Boys' self-esteem: the effect of co-educational schooling

Kevin Phillip Bell
Southern Cross University

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Boys’ Self-Esteem: The Effect of Co-educational Schooling.

Kevin Bell
BSc(UNSW) BTHeol(SCD) Dip Ed (ACU)

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Declaration of originality

I certify that the substance of this Dissertation has not already been submitted for any degree or is currently being submitted for any other degree or degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this work, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this Dissertation.

Kevin Bell
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Abstract

This thesis examined the changes in self-esteem of adolescent boys going through the school transition from a single-sex to a co-educational environment. The study combined an initial quantitative study followed by an in-depth qualitative study. The quantitative study used the Coopersmith self-esteem instrument to measure the self-esteem of boys in Years 7 and 8 in the last year of the all boys’ school. The same instrument was used twelve months later on the same students in Years 8 and 9 after the school had undergone the transition to co-education. Analysis of the data indicated that the boys’ overall self-esteem had dropped significantly. The second part of the study was a qualitative study to investigate more fully the effect of the transition on the boys at the school. This part of the study was based on data collected from interviews with twenty seven boys and nine staff, as well as various informal interviews and observations made by the author over the period 1998 to 2004. The qualitative study used the principles of grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) to draw out the factors and related phenomena to crystallize why the boys’ self-esteem may have been adversely affected. Through this process, three key factors emerged; Everybody’s Looking at Me (reflecting social self-esteem), Girls Hold You Back a Step and Academic Stuff (both reflecting academic self-esteem). The qualitative study pointed to why the boys may have felt less favorably about themselves in the co-educational environment. These findings are discussed in detail in relation to the extant literature.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter provides the background to the present study which concerns the self-esteem of boys in the transition from single-sex to co-education secondary schooling. The methodological approach used in the research and the significance of the study are outlined. The content of the chapters and limitations of the study are also presented.

This research was undertaken at a time when boys, masculinity and education were part of popular discourse in tertiary education circles, in political discussions and in the media. For example, in 1994 the NSW Government initiated the Enquiry into Boys’ Education: Challenges and Opportunity. In 2000, the Federal Government followed by announcing its own enquiry into boys’ education chaired by Dr Brendan Nelson, MP. This report was completed in 2002 and was entitled Boys: Getting it Right. The report was a response to growing community concerns about the education of boys. Significant statistics quoted in this report include:

- The retention rate of boys going on to Year 12 was 11% below girls.
- Girls have, on average, significantly better results in the HSC, leading to girls taking 56% of university commencements.

At the other end of the achievement continuum, West (2001) reported that in 1999 boys’ outnumbered girls 2 to 1 in the bottom 10% of the HSC.

It would appear from these statistics alone, that young men in Australia are not reaching their full potential.

As a high school teacher, I have become aware of the environment that our young men are growing up in. Boys have dreams and aspirations; they have potential and energy; but their dreams are often not fulfilled and their aspirations often die through a lack of confidence. Year after year my ‘bottom’ mathematics classes have a significant greater number of
males to females, with many of the boys there not for lack of ability, but lack of motivation and confidence.

Boys in our society are more vulnerable than girls to suicide, to being imprisoned, to being killed in motor vehicle accidents. In 1998 in Australia, 364 boys killed themselves compared with 82 girls (Hawkes, 2001). Boys enter dangerous situations, risking life and limb, through ignorance, lack of respect for themselves and others and through a lack of self-esteem.

Boys are both living dangerously and underachieving at school. A significant number of boys are falling far short of their potential. With boys falling short, so does the school and society. West cites British research which found that the quickest way to improve a school’s performance is to address boys’ underachievement (West, 1999, p.49). The present study is thus not just about inquiring into an aspect of boys’ education for the sake of the boys. If boys grow into considerate, loving and thoughtful young men who reach their potential, the whole of society grows with them.

With this in mind, this study sought to investigate further the effect of the school environment on boys. Specifically it examined the effect of the change from a single sex to a co-educational school on the self-esteem of a cohort of boys.

1.1 Background to the Study.

In 1993 I undertook a short study about the self-esteem of students in five Brisbane high schools, comparing the self-esteem of all-boys, all-girls and co-educational schools. This was completed as part of my Graduate Diploma. In this 1993 study, it was found that the boys at the all-boys school rated a higher average global self-esteem than the other four schools (two of which were co-educational and two of which were all-girls). Two of the results were significant (p<.05); one compared the global self-esteem of students in an
all-boys’ school with students in a co-educational school and one comparison was with an all-girls school.

In 1998 the all-boys’ day and boarding school at which I was teaching announced that it would be introducing co-education at the beginning of 1999 and would be discontinuing boarding at the end of 1999. The school had been an all-boys’ day and boarding school for seventy years. It proudly displayed its array of Rugby League trophies in prominent positions and was known throughout the district, and indeed in Sydney, as a significant nursery for League players and athletes. It is situated in a rural setting and had been run by an order of Catholic priests until 2000. It has its own farm, is surrounded by undulating hills and is boarded by a wide, flowing river. It stands on a hilltop, and is carpeted with sporting fields. The school is now incorporated into the Catholic diocese as a systemic, Catholic school. It caters for Years 7 to 12, and has peaked in 2004 with nearly 700 students. When the study began in 1998, there were 419 students (all boys) and in 1999 there were 494 students (117 girls and 377 boys).

With the proposed change to co-education, I saw an opportunity to investigate what impact the transition might have had on the boys’ self-esteem. Initially, I decided to undertake a ‘before and after’ longitudinal study of a cohort of Year 7 and Year 8 boys’ self-esteem using the same instrument used in the Graduate Diploma study described above i.e. the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Instrument (SEI) (school short form) (Coopersmith, 1981). On finding that there was a decrease in the self-esteem of the boys studied, I decided to explore further the issue of this change in boys’ self-esteem, and in particular the question of ‘What is the effect on adolescent boys’ self-esteem in transition from an all-boys day and boarding school to a co-educational school’ (note: the school remained a boarding school for 1999, the first year of co-education).

The concept of self-esteem is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, where a review is undertaken of its history as a concept, the different theories supporting it, its importance to adolescents
(and particularly for boys). Self-esteem’s relationship to the self-conscious emotions, to education and to learning is explored.

1.2 Methodology

This study combines a quantitative study and a qualitative analysis of the self-esteem of boys in the school described above. The quantitative study initially involved the administering of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Instrument (school short form) (Coopersmith, 1981). It will be referred to as the SEI. The SEI was administered to Year 7 and 8 boys in November 1998 (the last year of the all-boys school) and re-administered to the same cohort in October of 1999, at the close of the first year of co-education. Years 7 and 8 were chosen, as it was thought these boys in their early adolescence, would be the most vulnerable to change. This quantitative study demonstrated a significant change in the self-esteem of the boys over the twelve month period.

The qualitative study involved the formal interviewing of twenty seven boys and nine staff who were at the school over the period of transition from an all-boys school to a co-educational school. Also included were a number of informal talks with students and staff, and observations made by myself over the period 1997-2004. The methodology was based on Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the reasons why the boys’ self-esteem had been affected by the transition at the school. A number of key factors were identified that appeared to both reflect and contribute to the change in self-esteem among the boys. These factors are described in Chapter 4.
1.3 Significance of the Study

Boys are not achieving as well as girls across a broad spectrum of measures of educational attainment, a pattern which is reflected in Australia and in almost all OECD countries (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2002)). This parliamentary report was initiated because of “the growing community concerns about the education of boys” (p.xv).

Coinciding with the apparent decline in boys educational standing, has been the trend in Australia over the past three decades for single-sex schools to become co-educational schools. This has been particularly true for schools in the Catholic system (e.g. Catholic schools in Grafton, Lismore, Casino, Dundas, Goulburn and Mt Gravatt). The reasons for these schools becoming co-educational are unclear. The present study might challenge the overriding philosophy of such transitions, and how the transitions are managed. There has also been a trend in recent years to incorporate single-sex classes into the co-educational environment. This study appears to confirm the benefits of such moves.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

The chapters reflect the research stages undertaken in the study and the subsequent conclusions reached.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

An extensive review of the relevant literature is done tracing the history of the term self-esteem, self-esteem and adolescence, self-esteem and education, boys’ academic underachievement, single-sex versus co-education, polarization of attitudes and choices of subjects taken at co-educational verses single-sex schools, single-sex classrooms within a coeducational context and, self-esteem and self-conscious emotions.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter justifies and explains the quantitative study using the Coopersmith SEI. The quantitative data analysis indicated significant changes in the boys’ self-esteem, when a comparison of the mean scores of the Coopersmith SEI was done. The qualitative research process using Grounded Theory is then explained.

Chapter 4 – Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected is reviewed and analysed using Grounded Theory. The data is drawn from the interviews with the twenty seven boys and nine staff, as well as data collected by me through observation and informal discussion with staff and students.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

In this chapter, the data from both the quantitative and qualitative studies is compared with the relevant literature. From this comparison, it is possible to explain how the study adds to the bank of related research.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The study’s findings are summarized in terms of their theoretical and practical significance to schools and education in general. Based on these conclusions, recommendations are given.
1.5 Limitations of the Study

It is appreciated that this was a case study of just one school, and the results are not necessarily indicative of schools in general. The form of the study is, however, fairly unique and the results are challenging. Significant generalizations cannot be drawn from the study given its exploratory nature.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to provide an understanding of the history, definitions and current view of self-esteem, especially as it relates to education and adolescents and particularly boys, which is the central theme of this study. This review provides a justification for undertaking the study in the light of the current literature about self-esteem in general and among secondary school boys, in particular, undergoing the transition from an all boys’ school environment to a co-educational environment. It will be shown that there is a shortage of research about this type of transition, particularly of a longitudinal nature.

2.2 Self-esteem: An Overview

Self-esteem has become a widely discussed concept in psychology, social studies and education over the past fifty years. An equivalent term used by some writers is self-worth (Harter, 1999). It has been proposed by some psychologists, such as Maslow (1970), that self-esteem is crucial to a person becoming whole. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, self-esteem, and confidence in one’s worth, must be achieved before one “can feel free to act”; before one is “self-actualised”. Self-esteem is thus a key building block to becoming whole and to realising one’s true potential.

The first to write on self-esteem, and to give some definition of the term, was the eminent American psychologist William James (1890). His formula for it was:

\[
\text{Self-esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}}
\]

James thus produced the first theoretical position in self-esteem. According to this definition, the more we achieve, and the lower the expectations, the higher the self-esteem. James focused on cognitive processes whereby an individual actively compares
aspirations to successes in corresponding domains. According to James’ theory, a student who aspires to achieving a high HSC mark, would on subsequently achieving the goal, grow in self-esteem. If they fail, their self-esteem would diminish.

A second theoretical view is that of Cooley (1902), who considered self-esteem as originating with the person’s perceptions of how significant others viewed the self. According to Cooley self-esteem is a social construction that is socially determined rather than cognitively determined through the comparison of successes and aspirations. Kidder (1998, p.1) interprets Cooley’s definition thus: “An individual takes in and becomes or reflects how others view him”. According to this view, the environment determines the individual’s self-esteem. If peers and significant others (for example, teachers) view the young person poorly, this will be reflected in the student’s self-esteem.

In contrast to James’ view, Cooley’s antecedents to self-esteem are seen by Harter (1999, p.18) as being “far more social in nature, and less consciously driven, in that children inevitably internalize the opinions they believe significant others hold toward the self”. For students significant others would include their teachers and, important to the present study, their peers.

