cultural contexts", is defined by the issues of "historical privilege, gender socialisation, masculine expectations and how schools are organised for learning".

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The definition of masculinity itself has proved problematic for academics tackling this issue, and has been caught between dominant, popular perceptions of masculinity within societies on the one hand and a reality of multiple masculinities on the other. Davis (2002) tackles the plurality of masculinity that often arises by simply putting forward "the social and culturally constructed meanings or definitions attributed to being male" as a working definition and, although he also argues that masculinity should be considered in multiple forms, he maintains that the "traditional" or "conservative" perspective of masculinity usually dominates the discourse. In addressing the developing literature on masculinities, West (1999) looks at the portrayal of masculinity in the media using clichés that depict masculinity as natural and innate, and he suggests that there has been slow progress in the academic study of the subject that would more clearly highlight the term's multiplicity. The public debate, he further

argues, dominates the academic one, a consequence of the issues around boys' underachievement being linked to feminism, and any questioning of boys' perceived difficulties being linked with a "reaction against feminism". Addressing "common themes of masculinity", West's study unpacks "traditional" masculinity as being based on three dicta – perform, protect, provide – that incorporate the idea of proving and testing (proving to/ testing by other men, women, themselves) that "they are not female". This dialogue often takes place around and through the male body, with a focus on measurements through physical strength, and is informed through mediums such as Hollywood in the most simplistic of terms.

The focus of a traditional 'maleness' as the antithesis of femininity has (perhaps inevitably) provided ample material on sexuality within gender stereotyping and the prevalence of homophobic underpinnings within traditional concepts of masculinity. This argument is one explored by Figueroa (2000) as a consequence of schooling being perceived by Jamaican boys as a feminine endeavour and, in a society where homophobia is prevalent within the music and popular culture, male bookishness running the risk of accusations of homosexuality. More generically, West (2002) presents the bleak view that "when you are a 14-year-old boy, almost anything can be called gay if it does not endorse Neanderthal masculinity". Epstein (1998) addresses the problem within the context of school bullying and the resultant negotiation by boys, whether heterosexual or gay, around dominant heterosexist expectations in the classroom.

Gender roles and the 'feminisation of academia'

Popular in the writing on the impact of traditional masculine identities on boys' underachievement is the perceived femininity of studies by boys. Figueroa (2000) starts by placing this area within the Jamaican context and argues that female gender roles are more conducive to the requirements of successful studious behaviour. He contends that girls' early childhood socialisation and their role within the household work well with the demands of homework and reading, whereas the social space occupied by boys rejects this. As equal opportunities have increased within the educational system, these female gender identities have become more and more in tune with the ethos of education (discipline, more adult supervision, more responsibility) while boys have increasingly been alienated from inhabiting the space of academic aspiration. As boys fall behind within schooling, this problem becomes exacerbated by their

acquisition of a defensive posture that translates into negative associations such as homophobia.

Some of the literature on the feminisation of schooling has a complexity that places it within the limits of (a) certain academic subjects that are dominated by girls, often referred to as 'soft' subjects; and (b) a certain time-frame of schooling that sees these perceptions of femininity being overcome by some boys as they grow older. This presents a broader perspective on the overall issue of boys' academic underachievement that challenges the idea of boys being disadvantaged in the long term. However, the literature also provides dissenters to these standpoints.

The humanities and languages in particular have come under serious focus as the areas where boys mainly underachieve. Marks (2001) shows that by age 14 girls in the UK start to substantially out-perform boys in English. Boys' lower performance has been attributed to the use of more 'female-oriented' reading materials, with suggestions that the inclusion of more factual, 'male-oriented' works could increase male performance. This argument can also be found in Hunte (2002) in the context of Guyana.