The period from the early twentieth century to the 1960s produced little research or reflection on self-esteem. More recently Seligman (1995) has argued that the notion of self-esteem lay dormant until the nineteen sixties, when America grew into a period of wealth and prosperity. Individuals had excess money and more leisure time, and consumption drove the economy: “Choice and control, personal preference, decision, and will became the hallmarks of the new theories. Self direction, rather than outside forces, became the primary explanation of why people do what they do.”(Seligman, 1995, p.31). According to Seligman, the time was then right for self-esteem to re-emerge as an aspect of discussion and exploration in psychology.

Thus Morris Rosenberg and Stanley Coopersmith emerged in the mid-1960s, and contributed significantly to the study of self-esteem. Rosenberg (1965) provided a measure of self-esteem and a definition:
“By self-esteem we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself (sic): it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval (p.65).”

According to Kidder (1998), this definition includes the idea that self-esteem has both affective and cognitive aspects, as well as an evaluative component.

Stanley Coopersmith, was “a feisty and iconoclastic young psychology professor at the University of California” (Seligman, 1995, p.31). In 1967 Coopersmith published his benchmark book The Antecedents of Self-Esteem (1967) in which he defined self-esteem as:

“The extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior” (p.5).

Coopersmith argued that self-esteem is expressed through one’s actions and is therefore observable and measurable. He suggested that there are four criteria that define the successful growth of self-esteem in an individual.

a. Power – the ability to influence the course of ones own behavior and that of others.

b. Significance – through the concern, attention and love by others (versus rejection and isolation).

c. Virtue – adherence to a code of moral, ethical or religious principles.

d. Competence – high levels of performance.


These four criteria match a combination of both James’ and Cooley’s views of self-esteem in that they reflect personal goals and others’ expectations.

The general body of research in self-esteem has concentrated on global self-esteem i.e. the individual’s attitude toward the self as a totality. In the last decade or so, writers have stressed the importance of studying specific self-esteem as well as global self-
esteem. According to Marsh, Owens, Marsh and Smith (1988) and Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach and Rosenberg (1995) self-concept cannot be adequately understood if multidimensionality is ignored. Harter (1999, p.140) notes that although there has been a shift away from unidimensional frameworks, these more recent frameworks preserve the construct of global self-esteem.

2.2.1 Measurements of self-esteem

Coopersmith and Rosenberg reignited interest in self-esteem and built the foundation for our current understanding. Though their definitions are somewhat different, the essentials are the same i.e. that self-esteem has both affective and cognitive aspects and self-esteem can be measured. Most definitions today continue to incorporate the same essential components (Kidder, 1998, p.3).

Besides the Coopersmith SEI (1981), other significant self-esteem scales include the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1989) and the Piers-Harris Scale (1969). According to Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach and Rosenberg (1995) the Rosenberg Scale is the most widely used of all the self-esteem measures. Gross (1993) notes that The Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale appears to be the most frequently used scale in Australia; however she prefers the Coopersmith SEI over all others for her work with gifted students, as it contains the four subscales (academic, social, family and general), each measuring a different aspect of self-esteem (Gross, 1993, p.236) as well as providing an overall self-esteem score.

Most of the items in the Coopersmith SEI (1981) were based on items selected from the Rogers and Dymond scale (1954), but some new items were also included (Coopersmith, 1967, p.5). A team of psychologists chose statements from these items, creating questions that were indicative of high self-esteem and those of low self-esteem. Only those items that were not repetitive and were not ambiguous were included. Pilot tests were undertaken with a group of thirty children to confirm comprehensibility. The inventory was subsequently tested on 1748 children attending public schools in the USA. The children were more diverse in ability, interest and social background that the initial thirty children. They were tested in their classrooms under the guidance and supervision of members of the research staff. Test-retest reliability after a three year
interval with a sample of 56 children from this population was .70 (Coopersmith, 1975, p.6). Over one hundred studies have been completed supporting the SEI reliability and validity for a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic groups within the USA (Coopersmith, 1975, p.12).

The Coopersmith inventory was tested on a sample of 352 Australian adults by Noller and Shugm (1988). The sample was balance for gender, socio-economic status and age. It was found that the items of the SEI were internally consistent and discriminated well between the high and low self-esteem groups. A study completed by Dawson (1988) in Canberra concluded that the SEI “measures a relatively stable trait and is a reliable measure of overall self-esteem.”

Thus the Coopersmith SEI is a widely used instrument for the measurement of self-esteem, it is a proven instrument for self-esteem measurement on Australian adolescents and it has sub-scales to identify specific areas of self-esteem, notably academic, social, family and general.

2.3 Self-esteem and Adolescence

Self-esteem development begins in infancy and grows through childhood. Coopersmith (1967) linked the growth of self-esteem to child-rearing methods and in particular boys with high self-esteem came from families where the parents provided firm control, promoted high standards of behaviour, encouraged independence, and were willing to reason with their children.

Adolescence is often a difficult period of a person’s life, and it is to be expected that a personality variable such as self-esteem may change as a young person grows through the teenage years. Various studies have found conflicting results. Some research has shown that self-esteem rises during adolescence and early childhood (O’Malley & Bachman, 1979). Simmons, Rosenberg and Rosenberg (1973) found that self-esteem dropped during early adolescence, with the greatest decrease at age 12, when it gradually began to increase. Once established, though, self-esteem is resistant to change, other than what results from normal developmental processes (Fertman & Chubb, 1992). Chubb, Fertman and Ross’ longitudinal study of 174 ninth graders over
four years (1989-1992) confirmed the stability of the students' self-esteem. The study also confirmed that males had a significantly higher self-esteem than did the females in the study (p=.0013) (Chubb, Fertman & Ross, 1997, p.120). Adolescent boys have been reported to have a higher self-esteem than girls in previous studies, notably by Rosenberg (1985). Rosenberg and Simmons (1975) found that self-image posed a great problem for white adolescent girls and that, compared with boys, girls become much more concerned about what others think of them.

Byrne (2000) tested two hundred and twenty four Australian students from Years 7 to 12 confirming that males had a higher self-esteem than females in Year 7, but that this became insignificant by Year 12. Importantly for the present study, he found that there were no significant differences between years 7, 9 and 12 for self-esteem. This would indicate that there should be no major change in self-esteem for boys in the present study going from Year 7 to Year 8 nor from Year 8 to Year 9.

Rosenberg is credited with having done the first large-scale study of adolescent self-esteem (Chubb, Fertman & Ross, 1997, p.116). An important finding for the current study was that African-American students did not score significantly lower on self-esteem; however, if they went to a predominantly white high school, they did have lower self-esteem despite better academic performance. “Apparently, one’s reference group is a contributing factor” (Chubb, Fertman & Ross, 1997, p.116).

According to Kidder (1998) in a review of the self-esteem literature, studies of adolescent self-esteem supported the notion that the period of adolescence is rather stable in regard to global self-esteem, but that “scores were influenced by transitions, more so when adolescents were younger rather than older” (Kidder, p.59).

Demo (1985) showed that there is fluctuation of self-esteem with performances, responses from others and other situational characteristics. Thus, an adolescent’s self-esteem may well be affected by their school performance, and by the responses from teachers, parents and peers. Kidder (1998) cites Way (1998) who suggested that the turmoil of adolescence and an emphasis on peer relations places considerable stress on the individual’s self-identity. This has particular relevance to the present study which concerns the effects of changed relations effected by a change from a single sex to co-
educational environment and the subsequent change in the gender makeup of peers. Also of interest to the present study, is research conducted by Seidman, Allen, Aben and Feinman (1994) who found that the early adolescent is particularly vulnerable to puberty and changing social settings.

Kidder (1998) cites numerous studies in her review of the literature on self-esteem which links adolescent self-esteem to outcomes; notably low self-esteem has been associated with depression (Harter, 1986), with delinquency (Rosenberg, Schooler & Schoenbach, 1989), poor academic performance (Hawkins, Catalno & Miller, 1992), and maladjustment in social relations (Harter, 1993).

Harter (1999) found that individuals may develop a differentiated perception of their worth as a person across different relationships. “Thus, how much one likes oneself as a person with one’s parents may differ considerably from how much one likes oneself as a person with particular subgroups of peers” (p.168). Harter labels this “relational self-worth”. Harter identified four groups of potential support for older children: parents, teachers, classmates and close friends. In Harter’s research of children and adolescents, a strong correlation was found between perceived support from significant others and self-worth, ranging from .50 to .65 (Harter, 1990a, 1993). Harter’s earlier research (1990a) is of interest as this found that “support from peers in the more ‘public domain’ (e.g. classmates, peers in organisations, work settings, etc) is far more predictive of self-worth than is support from close friends” (Harter, 1999, p.177). In a later study by Harter, Waters & Whitesell (1998), it was found that adolescents have differing levels of self-worth in the four contexts of parents, teachers, with male classmates and with female classmates.

Harter’s studies bring together both James’ and Cooley’s theoretical views on self-esteem. Harter (1999) cites her comprehensive studies which have found that those individuals with the lowest self-worth are those who report both incompetence in domains of importance and the absence of supportive approval from others. Harter’s studies have also found that adolescents self-worth is highly related to affect along a continuum of cheerful to depressed, with correlations ranging from .72 to .80 (Harter, 1999, p.197). Harter thus links low self-esteem directly to the mood state of depression.
Harter has searched for the antecedents of adolescents’ self-esteem and has made some most interesting discoveries. Firstly, she has found that in the adolescent years, self-awareness, self-consciousness, introspectiveness and preoccupation with one’s self-image dramatically increase (Harter, 1990b). Related to these aspects are the findings quoted in Harter (1999, p.200) which demonstrate that physical appearance, peer likeability, and athletic competence are strongly related to peer approval and support.

Harter found in her USA study that “physical appearance correlates most highly with global self-worth; athletic competence consistently bears the lowest relationship with global self-esteem, and falling in between are scholastic competence, social acceptance and behavioural conduct” (1999, p.158). Harter reported that perceived physical appearance among children and adolescents is inextricably linked with self-worth with correlations ranging from .52-.80. Simmons and Rosenberg (1975) have confirmed the link between perceived appearance and self-esteem among children and adolescents. It would appear that the self-esteem of the adolescent is thus closely related to perceived physical appearance. If physical appearance becomes an issue (but previously was not an issue) then it would follow that self-esteem may well be affected. This has importance to the present study for the boys who have been confronted by girls as peers in class and at school generally.

2.4 Self-esteem and Education

A number of studies have confirmed the positive relationship between academic success and self-esteem (Beane & Lipka, 1986; Bachman, 1979). In a study using the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (SEI), Morrison, Thomas and Duane (1975) found that according to the subscale of the SEI specifically related to school self-esteem, college students with low self-esteem say less in class, contribute a smaller portion of their thoughts to class discussion and sit farther back in the classroom than students with high self-esteem. Morrison and Thomas (1973) confirmed the hypothesis that college students with low self-esteem would predict getting lower grades on an examination than high self-esteem subjects (confirmed by the SEI, but not for the Ziller Social Self-esteem scale). Howerton and Lynn (1992) found that the SEI score was significantly related to grades in English and social studies, suggesting that overall self-
esteem might be enhanced by increasing school performance in specific academic content areas.

A number of studies over the past four decades have demonstrated a positive association between self-esteem variables and academic achievement (Purkey, 1970; Walberg and Uguroglu 1980). Covington (1989) claims that most co-relational studies report a positive association between achievement and indices of self-esteem: Thus as the level of self-esteem increases, so do achievement scores; and as self-esteem decreases, so does achievement. Accordingly, Walker (1991) found in her study of 270 at-risk elementary school students in New Jersey, that her education program to raise the self-esteem of the students was successful as both their self-esteem and academic achievement were enhanced.

Covington (1989) notes that of all the traditional dimensions of self-concept, the one that has the highest consistent relationship with achievement is the perception of one’s ability. It would appear that if one perceives that one has ability, then one will achieve. The introduction of girls to the school in the present study introduced a new reference group, and the perception by the boys of their own ability may have changed. As noted above, it would appear one’s reference group is a contributing factor to self-esteem (Chubb, Fertman & Ross, 1997, p.116).

To quote Covington, 1989:

“It seems fair to say that perceptions of ability profoundly influence virtually all aspects of the achievement process as it unfolds in the classroom” (p.86).

And also:

“(If) shame in failure and pride in success depend largely on students’ perceptions of their own ability, then students will continue to learn for only as long as they can aggrandize ability….In effect, when failure begins to threaten one’s sense of competency, one is likely to withdraw from learning” (p.98).
Coopersmith (1981) links self-esteem to the perception of ability and confidence. Thus if one has a strong belief in self, if one has a high self-esteem, then one brings confidence and a perception of ability to the area being explored. Wattenberg and Clifford (1964) found that a child’s positive self-concept was a better indicator of success in reading achievement than scores in an intelligence test. Thus confidence and perception of ability would appear more important to success than a latent giftedness.

Rosenberg et al (1995) argues that global self-esteem has very little effect on school results; whereas specific self-esteem (e.g. academic self-esteem) has a strong effect on school performance. The reciprocal effects of global self-esteem and school marks are important for the present study. Rosenberg quotes from an earlier study (Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach, 1989), noting that the analysis showed that school marks has a more powerful effect on global self-esteem than global self-esteem had on school marks (.15 versus .08). Specifically, school marks significantly affect self-confidence. Thus, he concludes, school marks do produce an effect on self-esteem, whether we consider academic self-esteem, global self-esteem, or self-confidence (Rosenberg, 1995, p.153). Similarly, Wigfield, Eccles, Maclver, Reuman & Midgley (1991) found that school performance had a strong impact on students’ general self-esteem (p.555).

Wigfield et al (1991) confirmed in their study that the transition from primary school to junior high school was associated with important changes in young adolescents’ general self-esteem and their domain specific beliefs: “Although these changes were not always large, they were systematic, reliable and largely predictable” (p.564). Specifically, the self-esteem of the students was lowest immediately after the transition from primary to high school and increased during the seventh grade. This confirmed the findings of Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (1973) where it was shown that after the transition to junior high, young adolescents’ general self-esteem is lower and less stable and their self-consciousness higher. Bryan and Petrangelo (1989) concluded that girls’ self-esteem may be adversely affected by important school-related transitions, particularly in the transition years of Year 7 and Year 10. Marsh et al (1988) also reported a drop in the self-esteem of students in transition from single-sex to co-educational schools, noting that their self-esteem rose in subsequent years. It would appear that school based transitions may have a negative effect on a young person’s self-esteem.
2.5 Boys’ academic underachievement.

As the present study specifically dealt with boys’ self-esteem in a school setting, it is appropriate to explore the state of boys’ academic achievement. An indication of student achievement at school is retention rates to Year 12. Until the mid 1970s, boys’ retention rates in Australia were significantly better than girls. Since that time, girls’ retention rates have increased, so that by the early 1980s, girls’ retention rates have been significantly better than the boys (Yates, 1993).

Girls appear to now achieve significantly better than boys when Tertiary Entrance Ranks are compared, and boys are over-represented at the bottom (West, 1999, p.41). West, 1999 also makes the point that this underachievement by boys crosses the cultural divide, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls achieve better than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys. West also notes that it is in English where the greatest gender difference lies; girls’ results are an average of 25% higher than boys. This difference in achievement in language begins early, as it would appear that by the age of 7 boys are doing worse at language than girls (West, 1999, p.44).

In the House of Representatives report on the inquiry into the education of boys (2002), it is noted that:

- The gap between the aggregate NSW Tertiary Entrance Score for girls and boys widened from 0.6 to 19 percentage points between 1981 and 1996; and
- Over 56% of students in higher education were women.
- School retention rates for boys was 11% lower than that for girls in 2001.

Boys’ underachievement appears to be a phenomenon in most major countries, except Japan (West, 1999, p.43). Studies would indicate that an elite group of boys are doing well but on average boys’ performance relative to girls has declined (West, p.43). According to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Report released by Dr David Kemp in 1997, the gap between boys and girls has widened over the past 20 years, and at particular risk are boys from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2.6 Single-sex versus Coeducation.

In the mid-Twentieth Century, there was a move away from single-sex education to coeducation. This was a global phenomenon, not just confined to Australia (Lee and Bryk, 1986). In Australia, the change was evident in the public system earlier in the century, so that by the turn of the century, there were very few single-sex schools remaining in the public system in Australia (Yates, 1993). In the Catholic system, changes to co-educational schools were evident in the 1970s and 1980s. However, according to Watterston (2001) the more recent conversion by a number of single sex schools to coeducation appears to have been driven by financial crisis rather than by educational philosophy (Watterston, 2001).

The most influential research quoted in favour of coeducation is Dale’s (1969, 1971 and 1974). Dale’s studies in England and Wales led him to conclude: “it has been demonstrated that the average coeducational grammar school is a happier community for both staff and pupils than the average single-sex school” (Dale, 1974, p.273). Some would acknowledge Dale’s influence, but call into question his findings on the basis of their objectivity. Marsh notes that Dale is “opinionated” (Marsh, 1989, p.70). Lee and Bryk (1986) note that he is amongst some who are “such zealous advocates of coeducation that some doubt is cast on the objectivity of their research findings” (p.382).

The trend to coeducation has had its dissidents for many years. Coleman in The Adolescent Society (1961) published his work detailing the social life of teenagers in the 1950s. He concluded that “coeducation in some high schools may be inimical to both academic achievement and social adjustment (p.51). Coleman implied that co-education would not necessarily suit all students.

A great deal of research was undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s, comparing single-sex schooling to coeducation. Gill (1988) reviewed the research conducted on single-sex versus co-education which was sponsored by the Commonwealth Schools Commission. It appears from Gill’s report that much of the focus in the 1980s was on girls. In favour
of single-sex schooling for boys, however, she quotes Ditchburn and Martin (1986) who found that boys in single-sex schools were the most confident of the groups surveyed (Gill, 1988, p.11).

There has been greater support for girls’ single sex institutions than for boys (Yates, 1993, p.97). Up until the early 1990s, the focus was on girls’ attitudes to science and their choice of science streams (Yates, 1993, p.94). This focus on girls has continued, and is confirmed in Pamela Haag’s *K-12 Single-Sex Education: What does the Research Say? ERIC Digest* (2000): “This digest reviews that research with particular attention to the effects on girls’ attitudes and achievement” (italics mine). This may be reflective, in general, of what the Danish writer Nils Kryger (1994) argues is a trend in progressive education championing girls, but largely ignoring boys.

According to Yates (1993), research on achievement effects has established no clear superiority of either coeducation or single-sex schooling for girls once other factors are controlled for (p.94). Yates does note, however, that the studies that have found higher self-esteem for girls in single-sex, as compared with the mixed-sex environment, have typically used multidimensional measures composed of subcategories such as academic, athletic and social esteem.

Lee and Bryks (1986) undertook an important study comparing the effects of single-sex and coeducational secondary schooling on a random sample of 1,807 students in 75 Catholic high schools in the USA. The study indicated that academic achievement, achievement gains, educational aspirations, locus of control, sex role stereotyping, attitudes and behaviours related to academics, were all enhanced in the single-sex environment, especially for girls. Students in boys’ schools were much more likely to enrol in a larger number of mathematics and science courses and less likely than their co-educational school counterparts to enrol in vocational courses. In academic achievement, “there were no achievement areas in which coeducational school students surpassed their single-sex school counterparts at either sophomore or senior year” (p.388). The reason given by Lee and Bryk for the significant differences found between single-sex schools and coeducational schools was that “It may be that some separation of students’ academic and social environments removes the distractions that can interfere with the academic development of some students” (p.394). Marsh (1989) is
critical of Lee and Bryk’s results, and notes: “Their results suggest some differences between single-sex and coed students that may or may not be due to pre-existing differences” (p.73).

One of only a few studies comparing the development of self-esteem in single-sex and coeducational schools in Australia in the 1980s was done by Foon (1986). Foon found that the self-esteem of boys was significantly higher in single-sex schools (p.14). She also reports that the subject choice of the students for both boys and girls was less stereotyped in the single-sex environment. In particular, males were more likely to choose English as their favourite subject in single-sex schools (p.16). Although Foon is convincing in her arguments, Marsh (1988) is dismissive, as he argues that the comparisons are non-equivalent, with no attempt to control for any pre-existing differences (1988, p.5).

Marsh (1988) studied the transition from single-sex to coeducation of two Sydney high schools, with a focus on teacher perceptions, academic achievement and self-concept. In this five year longitudinal study, he found that for both boys and girls there was a clear increase in multidimensional self-concepts from pre-transitional to post-transitional and that these benefits were not gained at the expense of academic achievement. Of significance to the present study, however, was Marsh’s results for the transition year where he found that the self-concept scores are significantly higher in single-sex classes than in co-educational classes for both boys and girls (p.18). Marsh suggested that this was due to a “temporary disruption during the transition year” (p.19). In support of this theory he noted comments by teachers on changes produced by the transition. Nowhere in Marsh’s study are the views of students explored and this, I believe, is a weakness in his study. Teachers may have a view on the effect of the change from single-sex to coeducation, but so do students, particularly when it is their self-concept being assessed and when peer approval is so important in self-esteem and self-concept development as mentioned above.

In a follow up study of the schools undertaken by Smith (who co-authored Marsh’s original study) in 1996, it was found ten years after the initial study, that “the student self-concept was found to be just as high as when it was last measured in 1985, two years after complete coeducation” (Smith,1996, p.45). Smith notes that the self-concept
of the students dropped in the transition year but makes no explanation as to why. Smith also reports on the declining enrolment patterns of both the schools after co-education was introduced but does not explore in depth the reasons parents and students were not supporting the new schools.

LePore and Warren (1997) in the National Education Study (USA) found quite different results to Lee and Bryk (1986). In this study they considered achievement tests and social psychological measures, comparing single-sex and coeducational schools. The only significant results showed that boys who attended single-sex Catholic high schools had higher achievement test scores than boys enrolled in coeducational schools. This result was tempered by their research that showed that although single-sex school boys appeared to know more than coeducational school boys in many cases, single-sex school boys and girls did not learn more than coeducational school boys and girls during the high school years (1997, p.500).