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A number of studies have pointed out how better performance by boys in traditionally feminine subjects such as languages is perceived to be 'gender inappropriate' and hence undesirable in different contexts. Figueroa (2000) ties this discussion into a broader issue of Creole and slang and their usage by boys in Jamaican society as a badge of masculinity, whereas standard English is viewed as effeminate. This issue surrounding language presents a further dialogue on class and ethnicity that will be explored later. More generally, Figueroa (2000) once again approaches the dominance of better female performance in the humanities as a consequence of gender stereotyping, where 'harder' subjects, such as the physical sciences and mathematics, continue to be the preserve of males. In the Guyanese context, Hunte (2002) argues the opposite by maintaining that as time goes by, the sciences are also becoming more open to women. The changing roles of men and women, he argues, are proving to be educationally disadvantageous for men, with "the educated male fast becoming an 'endangered species'", as witnessed by the outnumbering of men by women at the tertiary level graduations of the University of the West Indies and the University of Guyana.

Conversely, in one of the few findings on this subject in Africa, the Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER) included statistics showing that despite successful attempts to address gender stereotyping in Lesotho – with boys showing considerable interest in such traditional female subjects as nutrition and cookery – there was nonetheless a rise in drop-out rates among boys as they reached late primary and transitioned to early secondary school (Jobo et al, 2001). This has linkages with economic issues, discussed later.

Epstein's study (1998) on British education draws attention to the limitations of the timeframe within which the impact of masculine perceptions and the subsequent view of schooling as 'feminine' takes place. She argues that although girls outperform boys in schools from late primary up to the taking of GCSE examinations, this phenomenon does not extend to the sixth form and 'A' levels, where boys become free to aspire academically due to a shift within masculine identity from anti-'feminine' and anti-school, to that of a "muscular intellectualness" inherent within hegemonic middle-class masculinity. But the fact that the British sixth form is a non-compulsory form of education, coupled with the availability of this "muscular intellectualness" in only a narrow class context, presents further questions of socio-economic factors and academic universality that need to be addressed when studying boys' underachievement. In other words, while disaffection towards schools may inhabit a limited timeframe, and any disparity for middle-class boys may be redressed in later stages of academia, educational opportunities would already have passed for many boys who lack the privileges of class.

Male role models

The absence of male role models is a factor that comes up regularly within the literature on boys' underachievement, and it assumes the stance that boys' needs within both school and the broader society are different from those of girls. In the Caribbean context, where the number of women-dominated and single-parent households has been on the rise, the literature reviewed presents strong concerns about the lack of male presence within the home as well as the school. Hunte (2002), in the context of Guyana, argues that boys will seek out negative macho role models to fill the gaps at home or school, and that the resultant anti-schooling attitudes will leave an emotional deficit that inhibits their progress. Figueroa (2000) takes this further and suggests that the absence of discipline meted out to boys in Jamaica by women – who believe this to be the preserve of a father or

other male figure – disadvantages boys by permitting their exploration of negative masculine identity to be played out unchecked.

West (2002) analyses the problem of an imbalance of male and female teachers, which potentially disadvantages boys by giving messages that 'only women teach' and 'only women read'. His paper further outlines studies that have been conducted in Australia showing that boys value male teachers as role models to get them through the difficulties of the classroom. West quotes a paper by Bress (2000), who argues that males and females have a different language – 'genderlects'. This theory arguably takes the issue of role models out of purely socialisation discourses and into the more contentious area of gendered heredity. One of the few findings that addressed the issue of boys' educational underachievement and under-participation in Lesotho also stressed the lack of male teachers in the educational system. However, the MUSTER project conducted in that country showed that the cause of boys' dropping out was more often in order to fulfil work obligations due to hard economic circumstances (Jobo et al, 2001).

The literature surrounding male role models, especially in relation to the Commonwealth's developed countries, also has an ethnic dimension. For example, a wealth of literature on the underachievement of Afro-Caribbean boys in the UK educational system presents nuances that go beyond simply gendered responses. Parallels with the United States, where disaffection towards school among African-American boys has also dominated the literature, are common. The academic literature in the UK concentrates heavily on issues of 'institutionalised racism' such as teacher expectations, streaming and curriculum relevancy. The call for black male mentors is often heard within popular debate on the subject at the operational grassroots level and in the media. A similar situation can be evidenced in Australia, where the underachievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys is assessed by Aboriginal workers, as reported in the *Boys in School Bulletin*, as being partly due to there being very few Indigenous men employed in high educational positions (2000a). Another issue that comes up in the same article is the inability of non-Indigenous teachers to address specific cultural issues. Interestingly, despite records of low achievement by white working-class boys, the literature is not as overwhelming in its call for role models drawn from that class of society.