In their analysis LePore and Warren suggested a number of reasons as to why their results differ so markedly from those of Lee and Bryk (1986). Something important about Catholic schools may have changed since 1980 when the data was originally collected. They noted that a number of single-sex schools either closed their doors or were merged with other single-sex institutions or converted to coeducational instruction. This they contend may have changed the demography of the schools. They also remarked that the number of non-Catholics attending the schools increased significantly from 11.2% to 15.3% and the number of laity teaching in the schools increased, as the percentage of religious decreased. They also noted that it may be that coeducational schools have been effective, especially towards girls, in addressing important issues of sexism and gender bias (p.505-6, 1997). In another American study, Dollison (1998) concluded that it was the structural features (such as smaller class sizes and local control over curriculum) of the single-sex school in the USA that lead to the better study environment for girls (and in particular for Mathematics).

Cairns (1990) studied self-esteem and locus of control in over 2000 students in Northern Ireland. He concluded that single-sex schools are associated with benefits in terms of self-esteem and locus of control. He noted, however, that his findings may be related to the context of academically orientated single-sex grammar schools.
In another Northern Ireland study by Granleese and Joseph (1993) girls in a single-sex school were compared with girls in co-educational school. It was found that the girls at the single-sex school were less critical of their own behavioural conduct than girls in the mixed school and this was the single best predictor of global self-worth in the all-girls school. In the co-educational school, physical appearance was the single-best predictor of global self-worth. For the girls in the co-educational school, it would appear that their appearance becomes important due to the presence of the boys.

Norton and Rennie (1998) studied students’ attitudes towards mathematics at secondary school level, comparing a single-sex girls’ school, a single-sex boys’ school and two coeducational schools. Although the authors conclude that overall the effect sizes were generally small in all their results, they did report that “Boys in the single-sex school studied generally had the most positive and consistent attitudes over the five grades” (p.26).

An important study of New Zealand single-sex and coeducational schools was published in 1999 by Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood. This longitudinal study was completed over a period of eighteen years and studied over 600 New Zealand children. It found that children attending single-sex schools tended to perform better than their coeducated peers across a number of educational outcomes; and these achievement differences were evident for both boys and girls (p. 8). Unlike many other studies, this one controlled for selection processes. Through these controls, the results were substantially reduced, and the strength of the association between school type and measures of educational achievement were watered down considerably, however “even after control for selection, small but consistent achievement differences were found between the two groups, with coeducational pupils having lower mean pass rates in the School Certificate (p < .0001), more frequently leaving school (p< .05), and having higher subsequent rates of unemployment (p < .01).

Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood (1999) surmised that the differences may reflect the social and gender climates found in single-sex and coeducational schools, with single-sex schools offering fewer opportunities during school time for cross-gender interaction that could potentially interfere with children’s academic development (1999,
p.14). Caspi, Lynam, Moffit, and Silva (1993), similarly found that early maturing girls in New Zealand were at greater risk of delinquency than early maturing girls in single-sex schools. Bringing these findings together, Woodward et al note that “at least for adolescent girls, the social composition of coeducational schools may expose adolescents to greater social and sexual pressures and opportunities that may impede their educational achievement” (p.14). The paper adds that the results may indicate there are educational advantages of single-sex schooling over coeducational schooling, such as aspects of school climate, teacher attitudes, class sizes and resources.

Recent research in Victoria confirmed these findings. Drs Ken and Katherine Rowe’s submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into boys’ education is referred to, stating that Victorian Certificate of Education results from 1994 to 1999 shows that both boys and girls in single-sex schools outperform their counterparts in co-educational schools (Parliamentary report, October, 2002, p.86). The Parliamentary report goes on to note that “the Committee is not convinced that this would justify re-structuring public schooling on single-sex lines” (p86).

2.7 Polarisation of Attitudes towards Subjects.

One factor that Dale found in favour of single-sex schooling for boys was their attitude towards languages, in particular French (Dale, 1974). “The interest of the co-educated boys in French may be affected by the intensification of boys’ stereotyped attitude that French is a ‘cissy’ subject or at least not a boys’ subject.” (Dale, 1974, p.160). Dale notes that this may be due to boys’ feeling of inferiority in French especially in oral work.

Ormerod (1975) found that the polarisation of subject interest between the sexes is greater in mixed than in single-sex schools. ‘Female’ subjects were seen to be English and French. Ormerod noted that this polarization may well be due to adolescents at puberty being driven by developmental changes to use subject preference as a means of asserting its sex-role. Stables (1990) confirmed this polarisation of attitudes towards French, with boys in the single-sex schools being more likely to prefer it as a subject. This polarisation of subjects, especially in languages, may be due to what West describes as “the power women have in speech….Men in all-male gatherings almost
invariably talk about how hard it is to speak about gender in mixed company without being contradicted and condemned” (West, 1996, 29).

Stables (1990) research also covered boys’ perception of the importance of Music and Drama. Those in mixed schools rated both Music and Drama below their single-sex counterparts. In their attitude to school generally, boys at single-sex schools had a more positive attitude to school than those boys in coeducational schools as “polarisation also occurs in this context and positive attitude to school can be seen as a feminine trait” (p.229). Stables also reports that boys’ feelings about subjects may be more affected by whether they are in mixed or in single-sex schools than girls (1990, p.229).

Polarisation of subject preferences is supported by Colley, Comber and Hargraves (1994) in their findings for children 11-12 years of age. “The female stereotyped subjects of music and art were higher in preference order of boys from single-sex schools than in that of boys from co-educational schools, while the reverse was true for science” (p.381).

In a Belgium study, Brutsaert (1999) found that gender stereotyping of attitudes and behaviours is more pronounced in coeducational schools than in single-sex schools, notably for girls. Brutsaert’s research showed that, on average, girls identify themselves more strongly in terms of their own gender in coeducational schools than in single-sex schools (p<0.001); and single-sex girls showed significantly less inhibition than the coeducational school girls (p<0.001). There was no difference among the boys on the same variables.

Campbell and Evans (1993) compared girls at co-educational schools with those at single-sex schools in Louisiana, USA. They found a much larger percentage of girls at the all-girls schools were enrolled in the ‘masculine’ subjects of chemistry, advanced biology and advanced maths classes than at the co-educational schools. The girls enrolled in the advanced maths and science classes also had a more positive self-esteem. This could indicate that when a young person is pursuing what they are most capable of, their self-esteem is enhanced.
It would appear from the literature that there is more polarisation of subject choices in the coeducational environment. This leads to subjects and activities being more blatantly branded as masculine or feminine in a co-educational environment.

2.8 Single-Sex Classrooms within a Coeducational Context

Ken Rowe is one of Australia’s most recognised educational researchers. In the mid 1980s he did a longitudinal study comparing students in co-educational classes to boys and girls in single-sex classes. Specifically, he compared student achievement, confidence and participation in mathematics. Rowe (1988) found that being placed in single-sex classes was associated with greater confidence which, in turn, significantly increased the likelihood of their subsequent participation in senior mainstream mathematics education (1988, p.196). He quotes a typical response from girls as “It’s easier to talk to the teacher with just girls, because boys sometimes laugh and make you feel stupid” (1988, p.197). Rowe also notes

“In single-sex classes of either gender, there was a notable reduction in the frequency and saliency of student attention-demanding behaviours” (p.196). Rowe also highlights the fact that teachers were better able to match curriculum to students needs (p.197).

Marsh and Rowe (1996) re-analysed the quantitative data of Rowe, Nix and Tepper (1986) and Rowe (1988) and found that the results were largely inconsistent. In part this was due to the fact that a significant number of the students in the experiment needed to move classes, compromising the random nature of the study (Marsh and Rowe, p.153). Marsh and Rowe (1996) are thus critical of Rowe (1988) and especially his quantitative data and subsequent findings in favour of single-sex classes. The criticism is limited to the quantitative data and appears to ignore the qualitative data of Rowe (1988) quoted above.

Various other studies in the past decade have shown that both boys and girls appear to gain confidence in the single-sex environment. Seitsinger, Barboza and Hird (1998) studied a middle school in the USA, grouping 63 sixth and seventh graders into single-sex mathematics classes with the aim to improve girls’ achievement and attitudes in mathematics. Both girls and boys improved in their achievement (boys more than girls)
(p.7), and teachers noted that “both girls and boys seemed more confident, spoke out more confident, spoke out more often, took responsibility, and refrained from self-deprecating remarks” (p.9). The girls reported positive differences in their attitudes, including being more comfortable, outgoing, and interested in mathematics and less afraid to make mistakes (p.9).

Blair and Sanford (1999) undertook a qualitative study of Western Canadian schools that have undertaken the move to single-sex classes in some disciplines. They noted that some of the more affluent single-sex girls’ schools in Canada have for decades addressed the issue of gender, and have been somewhat successful (p.3). This study explored single-gender programmes in public schools. One of the premises in the study was that “Adolescence is a critical time for the construction of gendered identity, and often academic success can be jeopardized” (p.5). Though the study had initially been set up to explore the outcomes for girls (p.9), it contends that “these programs are potential sites for a transformation of educational practice that can benefit both boys and girls” (p.5). In one of the schools, programmes have been set up for junior high school boys and girls acknowledging that they have different learning needs in the core areas of mathematics, science English language arts and social science (p.8). “The English language arts teacher is also redesigning her language arts curriculum in order to address issues of literacy for boys” (p.8). In general, the programmes have “increased the teachers’ awareness of issues of gender both in education and society, such as what is valued, what is encouraged, what is ignored, and for whom” (p.9). The study recognises that “there may well be just as serious issues for boys when it comes to literacy. Numerous questions remain as to how Canadian schools may be short changing or failing boys and what role literacy plays” (p.10).

One of the most compelling experiments undertaken in England in recent years was by Marian Cox (cited in Biddulph, 1997)). Cox assigned boys and girls in their fourth year of high school to gender-segregated English classes where they remained for two years. Other students remained in co-educational classes. Teachers adjusted books and poetry to suit the gender they were teaching, so that the classes took on a boys’ or girls’ flavour. Cox found that the boys became more expressive and open and the girls became more assertive. The school increased the number of boys in the high scoring range by almost 40%. The girls improved as well. Cox found the boys could relax and
express themselves more without the girls present. “It gave boys a safe environment where they wouldn’t feel stupid in front of the girls, who were so much more articulate” (Biddulph, 1997, p.139).

In an ethnographic study, Browne (2001) reported on a single-sex boys’ class in working class Wallsend (NSW). In 1999 the school set up a composite year 7 and 8 class of boys who were struggling with literacy and numeracy. The classroom teacher had the view that “these boys have problems socially and don’t interact very well with girls. It would become another major issue that would get in the way of learning, so at this stage we decided to go for an all boys’ class” (p.35). After one year, it was found that absenteeism and suspension rates dropped dramatically, and there was a significant improvement in literacy.

The principal of Humpybong State School in Queensland, Callum (2001), reported that the trial of single sex classes at his school was very successful. More than only testing for improvement in academic achievement, the trial was to test for any significant effects on self-esteem and attitudes. The trial indicated a significant improvement for boys in the single gender classes when compared with the results of the students in the mixed and single girls’ gender class. The group of Year 7 boys achieved very large gains in both spelling and reading children compared with both the girls class and mixed classes. Teachers also rated the single sex classes as better for behaviours and approaches to their learning. Most significant for the current study, however, was the results for self-esteem: “Self-esteem in both boys and girls in the single gender year 6 classes were consistently higher than those in the mixed classes” (Callum, 2001, p.39). A parental quote was that “In the single gender class, they can concentrate on learning without the distractions of the opposite sex” (p.39). A quote from one of the boys is an echo of the current study “I am more confident and don’t have to worry about the girls” and “I am better at reading in front of the class now” (p.39). In conclusion, Callum notes “(the) students reported that they were more able to learn and felt good about themselves. This reflects the significant research that acknowledges the strong correlation between positive self-esteem and student learning outcomes” (p.40).

Watterston (2000) noted that a growing number of coeducational secondary and primary schools both in Australian and internationally are trialling the efficacy of single-sex
classes as one approach in their whole school repertoire to address the differences in
education performance and to enhance the social and emotional outcomes of their
students. Schools are finding that boys in single-sex classes are less distracted and more
willing to contribute during lessons and to take risks answering questions. Watterston
claims that some schools are now saying these issues can be explored more fully within
the security and confidentiality provided by the single-sex classroom where each sex is
less inclined to limit their participation based on fear of ridicule or rejection from the
opposite sex.

Watterston goes on to note that anecdotal evidence points to:

“Both boys and girls in lower secondary single-sex physical education classes
felt less concerned with body image and performing in front of the opposite
sex...boys felt they could participate more fully in less modified sports.
Amongst the boys, teamwork and empathy for those at different skill levels
became more overt. Students in single-sex health classes discussed issues of
sexuality more openly. Teachers felt that the dynamics in the boys’ class
changed particularly as they didn’t feel the need to ‘show off’. Both sexes
tended to take more risks in their conversations allowing for greater depth in
discussions” (2000, p.111).

Watterston (2000) also reports that ‘cool boys’ felt that they didn’t have to live up to a
stereotype. Most boys wanted to stay in their single-sex literacy classes where lessons
suited their learning styles and engaged them in their areas of interest. Assessment tasks
focused more on the oral than the written. Boys in a single-sex low socio-economic
upper primary class moved beyond ‘reading is not cool’ to reading novels. These levels
of achievement continued to be maintained when they moved to a nearby high school.
The high number of discipline referrals for this group reduced dramatically – when
referrals did occur, the boys felt that they had not only let themselves down but also
“the team”. Boys felt it was easier to ask questions in a single-sex environment as they
weren’t hiding behind a facade or fear of being put down (as was the case in the present
study). As with Callum (2001), parents noted the impact of single-sex classes was
reflected in the happy and more relaxed demeanour of their children who had developed
a greater sense of self-worth.
The intention of recent single sex classroom strategies in primary schools has had the aims of providing younger students with more options to ‘do’ gender differently and to develop resiliency to support their passage into adolescence (Watterston, 2001). Watterston also notes that anecdotal evidence from schools seems to suggest that issues of gender can be explored more fully within the security and confidentiality provided by a single sex classroom. Segregated classes, it would appear, help students see their gender group in a new way. Watterston suggests that the assumption appears to be that each sex is more inclined to participate because the fear of ridicule or rejection from the opposite sex is eliminated. She claims that students need more than just the single sex environment to excel, but that with boys and girls different needs in the areas of emotional and social literacy, single sex classes make sense.

In her snapshot of the findings over the last decade Watterston (2001) notes regarding single-sex classes within a coeducational context that:

- Separating Year 7 students improved male behaviour.
- Boys’ self-discipline improved.
- 8th Grade single-sex maths and science classes produced higher grade point averages for both boys and girls.
- Boys in single sex classes were less distracted and more willing to contribute during lessons and to take risks.

Watterston (2001) quotes from her own qualitative research noting:

- Both boys and girls in lower secondary schools felt less concerned with body image and performing in front of the opposite sex.
- Students in single sex health classes discussed issues of sexuality more openly.
- Boys wanted to stay in their single sex literacy classes where lessons suited their learning styles and engaged them in their areas of interest.
- Teachers felt that single sex classes helped to improve self-esteem as they worked towards breaking down undesirable stereotypical behaviour.
- Students tended to enjoy the opportunity to work in single sex groupings and felt they were achieving better results, were less distracted and more confident.
According to the Commonwealth Parliamentary report into boys’ education (2002), many of the trials of single-sex classes were set up to promote girls’ interest and achievement in mathematics and science. It is noted that often the trials were abandoned, not because they didn’t work for girls, but that they were not positive for boys. The report notes that a reason for this may be that girls’ needs were met, but that boys’ were not. In the schools that it was successful for boys, it was noted that the classroom teachers had modified the content to suit boys. For example texts in English were chosen to suit a boy’s interest and there was more opportunity for hands on work (p.88). In one school, it was noted that two-thirds of the boys were kinaesthetic (physical) learners and one-third were visual learners, whilst three-quarters of the girls were auditory learners (p.89). The teaching practices were modified to suit the students.

In an American study reviewing the literature on single-sex education and its effects on female confidence and achievement in mathematics, Dollison (1998) found that an analysis of single-sex classes with coeducational schools revealed improved locus-of-control and more positive feelings for mathematics with modest improvements in mathematics achievement for girls (p.2).

In summary, it would appear that some ventures into single-sex classes have been more successful than others. The balance, it seems, tend to support the view that single-sex classes within a co-educational environment, can benefit both boys and girls, provided the teacher is aware of the different needs of the students being taught.
2.9 Summary

Self-esteem as a concept dates back to the late Nineteenth Century, when two major theories emerged: James’ who focused on the cognitive processes whereby an individual compares aspirations to successes and Cooley, who viewed it as originating with how significant others viewed the self. Rosenberg and Coopersmith began research in the 1960s, not only adding to the understanding of the term, but also creating instruments with which self-esteem could be measured.

Young people appear to be affected by important school transitions (Wigfield et al, 1991). The young person’s self-esteem is also affected by their reference group (Chubb et al, 1997). Harter (1990a) has found that the context in which self-esteem is being measured is important, and particularly that support from peers in the public domain is predictive of self-worth. Harter highlights the importance of achievement and the support of significant others in a young person’s life, bringing together both James’ and Cooley’s theories. Harter (1999) also highlights adolescents’ increased self-awareness, self-consciousness and preoccupation with self-image.

Academic achievement, it would appear, is significant in developing self-confidence and consequently self-esteem (Rosenberg et al, 1989). Of note to the present study is the world-wide underachievement of boys. This academic underachievement by boys may well point to the issue of boys and low self-esteem.

One of the major academic debates of the past decades has been the merits of single-sex versus co-educational. There are conflicting views. Research in Australia and overseas has indicated that self-esteem is better developed in a single-sex environment, but much of this has been dismissed by proponents of co-education, such as Marsh, due to the lack of control for any pre-existing differences. The New Zealand study by Woodward et al (which did control for pre-existing differences) and the review of the relevant literature by Watterston (2002), would indicate that students at single-sex schools are more successful and don’t have the social pressures of a co-educational environment. This is confirmed in the literature that examines a modern trend of single-sex classes within co-educational schools. This research indicates that both boys and girls do better
academically and emotionally when the constraints of the co-educational classroom are removed.

Another convincing aspect supporting single-sex education is the type of subjects chosen by the students, reflecting non-polarization. Boys, in particular, appear more likely to do ‘sissy’ subjects such as foreign languages, drama and music in a single-sex environment. The literature suggests that the single-sex environment may be better in developing confidence in some subject areas for both boys and girls, and that a single-sex environment is less prone to a polarization in the curriculum. It also suggests that there may less adverse social pressure on the boys in a single-sex environment. The literature indicates that there may be a change in the boys’ self-esteem, particularly during the transition period. The research question that emerged was thus: *What is the effect on the self-esteem of boys going from single-sex schooling to co-educational schooling?*

In the following chapter the methodology will be discussed that will define an approach to determine an answer to the above, using a quantitative method of self-esteem measurement and a qualitative grounded theory method based on a series of interviews with students and staff.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter 2 indicated that there has been considerable debate over the decades between proponents of single-sex and co-educational schooling. The most recent research appears to be supporting the advantages of single-sex classrooms within the co-educational environment. Both boys and girls appear to benefit academically and socio-emotively in a single-sex classroom environment. This study’s methodology was devised to explore the effects on self-esteem on boys in the transition of a school moving from a single sex to a co-educational environment. It will be recalled that the research focus for this study was Boys’ Self-esteem: The Effect of Coeducational Schooling. As a teacher at the school throughout the transition period I felt well placed to study the boys’ reaction to the changes taking place.

The methodology for this research involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative study is discussed here (and not in Chapter 4) as it was exploratory in nature, and only after the results of the quantitative study were known was it decided to continue with the qualitative study.

3.2 Quantitative Study

In Chapter 1, I noted my curiosity concerning the possible effect on boys’ self-esteem during and after the transition to a co-educational school. With this in mind, it was decided in 1998 to do an exploratory study of the boys’ self-esteem over the transition period 1998-1999. The aim of the quantitative study was to identify any change in the self-esteem of the Year 7 and 8 students at the school during the transition. Years 7 and 8 were chosen as these years would have the largest influx of girls in 1999, the senior classes having only minimal females coming into their classes when co-education was
introduced in 1999. The school was also going through a transition from boarding and
day school to all day school. This was completed in 1999, at the end of the first co-
educational year.

Before initiating the study, I wrote to the school executive asking permission to carry
out the research. During the period of the study I was employed as a teacher at the
school. Approval was given in late 1998, and the study commenced.

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory SEI (school short form) was chosen to measure
the boys’ self-esteem. The Inventory is provided as Appendix 1 to this thesis.

3.2.1 The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Instrument

The Coopersmith SEI (school short form) (1981) was developed to provide an
alternative to the fifty-item School Form (1981) and is ideal for the measurement of the
self-esteem of a large group of students. It consists of 25 questions, which the
respondents have the forced choice of answering as *Like me or Not like me*.

The *School Short Form* (used in the present study) includes the twenty-five School
Form items that showed the highest item-total score correlations. The short form does
not allow differentiation by subscale. The Lie Scale items are not included. The total
score correlations of the *School Form* with the *School Short Form* is .86 (Coopersmith,
1981). It was decided to use the short form version as the study was concerned with
total self-esteem.

The SEI was issued to most of boys in Years 7 (69 students out of a total of 80) and
Year 8 (61 students out of a total of 70), during their ‘Homeroom’ period at the
beginning of the school day (November 1998). The school at this stage was a single-sex
boys’ school, with a small boarding school component. By far the greater number of
Year 7 and 8 students were day students (of 150 boys, only 30 were boarders).

The boys’ homeroom teachers were instructed in the use of the SEI by the researcher
and were asked to issue the SEI to their classes with the following instructions:
‘One of the teachers is doing some research into young people and schooling, and would like you to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions and you are asked to answer whether or not the question is either like you or not like you. You don’t have to complete the form if you don’t want to and there will be no repercussions if you don’t. The results of this questionnaire will be kept completely confidential and to assist in this do not put your name on the form.’

Teachers reported no problems with the process and had full cooperation from the students.

At the beginning of 1998, the school welcomed girls to the school for the first time since the school’s beginnings in the early 1930’s. The school also entered its last year as a boarding school.

In November of 1999, the SEI was reissued to Year 8 (a total of 71 boys out of a total of 80) and Year 9 (a total of 57 boys out of a total of 63). Of the boys tested in 1998, 17 left the school at the end of the year and there were 10 new boys. Thus there was a notable turnover of students. Over 100 students, however, did complete both the 1998 and the 1999 surveys which represent a significant cohort tested on both occasions. A worthwhile comparison of self-esteem could therefore be made.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Self-Esteem Data From the Quantitative Study

The 1998 and the 1999 measures of self-esteem of the cohort of boys who had been at the school in the transition (and had progressed from Years 7 and 8 to Years 8 and 9) were analysed using a T-Test and then Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances.