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Teacher expectations

Some authors have argued that teachers in the classroom have been guilty of gender stereotyping, and that low expectations of boys' behaviour and academic effectiveness contribute to the levels of boys' underachievement. Figueroa (2000), for example, suggests that there is a growing ambivalence within the Jamaican educational system that allows the misbehaviour of boys to continue, partly as a result of reluctance to curb the tendencies of traditional masculinity that would endanger that identity. Davis (2002) goes further to argue that boys are treated differently than girls as early as pre-school, and that throughout primary school they receive lower ratings by teachers for social behaviour and academic expectations. Martino and Berrill (2003) put forward work suggesting that male teachers in particular sometimes reinforce gender stereotypical behaviours in boys rather than challenging them.

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Jones and Myhill (2004a) argue that the identity of the underachiever has become synonymous with the stereotypical identity of boys. What is interesting is the authors' concern that such teacher expectations are not based on a belief of boys' innate academic inability, but more a belief in boys' innate inclination to misbehave despite being quite bright, often due to boredom. These teachers run the risk of rendering girls invisible and of attributing girls' higher achievement purely to hard work and performance, whereas boys are seen as harbouring natural but latent abilities. In another study, Jones and Myhill (2004b) articulate this concern further by suggesting that when teachers attribute high performance to girls as a gender norm, the underachieving girls become overlooked, whereas the high-achieving boy is credited for having challenged his gender stereotyping.

Single sex or co-education?

The debate over whether boys perform better in single-sex or co-educational schools remains fractured. Arguments that suggest boys adopt anti-school masculine identities as a response to the feminised ethos of schooling can lend themselves to conclusions that the provision of single-sex schools might be effective in alleviating the problem. Hunte (2002) argues that, in Guyana's case, the re-introduction of single-sex secondary schools could put the education

of boys on a fast track, as such schools are able to bring boys' emotional and learning needs more sharply into focus. Davis (2002) claims that single-sex school will allow the freedom of multiple masculinities, but also maintains that although these schools can help boys to embrace the diversity of male roles, many position themselves as restoring a "normative masculinity" and act as compensatory institutions.

Research conducted in New Zealand has provided evidence that boys in single-sex schools perform better than boys in co-educational schools. The Education Review Office report (Aitken, 1999) showed that both boys and girls achieved better results in single-sex schools. Interestingly, however, even though boys in single-sex schools outperformed both boys and girls in co-educational schools, they lagged even more significantly behind their female counterparts in single-sex schools than they would have done their female counterparts in co-ed schools. Further data provided by the report also suggested higher levels of managerial performance from girls' schools as opposed to boys' schools. This, together with the continued higher academic performance levels of girls over boys in single-sex schools, fosters the earlier arguments that girls and schools are somehow conducive to one another where boys and schools are not. But the statistics offered by this report also disaggregate the overall percentage finding according to other factors such as the rural-urban divide and public-private school ownership. These data present marked contrasts in the levels of underachievement among boys, suggesting that deeper reasons going beyond the gender divide are also at play.

THE INTERACTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AND GENDER

Reed (1998) argues for the social justice perspective when dealing with the education of boys and maintains that, by focusing simply on the "distribution of goods" (i.e., qualifications), the dialogue is ignoring other important factors such as structural inequalities, institutional processes and the separation of the private from the public sphere. This article focuses primarily on the performance of schools and boys' underachievement, but the issues tie in with broader concerns, such as social class, economic under-privilege, poverty and ethnicity. Epstein et al (1998) clearly state that "overall, the 'underachievement'

of boys at school is a strongly classed and racialised phenomenon", and that class and parents' education continue to be the most reliable indicators of a child's educational attainment. Nyland (2001) goes one step further to include residential address as an indicator, and argues that educational reform needs to go deeper than changes to curriculum and pre-service teaching courses. The earliest literature that focused on masculinity and gender identity had a tendency to make vague references to some of these issues. More recently, however, authors have moved towards analysing the interface between the masculinity debate and other factors that have allowed boys to be more accurately viewed in smaller groups. This has enabled the literature to reflect the diverse factors that can affect different groups of boys towards academic underachievement, and present a clearer picture of the complex causes behind the phenomenon.