The results of the t-test for Equality of Means are shown in the Table 3.1. Results indicated that there was a significant drop in the overall self-esteem of the boys (F=16.292, <0.001). The mean self-esteem score in 1998 (41.9308) is compared with that of 1999 (38.9922).
Table 3.1

**T-Test Comparison of Boys Before and After Co-education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>41.9308</td>
<td>4.7220</td>
<td>.4141</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>38.9922</td>
<td>3.2847</td>
<td>.2892</td>
<td>16.292</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results indicate a significant difference in the Total self-esteem of the group of boys in 1998 compared with the 1999 group. As noted above, the group was largely the same, with over 100 of the same boys completing the SEI in 1998 and 1999. It would appear that the introduction of co-education may have had a significant effect on the boys’ self-esteem. The qualitative analysis was undertaken to explore this effect in more detail.

### 3.3 QUALITATIVE STUDY

The qualitative study involved the following techniques:

a. Interviewing a number of students singularly and in small groups over the period 2000 to 2001. In all nine interviews were completed involving 27 students, ranging in year levels 9 to 12. All the students were present throughout the transition period.

b. Interviewing nine teachers individually. The teachers were chosen from a variety of disciplines.

c. Ethnographic observations were made by myself over the period 1997 to 2004. As a teacher at the school over the period of the study I was able to observe and be a part of the changes taking place at the school. This had the positive effect on this study as I was able to observe first hand the effects of the transition on the boys at the school. It does, however, add an element of bias to the study.
3.3.1 Selecting the research approach

The chosen ontology for this study was constructivist. The essence of a constructivist approach is that the theory evolves from the data. This approach, it is suggested, would provide for the best understanding of the factors surrounding any variance in the boys’ self-esteem over the transition period, as a constructivist approach acknowledges the role of those involved as well as their experiences.

It was decided to base the qualitative component of this study on Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) as it provides a rigorous and well-defined approach to the collection and analysis of qualitative data. In addition it allows for the systematic emergence of theory from data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p11) ‘Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes and emotions’. When we consider the theme of self-esteem and what affects self-esteem we are dealing with just that: feelings, thought processes and emotions, all of which are explored by Coopersmith (1975) in his study of developing motivation in young people.

3.3.2 Grounded Theory principles and methods

Grounded theory developed in response to the logico-deductive social research in the mid-twentieth century, which had emphasized theory testing rather than the process of theory generation. Grounded theory, in comparison, takes an approach that focuses on the beliefs and concerns of those being studied through processes such as interviews and focus groups, and with the aim of producing theory. It takes a more humanist approach to the collection of data and the emergence of theory.

The validity and reliability of Grounded Theory is based on the constant comparative method that requires the researcher to consider a diversity of data by comparing the data from a variety of respondents with the emerging theoretical categories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) note that replication is the best means for validating facts. As the study continues, respondents are selected for their likeliness to be able to provide disconfirming data. This data is compared and adds to the development of the theoretical categories.
Grounded Theory has evolved into two schools of thought. Glaser’s interpretation (Glaser & Strauss 1967; 1992) and that of Strauss and Corbin (1990). Strauss and Corbin encourage the use of predetermined questions, arguing that this better meets the criteria for good science, being more reproducible and more rigorous. Glaser (1992), however, argues that this approach forces the development of theory through the use of preconceived questions. He argues that a less structured approach to questioning allows the theory to emerge from what is relevant to the respondents. Glaser’s approach was considered the more apt approach for this study, as it was felt that it would allow the respondents to express their feelings and emotions more freely and honestly.

Glaser recommends the initial question should not preconceive the problem and that the question should be sufficiently open to allow the issues to emerge from the data. Questions for the respondents develop from the concepts emerging from the analysis. The focus should be on finding disconfirmation of the concepts and trying to explain this disconfirmation.

3.3.2.1 Convergent interviewing

Convergent interviewing was used to support the Grounded Theory methodology. This method is described by Dick (2000). The interviews begin open-ended. As the interview process continues, the questions and the probes tend to be more specific. The theory emerges from the data, and from the respondents. As with grounded theory, the explanations emerge gradually from the data as the study proceeds. As the interviews proceed the questions are more probing and specific. Questions emerge through constant comparative analysis of the data. The theory emerges from the respondents and develops as the interviews proceed.

The method seeks disconfirmation and possible explanations of this disconfirmation to gain a better understanding of the respondents’ attitudes. The process of convergent interviewing is in line with the constant comparative method of Grounded Theory.
3.3.3 Theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis

To select the respondents, Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe the process of theoretical sampling. This involves selecting respondents based on the theoretical concepts emerging from the study, not from a predetermined representative sampling procedure or attempts to get the fullest data on a group. The data collected through this process leads to conceptual categories emerging. Properties are clarified and any disconfirmation is noted.

By comparing groups and data outside the initial group of interest, Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that the researcher can gain more insight into the emerging theory being generated. Through diversity the researcher can further develop the properties and further integrate the categories and properties of the developing model.

As the research continues, the researcher begins to look for ‘theoretical saturation’: which means that no additional data are being found whereby the theory can be further developed. When similar comments and reflections are being made by a variety of respondents from a variety of groups the researcher can be confident that saturation is being reached.

Glaser (1978) recommended ‘open coding’ of the data using the constant comparative process. This is a process of coding the data without predetermined codes that could limit the emergence of relevant concepts. Open coding involves coding the data for as many categories and their properties as seems relevant; constantly comparing these codes and categories, trimming them as necessary.

This is followed by ‘selective coding’ focusing on coding the data to an emerging core variable.

Through the constant comparison of the concepts generated by the data, theoretical categories emerge and these generate the Grounded Theory. The theory developed explains what is happening in the data (Glaser, 1978, p.55).
3.3.4 Research procedures used in this study

The qualitative study was undertaken in the period 2000-2001. The students interviewed were all present during the transition years 1998-1999. The sampling was purposive. Consistent with the principles of ‘snowballing’ described in grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) I was interested in allowing respondents to identify themselves and others who might be able to inform the research question. I also sought to interview those who might provide disconfirmation of current data and therefore obtain as broad a sample as possible.

Overall, I conducted nine student interviews involving 27 boys. Most interviews were conducted in groups of two or three. Individual interviews were avoided due to issues of child protection. Initially I asked boys in my classes whether they would be interested in discussing the changes the school was going through. Various boys approached me showing a keenness to do so. As the word spread that I was doing interviews, boys from various classes and age groups approached me with the request of being involved in the interview process.

The boys interviewed ranged from Year 9 to Year 12. Boys in Years 11 and 12 were included in the interview process (even though they were outside the original cohort tested) to ensure a cross-section of ages and to allow for confirmation or disconfirmation of the theory emerging from the data. All students were present during the transition period 1998-1999.

The approach to questioning the groups in the present study was based on convergent interviewing as discussed above. This allowed for more emergent theory development by relying on what is important to the respondents.

During the interviews with the boys it became clear that the staff were important to the emerging theory. These were approached casually and individually and asked whether they were willing to assist in the research by being interviewed. A conscious effort was made to include staff across the curriculum areas. Included are teachers of Mathematics, English, Agriculture, Music, Italian, Science and Computer Studies. A balance of male and female teachers was also sought. Teachers approached were keen to participate. No
staff member refused. I found staff were quite interested in the research being undertaken.

Further ethnographic data was collected over the period 1998-2004, that related to the boys’ involvement in activities such as choir, debating, school sporting carnivals and liturgies.

3.3.5 Interviews with Students

The students were interviewed during their lunch-time, singularly and in groups of two to five. Initially the boys were asked if they were interested in being a part of research into the changes that had occurred since the college had gone through its transition. When the students expressed an interest, a letter was issued asking for their parent’s permission to go ahead with the interview.

The groups would gather at lunch-time, after the boys had eaten, and interviews would generally last 20-30 minutes. Each session was recorded on a tape recorder, and later transcribed by the author. When transcribing, the names of the boys were changed to ensure anonymity. In all twenty-seven boys were interviewed in nine sessions.

The session would begin with the author welcoming the students, noting that the research being done was to do with boys’ education, that the session would be recorded, and that the names of the participants would be confidential. Students were also told that they could withdraw from the study at anytime without any negative consequences.

3.3.6 Research Question

The initial question to the group was: “Have you seen any changes here since the school has gone co-ed?” This initial question was in line with Glaser’s recommendation that the initial research question should be emergent from the initial data collected or the background literature, but not preconceive the problem. The question ought to be open enough for the data to emerge (Glaser, 1992).
In line with Dick (1998), convergent interviewing techniques were used to support the Grounded Theory methodology. As the interviews developed, questioning became more probing and specific. As issues of socialization and academic achievement emerged, questions probing into why and what and how were run past the respondents. Thus a better understanding of their beliefs and attitudes emerged.

Generally the boys were very keen to discuss the changes at the school and were open to answering the probing and prodding.

The audio tapes and transcripts are available.

A decision was made after nine interviews with the boys that no more were needed, as a theoretical saturation point (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) appeared to have been reached. This aspect is a key to grounded theory, and is applied when a sufficient sample is procured to provide category depth and breadth. Aspects of the boys’ self-conscious emotions and their confidence in the classroom appeared to be being repeated. Thus I believed that saturation point had been achieved.

3.3.7 Interviews with Staff

Nine formal interviews and a number of informal interviews were undertaken with staff over the period 2000-2001. The interviews were conducted at lunch times, recess and free periods. The staff interviewed had been present during the transition period 1998-1999. The interviews were not taped. Notes were taken, and typed that evening. Staff were given a copy of the interview to check for accuracy.

The interviews were initiated with the statement: “I am doing some research into boys’ education and it would seem that the boys’ self esteem has dropped since the introduction of co-education. How would you explain this?” As with the boys’ interviews, a process of convergent interviewing was followed. Questions were not preconceived, but rather emerged as the data developed.
Staff were generally very keen to express their point of view. After interviewing nine staff, it appeared that theoretical saturation point had been reached. Issues affecting the boys since the introduction of co-education appeared to have been funneled, such that many of the issues raised by the staff were agreed upon, and more, they generally agreed with the data that had emerged from the boys interviews.

3.3.8 Analysis of the Data

As the data was collected, I transcribed the interviews, and then analysed the data using the guiding principles of Grounded Theory as described by Strauss and Corbin, (1990). A process of constant comparative analysis was followed, with a detailed study of the transcripts of both the boys and the teachers’ interviews.

Each interview was printed on A4 paper, and then dissected for key words, phrases and sentences. These were cut out and this became data. The data for all interviews was then categorised and key factors were identified, along with their properties or concepts. This formed the basis of the qualitative study into the self-esteem of the boys in the transition from a single-sex environment to a co-educational one.

The emerging categories were progressively mounted together on blank paper. Three phenomena related to self-esteem emerged. One was based on terms related to the self-conscious emotions, and given the term Everybody is Looking at Me. A second one was based on interactions in classroom, and termed Girls Hold You Back a Step. A third category related to academic achievement and has been named Academic Stuff (summaries of the words, phrases and sentences are attached as Appendixes B, C, and D).

3.4 Other data

Ethnographic methods of research were used to collect other relevant data. This was achieved via careful observation and discourse with students and staff on an informal basis. This was possible due to the fact that I was a teacher over the period; immersed in the day to day clatter and chatter of the school. Observations and conversations were
noted down and recorded over the period 1998-2004. This included the boys’ participation in curricula and extra-curricula as well as informal chats with teachers and students. Salient changes have been recorded concerning the boys’ participation in curricula areas such as debating and languages other than English. Results of the Gold and Silver Awards for attitude towards study have been reported on. Extra-curricula activities such as school liturgies, carnivals (swimming and athletics), and public speaking events have also been observed and reported upon. This data is seen as important as it confirms much of the data collected via the interviews with staff and students.

3.5 Ethics
The ethics protocol supplied by Southern Cross University was closely adhered to. The project was only initiated after the school’s executive had given its permission. The boys’ were only interviewed after parental permission was given for their son to be involved in the research. The staff who were interviewed were always given a verbal outline of the project before being interviewed. Notes were taken of the staff interviews which were typed that evening and shown to the interviewee the next day for checking. No student or staff are identified in the research. The names quoted in the interviews are bogus, and are used instead of numerical methods to give the research paper more life.

3.6 Summary
The methodology used in this research combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Initially the qualitative study indicated a change in the boys’ self-esteem, which was subsequently investigated using the qualitative methods of grounded research. The qualitative data collected was dissected and then reformed, forming categories which lead to phenomena being identified that related to the boys’ self-esteem. Other data was also collected via the observation of the boys’ curricula and extra-curricula activities. Together a picture emerged of a changing school climate that had implications for the boys’ self-esteem.
Chapter 4 – Analysis of the Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the factors that emerged from the qualitative study of the data. The data was obtained from interviews with twenty seven boys, nine staff and various ethnographic observations made by the staff, the boys and myself over the period 1998 to 2004.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the interviews were analysed using Grounded Theory methodology. This included a constant comparative research process and looked for areas of disconfirmation of the theoretical concepts. The emerging factors became the focus of development of the model which described the changes in the boys’ self-esteem. The development of the factors and the model is presented in this chapter. These factors and the propositions are grounded in the data from the interviews and from the observations.

4.2 The Key Factors

Following the constant comparative analysis of the interview data and the observations over the period, key factors emerged as being influential to the boys’ self-esteem. A summary of the words, phrases and statements that led to these key factors is at Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

4.2.1 Academic ‘Stuff’ – The perceived changes in the boys academic achievement.

- 4.2.1.2 Board of Honour
- 4.2.1.3 Teachers: The Boys don’t measure up to the girls.

- 4.2.1.4 Polarisation of the curricula and co-curricula
4.2.2 Girls hold you back a step – The influence of the girls on the boys in the classroom and in other curricular and co-curricular activities.
  o 4.2.2.1 Teachers’ views on the boys being held back
  o 4.2.2.2 The boys’ view as to why they feel held back

4.2.3 Everyone’s looking at me – The increase in the self-consciousness of the boys since the introduction of the girls to the school.
  o 4.2.3.1 The boys speak of being more embarrassed in class
  o 4.2.3.2 The boys speak of being more self-conscious about dress and looks.
  o 4.2.3.3 The boys are embarrassed at sporting events
  o 4.2.3.4 Boys are embarrassed to sing, to debate and to participate.

4.3 Academic Stuff

Academic stuff refers to the various indicators that the boys are now not doing as well nor participating as actively as they had been. This is evident in the boys’ interviews, the teachers’ interviews and in the ethnographic observations made by teachers and myself.

4.3.1 Board of Honour

Important for the boys was the perceived change of attitude of the teaching staff towards them with the introduction of co-education. This can be measured, to some extent, by an analysis of the Board of Honour system in the school. The Board of Honour is an academic award to students, awarded at mid-term and at the end of term. Students are given an alphabetical rating by each of their classroom teachers from A (excellent) to E (most unsatisfactory). Silver awards are presented at the end of term for students who receive all As or Bs over the term. For a Gold award, the students need to have done the same for three terms. It is not an award for academic achievement as such, but it is indicative of how a student is working, how responsive they are to their teacher, how positive they are towards their study (both school work and homework),
how they participate in class and, to some extent, how neat and presentable their work is. Since the introduction of coeducation to the school, girls have dominated the awards. This is evident, for example, in the 2002 Gold Awards, summarised in Table 4.1. 2002 was chosen as it was the first year that boy and girl numbers approached being even (data taken from the 2002 School Annual).

Table 4.1

Gold Awards 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Boy Awardees</th>
<th>Girls Awardees</th>
<th>Boys in Year Group</th>
<th>Girls in Year Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>68</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from Table 4.1 that the girls dominated the Gold Awards for 2002. This is most striking due to the fact that the boys were in fact in the majority for each year group, except Year 8. As the Gold Awards are based on the Board of Honour, it would appear that the girls are doing significantly better than the boys on the Board of Honour generally.

In the interviews with the boys, they appear very aware of the girls dominating the awards, believing that the teachers have changed their attitude towards what deserves an ‘A’ and a ‘B’ and importantly a ‘C’ (which is Satisfactory). The awarding of just one
‘C’ would mean no Silver award for the term and no Gold award for the year. In an interview with Allen on 9 November 2000, he states that “I was getting A’s all the time. And same last year, but it’s sort of gone down and I’ve been getting Bs and Cs”. Stan (27 July 2000) noted that he used to get Bs, but not anymore. Rod (9 November 2000) stated that in Year 7 and 8 he was getting A’s all the time, but with the advent of coeducation “I’ve been getting Bs and Cs”. Rod’s explanation for this is “Probably because a lot of girls are smart; smarter and therefore the expectations of the teachers go up more”. Tim (17 October 2000) noted that “for what they do in class they get some pretty good board of honours, compared to what the boys get”.

This change in the reporting attitude towards the boys is confirmed by the teachers. Mr. Kane (6 Jul 2001) commented:

“Today I noticed that the girls outnumbered the boys by two to one in the Silver Awards. The boys who used to get an A or a B now get a B or a C. They’re not getting the awards that they used to”.

In an interview with Ms Judy (November 2000), she noted that “They’re (the boys) not wanting to answer questions. …. They’re unsure of themselves.” In the interview with Mr. Chris 1 June 2001, he notes “Girls have a go and get results; they have good presentation and put in a quality effort”. He continues by stating “The boys are the biggest smart alecs. They’re more immature”. Mr. Pearse noted on 16 February 2001 that “Girls are better at keeping quiet and listening. …..teachers probably relate better to girls who are acting more maturely”. Boys (in general), in the eyes of the teachers, are thus not as worthy as the girls of a high Board of Honour.
4.3.2 Teachers: The boys don’t measure up to the girls.

The teachers appear consistent in how the girls’ presence has affected the boys in the classroom and subsequently the boys’ academic self-esteem. The boys are now compared to the girls in class, and don’t measure up. Mr Pearce commented “I think that the way the education system is set up suits girls. Girls are better at keeping quiet and listening. And they tend to be better at handing things in; boys are probably better at doing exams. I think the boys sense that girls are more mature, and teachers probably relate better to girls who are acting more maturely”.

Mr Chris also notes that the girls present their work better and put in more of an effort. The boys, in contrast, are more immature. He notes that in Design and Technology the boys are good at the practical exercises but not as proficient when it comes to the theoretical, and don’t express themselves as well verbally nor in writing. There has been a change over the years with assessment techniques. In an informal interview with one of the Technical teachers he commented on the need now to produce a “portfolio” for metal work and woodwork assessment. In the past the boys would just get in and do it; produce it. He spoke of the “feminisation of the curriculum”, and how it was now more difficult for the boys to achieve a top grade.

The comments by Mr Pearce and Mr Chris give insight into why the girls are getting better Board of Honour grades and better results generally. They appear neater, more reliable, more focused and more mature. They are seen to be better students, and the boys just don’t measure up when compared with the girls.

4.3.3 Polarisation of the curricula and co-curricula

The teachers and boys noted in the interviews that there had been a change of attitude by the boys concerning the perceived feminine aspects of the curriculum and the extra-
curricular. Included are debating, scholar (choir), languages other than English, higher levels of senior English and liturgies.

In the interview with Paul, Charles and Dan (8 August 2000) Charles notes:

"ladies dominate those things now. Especially in the Schola (choir) there’s about four or five men, the rest are girls. I don’t know about debating but I was in the debating team this year and I was the only boy……I think that may be um the girls enjoy the more bantering; academic stuff like debating more than boys and that. Boys that didn’t want to be in the Schola because they didn’t want to seem like woosers in front of the girls and that, I suppose”.

Paul comments that, in reference to debating, the girls are “better for the job than a lot of males”.

This attitude of the boys towards areas of language, choir, liturgies and debating has continued over the years since the interviews were done. In the Ash Wednesday Liturgical Choir in 2004 there were 30 girls and five boys; with all of the boys hiding themselves safely from view at the back of the choir. In the Easter Liturgy Play in 2002 there were 12 girls and two boys. It was worth noting that in this liturgy some of the girls and both the boys wore masks as part of their costume. When the members of the group were presented to the school at the end of the liturgy, the boys kept their masks on, suggesting self-consciousness or embarrassment at being in the liturgy and out in front of the school. All the girls removed their masks for the presentation. The choir that sang at the 2002 liturgy, was also unbalanced, and consisted of 27 girls and five boys. All these examples are in contrast to what I observed previously, when the school was all-boys. It was that in the liturgies and in the choir the boys had been eager to participate and to acknowledge their participation.

The debating teams since co-education have also been unbalanced. In 2003 the Year 7 debating team, which won a regional competition, consisted of two boys and eight girls. It is worth noting that in 1998, as an all-boys school, the Year 10 debating team competed in the district competition. The only boys in the whole district competing in
Year 10 debating were from the school in this study, which was single-sex at the time. All other teams, from the three other high schools, had all female teams.

It would appear that the boys are now more reticent about participating in competitions that require good language skills. Mr. McNeill notes “In the past there used to be a lot of boys volunteering for Lions Youth of the Year and for the debating team etc. Suddenly the boys would be thinking ‘What will the girls think?’” This point is supported by Ms Anne-Marie (1 March 2001) who notes “We’ve been conscious of the boys not wanting to volunteer for debating and public speaking”.

The statistics concerning liturgies, choir, public speaking and debating, now point to the boys being considerably less involved than the girls in such co-curricular activities. This is confirmed in a number of the interviews. When quizzed about debating in an interview with Micky and Simon on 13 December 2000, Simon noted that it was difficult to work with the girls and to “put it together”. Micky was in the scholar (choir) but admitted to having dropped out at one stage. “I felt weird, being surrounded by a lot of girls singing”. He noted that most of the boys had dropped out as “Most of the boys …… must think that men aren’t supposed to sing”. Choir and singing as a co-curricular activity was pursued by a good number of boys in an all male environment, but the boys have avoided it in a coeducational one. Simon noted “now that it’s co-ed. Now no one seems to care about singing and that”. This fact is confirmed by the statistics outlined above concerning the school liturgies and choir.

Louis, Tim and Mark were considered very able students; students aspiring to doing very well in the HSC, and especially in English. When quizzed on whether they would attempt the top level of English for the HSC, Louis stated “I reckon if it was still an all boys school they’d be pushing the top guys to be doing top level English, ……now quite a few of the girls have come along and they’re more interested in English and stuff like that so that they could kick me easily. I probably can’t”. Here Louis is showing a reticence about stepping into a subject area that he fears will be dominated by girls.