Economics, class and gender identity

While many of the problems that arise from class and economic disadvantage within the findings are also entwined with the more detailed debate on ethnicity, a distinction is being made for the sake of recognising the two as related but distinct factors. UNICEF (2004) outlines the role that poverty has to play in boys' underachievement in the Caribbean and Latin America, where governments have become increasingly aware that boys and young men are more likely to be alienated from school if they come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. A DFID study in Botswana and Ghana also shows the relationship between economic disadvantages and boys' underperformance (Dunne, 2005). Although Botswana is ahead of Ghana in terms of universal primary education (UPE) and educational provision for girls, overall statistics in the study showed boys achieving more than girls. This pattern, however, went into reverse in Ghana in the poorest peri-urban and rural schools that also registered the lowest scores overall. In those areas, better relative performance by girls could be seen. In Botswana there were two case studies where girls out-performed their male counterparts, and again these were in the poor, low-achieving schools.

Across the globe in New Zealand (and across the development line as well), statistics in the report by the Education Review Office (Aitkin, 1999) also show that the underachievement of rural boys relative to rural girls is far greater than that of urban boys to urban girls. In this instance, the study points to the limited options available in rural schools and the lack of opportunity to study specialist subjects, but no specific mention is made of socio-economic

disadvantage. A possible contributory factor put forward by the DFID study for the Botswana and Ghana case studies was the lower attendance rates of boys in schools within the peri-urban and rural areas (Dunne, 2005). The study identifies reasons for boys dropping out in those areas of Ghana as related to employment opportunities.

However, although the literature above has outlined that it is common to see the most underachieving boys coming from socio-economically disadvantageous backgrounds, the literature also maintains the fact that girls in those groups are still out-performing their male social counterparts. So although both sexes may be adversely affected by these circumstances, and therefore both achieve below those from higher social classes, boys nonetheless remain at the bottom of even this more detailed hierarchy. This is corroborated by Brown (2001) in the case of Jamaica, where the suggestion is that boys are affected differently by economic and class issues within the society, such as the tendency towards engagement in crime. Figueroa (2000) explains that the minority of boys who do very well in school in Jamaica start their education within the privilege of the private prep school. These lines of arguments that show economic disadvantage being related to the adoption of certain types of masculine identity ultimately lead to a conclusion by some authors (such as West, 1999) that anti-school manifestations of traditional masculinity are more commonly found among working-class boys. Mahoney (1998) recommends that more work needs to be done on how boys from UK working-class backgrounds are "subordinated by the practices, values and conceits of white, middle-class modes of masculinity".

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Ethnicity, language and gender identity

Mahoney's usage of not just 'middle class' but also 'white' brings us to the next socio-economic sub-factor that has received considerable attention in the literature. Within the discourse of poverty, economic disadvantage and class there exists a further one on the roles of ethnicity and language within boys' underachievement. Much of the data on this has come from developed countries in the Commonwealth where racial and ethnic polarities and their relationship to the economic power structure already feature significantly in broader academic discourses. In the UK, this refers mainly to the Afro-Caribbean community, but also to others where low academic achievement is particularly evident, such as

among Bangladeshi and Turkish boys. Mortimore (1988) noted the relationship between economic disadvantage, class and ethnicity in London's schools. Much of the literature on Australia in this regard refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys, while lower levels of achievement have been noted in New Zealand among the children of immigrants from the Pacific Islands as well as the Maori community.

A wealth of literature, going back decades, exists on Afro-Caribbean boys underachieving within the British education system. The focus on boys, however, is often seen within the much broader context of underachievement by both girls and boys in those communities. Coard (1971) was one of the first to critique the UK education system for being unresponsive to the needs of black children and for inherent institutional racisms. Graham and Robinson (2004) used a methodology where black boys voiced their own experiences. The authors argue that British educational policies continue to deny the existence of race and racism and to consider the different positioning of black boys in the wider society. Richardson (2005) has edited an anthology of work that tackles the underachievement of black children. One of the interesting points to come out of this book is in relation to the debate on 'tiering' within exams, and how negative expectations by teachers of black children, and in particular of boys, result in attainment ceilings being placed above them.

Much of the popular debate about black boys' underachievement has revolved around the assumption that the group operates as a homogenous disaffected entity. Explanations can lean easily towards 'blameist' arguments, with the influence of rap music, absent fathers and gun violence being held directly responsible. Indeed, when debating disadvantageous socio-economic circumstances, even when also addressing institutional racism that refuses to acknowledge these circumstances, some of the heterogeneity that exists within the group can be overlooked. Moving beyond the Commonwealth for examples, we see much of the data produced on underachievement of socially disadvantaged (and often black) boys in Brazil is related to the call of street culture and gang peer pressure. Sewell (1998) sought to address differing attitudes among underachieving Afro-Caribbean boys through empirical research at an inner-city school in the UK. His findings placed the boys within categories that were defined by differing characteristics, such as "conformists" and "retreatists", as well as "rebels". He concludes, contrary to much of the literature that has been produced, that the school constructs a more complex, ambivalent

and contradictory male identity, with many boys actually positioning themselves within a pro-school stance.

In Australian research, both West (1999) and Nyland (2001) indicate the prevalence of underachievement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys. West highlights that especially at risk are Aboriginal boys and boys from homes where the first language is not English. Nyland adds children with learning difficulties and those living in isolated rural areas, but more specifically takes up the impact of home language on achievement. She argues that where the Australian school curriculum expects language to be used appropriately, the term 'language' actually simply means English.

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But these broader dynamics of power and inequality again do not adequately explain why boys from these marginalised groups in Australia continue to achieve less than their female minority counterparts. This was more adequately approached in the Jamaican context by Figueroa's (2000) explanation mentioned earlier of the perceived femininity of standard English and the masculine association with Creole and slang, particularly among boys from poorer backgrounds. In that context, the interface between economic disadvantage, gender identity and ethnicity as it pertains to the use of language is arguably clearer. One of the many discrepancies that come up within the Australian literature in terms of ethnicity is the relative 'over achievement' of boys who come from Asian cultural backgrounds. Similarly in the UK, this applies to students of Indian origin (although with the underachievement of Bangladeshi boys, the South Asian grouping is also fractured in this respect) and East Asian boys.

New Zealand has also produced material on the underperformance of Maori boys relative to their white counterparts. While the Education Review Office report (Aitkin, 1999) mentions Maori boys only in the context of schools where boys have performed better, the *Boys in Schools Bulletin* (2000b) provides evidence of consistent underachievement by both Maori boys and more broadly by boys deemed to be of a low economic status. There is also evidence to suggest that Pacific Island children living in New Zealand fall within that bracket.

What is also clear in all these cases is that while boys' underachievement within those social groups is a problem, girls in those groups are also underperforming

in relation to their female counterparts from higher status social groups. In many cases they also under-perform against boys from higher status social groups. This phenomenon is seen clearly in the UK among many minorities. A Report of Education Scrutiny Panel (2003) into the underachievement of Turkish boys concluded with recommendations that while the panel was formed to investigate boys, the major cause of the underachievement – low rate of English language acquisition – affected both sexes. What it did not clearly outline were the differentials in achievement between Turkish boys and girls.

Cultural economic alignments with gender roles

Of the less abundant literature available from Africa where boys are not academically achieving as well as girls, the alignment of gender and economic roles emerges more clearly as a determinant of boys' dropping out of school and underachieving. The DFID comparison between Botswana and Ghana already mentioned highlighted the lower performance of boys relational to girls within peri-urban and rural schools, and attributed this in part to the need for those boys to access employment opportunities at an earlier age (Dunne, 2005). Further research on Botswana noted in *Equals Newsletter* makes a correlation between the traditional role of boys as cattle herders and increased drop-out and low enrolment rates in the transition from primary to secondary school (Challender, 2004). The absence of fathers and older brothers, who leave to work in the diamond mines, puts the pressure on boys to take on this position. With half of families in Botswana owning cattle, this is not necessarily a factor only applicable to economically marginalised groups. A 'graduation' on to the mines as the boys grow older only compounds the perceived lack of need for boys' education. Within this scenario, as the Newsletter clearly notes, there is a complex issue of macroeconomic policy (an undiversified economy reliant on natural resources) and a new slant on traditional gender roles from those we have so far encountered in the literature in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the Caribbean (ibid).

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Similarly, the MUSTER paper on Lesotho places that country's current experience with boys' underachieving in school within an economic and cultural

history of gendered economic alignment (Jobo et al, 2001). It argues that male child labour is very common in Lesotho, with young boys in the rural areas being denied their right to education by being hired out as herdboys from a very young age. This phenomenon is rooted in Lesotho's past, where boys from 18 years of age would go the South African mines and parents felt that boys did not need any education to work. The retrenchment of more and more men from the mines has yet to be adequately addressed within this attitudinal standpoint. And yet, despite the lack of education of many boys in Lesotho in comparison to their female counterparts, the MUSTER paper also points out that women are still significantly discriminated against in other spheres of life (ibid).

BOYS UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN THE WIDER GENDER EQUITY CONTEXT

This leads to the consideration of a further strain within some of the literature that has been produced on boys' underachievement, which essentially seeks to answer the question: Where should one place the debate around boys' relative underachievement in school within the wider context of overall gender equity? As Epstein (1998) notes, the mid-1990s movement towards boys' issues initially produced a 'the future is female' fear as part of the panic that resulted from evidence of boys' apparent underachievement in school. Jackson (1998) notes that in the UK "the language of educational inequality has dramatically shifted over the last twenty years", from the focus on girls' disadvantage in the 1970s, to the mid-1990s when boys' disadvantage took centre stage. The debate on boys and school became grounded in a to-and-fro scenario between anti-feminist backlashes and counter-backlashes. In the Caribbean, we have already seen in the work of Hunte (2002) that boys are being viewed as an "endangered species" as a result of their educational underperformance.

Yet, some of the literature places the debate within equity indicators outside of strictly educational attainment. In Lesotho, for example, as noted above, female educational achievement was shown not to equate with increased socio-economic progress (Jobo et al, 2001). Women were still legally regarded as minors, with very little economic power such as land ownership. And this paradox is not restricted only to an arguably extreme case such as Lesotho. Although not all the studies on the Caribbean concur with this, Figueroa

(2000) clearly highlights evidence that suggests women have to gain much better qualifications than their male counterparts in order to access the work market, with men still achieving far more in the employment sector despite their overall lower grades. By positioning his debate about boys' underachievement as inseparable from various forms of "patriarchal capitalist restructurings", Mahoney (1998) argues that there is a danger that discussions on transforming masculinities, even from the most radical stance, can overlook the secondary positioning of women within the wider spectrum of gender relations.

Although such considerations are increasingly mentioned in much of the literature, there has been a lack of more inclusive research into the cumulative positions of men and women in society. Broader indicators such as economic ownership, political participation and relative earnings according to gender have not fully been put into context on this issue of boys' underachievement relative to girls even by those countries mentioned in this chapter that have yielded the most literature.

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This review of literature, along with the conceptual frame outlined in the first chapter, provides the context for analysing the issue of boys' underachievement by going deeper into the trends in four Commonwealth countries: Australia, Jamaica, Lesotho and Samoa. The case studies of different initiatives in these four countries are analysed in the next chapter to understand the phenomenon better and trace pointers for policy or programmatic solutions. The chapter also attempts to identify areas for further research in this context.