Anthony, Chris, Harry and Martin (all Year 12 students) were interviewed on 5 October 2000. The boys referred to the girls dominating subjects and activities, such as English and the school choir. Chris argued that it was due to the girls having more confidence
than boys and “the chicks dominate it”. It is worthwhile noting that Chris was the last of the boys to drop out of the top level, senior English class and it was the first time staff can recall that no boys at all attempted the top level English course for the HSC at the school.

Miss Judy commented on her Italian classes highlighting the comparison between the co-educational classes and the all-boys classes. She noted “In the co-educational classes the boys are twenty marks lower than the all-boys class”. In an informal interview she confirmed that in 2002 she had no boys at all in the Year 9 elective Italian class. All the boys had chosen Design and Technology electives. In 2003 she had one boy (and 15 girls) choosing Italian. This compares to earlier years when the classes were all-boys and the subject was one of the more popular Year 9 – Year 10 electives.

To summarize this section on Academic Stuff, the academic subjects and the co-curricular activities chosen by the boys appears polarized towards the more masculine areas and away from the feminine. The boys are generally doing poorly compared with the girls in the teachers’ eyes, as reflected in the Board of Honour results. With the boys now not choosing subjects and co-curricular activities based on the fact that the girls are doing them, the boys are not expressing themselves in areas which they may well excel. An area of growth in self-esteem is disregarded on the presumption that the activity is ‘a girl’s subject’ or from a fear that ‘it’s uncool’. Subject and co-curricular areas that were pursued in the past are now seen as ‘chick stuff’.

4.4 Girls hold you back a step

Words and phrases that lead to this category being highlighted included: Not as strong in English, standard that the girls set, girls probably renowned for being smart, boys have gone off their work, easier to work without them, I worked a lot better, girls are more academic, girls are more opinionated and girls hold you back a step.
The boys note in the interviews their feeling that they aren’t doing as well now, as the girls hold them back. The girls are seen to be more articulate, better at language and smarter. They are also perceived to be more critical and a mistake in front of the girls is seen as far more detrimental to the boys than a mistake in front of boys only. The teachers tend to agree that the boys are now not doing as well in the face of the girls’ presence.

4.4.1 Teachers’ views on the boys being held back

Teachers have noticed a change in the boys since coeducation and particularly refer to the boys’ lessened confidence and increased self-consciousness. Mr. Kane noted the “The boys find it uncool to stand up and say it’s okay to do well”.

Mr. Manning noted:

“The boys appear more reluctant to speak up in class now. They appear concerned about what the girls will think of them. They don’t want to be seen as unpopular with the girls. They don’t want to be seen as dorks or fools......less able students would be affected by the girls....I think the more vulnerable kids would have their self-esteem affected by the girls coming. These boys would have been less inhibited in the all boys environment”.

Mr. Pearse (16 February 2001) confirms this impression that the boys were now more self-conscious: “They want to appear cool in front of the girls”. McNeill (1 June 2001) noted that the boys appear threatened by the girls. They seem worried that they might be wrong. They seem afraid of looking silly. In the past it wouldn’t have mattered with their mates”.

Ms Judy, the language teacher, noted that: “The all-boys’ classes are more self-confident. They don’t worry about what they say. They’re freer to express how they feel”. She continued by stating: “The boys are worried about their relationship with the girls. ‘Are they cool?’...... They participate less in class”. Manning noted on 11 April 2001 that the less able boys may be the ones affected more by the change to co-education as he believed “the more vulnerable kids would have their self-esteem affected by the girls coming”.
Teachers see the girls as more mature and better adjusted to school. Mr Pearce notes: “I think the boys sense that girls are more mature and teachers probably relate better to girls who are acting more maturely”. Mr Chris agrees: “The boys are the biggest smart alecs. They’re more immature”. This perception by the teachers that the girls are better students, and are more mature, would be felt by the boys. They would be aware that the girls in the class are acting more maturely and that the teachers would be aware and appreciative of this. The boys would feel the new division in the classroom politics. The teachers’ views that the boys are less mature in comparison with the girls would be an aspect the boys would pick up on. They would feel diminished in their own view of self and especially academic self.

4.4.2 The boys’ view as to why they feel held back.

The boys concur with the teachers’ views that they are more self-conscious in class. In an interview with Jim, Len and Bob on 7 September 2001, Bob noted “we are a lot more conscious of what others think now. And so we keep to ourselves”. Jim continues “We’re just scared to say what we feel, like with the girls, cause I don’t know. What they’ll think of us, or what we think they’ll think of us. I don’t know people are just scared to say what they want to say”. Jim stated that having a difference of opinion is difficult for him in the co-educational environment: “you’re scared of the girls having an opinion about something and you have the opposite to that opinion, you’re scared to just say it; what they’ll think of you. They’ll think, ‘Oh you’re just an idiot’”. Bob stated that it’s in English and Religion that he felt most inhibited: “Because they’re more opinion orientated, rather than ‘yes’ or ‘no’. And when opinions come up”. It would appear from these interviews that these boys are much more reticent about expressing an opinion now that girls are present. They are more self-conscious about their learning opportunities in the classroom.

In an interview with Dane, Ken and Steve on 5 December 2000, Ken observed that the girls dominated debating in English: “Heidi just seemed to dominate it. Even when she wasn’t in the debate she’d come up with something to say”. Steve continued “Girls just gotta talk. Gotta be in the spot-light all the time”.

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Clem, Sam and Allen were interviewed on 10 August 2000. Allen noted that he felt that he worked a lot better in a single-sex environment “It’s a lot easier to work without them. I feel more confident without them”. Stan agreed: “I don’t feel as confident as I did when it was all boys. I sort of hold back a bit; don’t talk as much”. Clem goes on to say that he had been able to speak confidently in class presentations but since the advent of coeducation he “read straight from the palm cards” due to feeling more embarrassed with the presence of the girls. In an earlier interview with Clem, Stan and Steve on 27 July 2000, Clem noted in an all boys class he was able to go up and “individually looked at each person; expressions on by face; I couldn’t do that in front of girls”. When asked why, he replied “They’d laugh at ya. Uncomfortable. They’d stop ya …..They hold you back a step. A cog. I wonder why they do?”

Rod and Allen (9 November 2000) both commented on being more self-conscious in a coeducational classroom. Allen noted

“You know how um you have an all boys class and you all participate in it and now they’re all afraid of the answer’s wrong they’re gonna be laughed at so now one answer’s it anymore”.

Rod followed by stating

“When it was just boys like you didn’t really care about it, but now you sort of…but now with the girls here you just think about it more….You think before you say things. You don’t say it just like you normally do with a group of guys … Like you wait and think if it’s the right thing to say or not”.

Allen was more specific when he referred to his Science class; “I used to answer questions all the time. Now I think about it a real lot more to make sure they’re right”. When asked why, Allen replied “Just in case of embarrassment if it’s wrong or anything like that”.

Rod admitted that with girls in the class now “You think about things before you say it …. I don’t answer questions that I know; I just sit back and let someone else do it
because just in case everyone laughs at you”. When asked what would have happened in an all boys’ class, Rod replied “…. You wouldn’t really care, but with the girls you’d sort of go urh.” Rod followed up by stating “I know that I’ve done better in an all boys’ classroom than with girls”.

Micky and Simon (13 December 2000) have similar comments when reflecting on their experiences. Micky says “I felt more comfortable reading out aloud when it was all-boys. Because now with girls I feel that if I don’t do this right then down hill I go again”. Continuing, he states that when it was all-boys he didn’t worry about making mistakes, but now he’s afraid the girls are “thinking about my stuff ups in class”. He says later in the interview that this particularly important in English as “you don’t want to stuff up in front of everyone”.

In the interview with Tim, Mark and Louis on 17 October 2000, Mark noted that some boys just sit back saying very little in class now “they don’t want to get paid out by the people trying to be cool and stuff like that”. Tim agreed noting that “They don’t want to go hard in front of the girls”.

Louis made a most interesting and insightful statement when reflecting on the girls in the classroom and the embarrassment felt by some boys: “It’s just mainly because the guys are trying to impress. They feel a lot more secure if the girls give them attention. And if someone, a guy, thinks they’re loved or liked by a girl they feel a lot better inside. But if they say something really stupid in class then they’ll think that the girls hate them and that and they’ll have a real low self-esteem”. Tim agreed and added that “It doesn’t affect me. But I have seen it. Like before the girls came guys would volunteer the answer, but now they’re a lot more cautious unless they think it’s absolutely right”. Louis continued by making quite a profound statement, saying that making a mistake wasn’t that important unless “you really, really like the girl in class”. When asked as to what happens if you did really, really like a girl, he replied “Then you shut up”.

Many of the aspects raised by Tim, Mark and Louis had been considered by John, Pete and Oscar (7 September 2000). They believe that the girls are smarter, more artistic, more articulate and expressive. Oscar notes in colloquial language that when a question
is asked in class “you see half a dozen painted fingernails go up and only one or two blokes try to answer the question”. Pete makes the point that especially in music the boys expect the girls to now answer the questions. John reckons that the girls doing better is because of “More developed brains”. Oscar reckons that it’s due to the girls “being more conscientious”. Oscar later notes, as various boys above have, that he feels more inhibited with the girls in the class “Like I won’t answer a question cause it might be wrong”. This has resulted, according to Pete, in the boys “being quieter”.

Anthony, Chris, Harry and Martin (all Year 12 students) were interviewed on 5 October 2000. The boys referred to the girls dominating subjects and activities, such as English and the school scholar. Chris argued that it was due to the girls having more confidence than boys. When discussing the fact that no boys were now doing the top level English, he being the last to drop down, he noted that the guys are “probably intimidated” by the girls’ presence. Dan (one of a number of Pacific Islander students) went on to explain that “For our case, you don’t want to make mistakes (in front of the girls)”. Chris summarised the feelings of the group by stating “It all comes down to being more self-conscious”.

The boys and teachers appear consistent in how the girls’ presence has affected the boys in the classroom and subsequently the boys’ academic self-esteem. The boys are now compared to the girls in class, and don’t measure up. They are quieter in class as they are self-conscious and concerned about ‘what the girls will think’. They are reticent about pursuing activities that may be seen to be ‘feminine’ such as debating, choir and participation in liturgies. To quote Miss Judy (25 November 2000) on the boys “they feel insecure; unsure” and “the girls make their presence felt”. The boys feel that they are less able than the girls, who they perceive as being smarter, more articulate, better academics, better at expressing themselves and more studious. The teachers agree, and would add that the girls are also more mature and focused. All this leads to the boys’ perceptions that the girls are holding them back. In being held back, they are not as confident about expressing themselves, and display an increased amount of self-consciousness in their classroom participation and in their co-curricular activities. The boys’ academic self-esteem, it would appear, has been diminished.
4.5 Everyone’s looking at me

In this category, the boys appear to express various self-conscious emotions, indicating that they feel as though “everyone is looking at me”. Self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment and shame are often either mentioned by the boys, by the teachers, or are alluded to by them. This category appears to match Coopersmith’s Social Self-Esteem, which is evident from the questions from the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory.

Questions from the SEI that refer to Social Self-esteem:

I’m a lot of fun to be with.
I’m popular with persons my own age.
People usually follow my ideas.
I’m not as nice looking as most people.
Most people are better liked than I am.

4.5.1 The boys speak of being more embarrassed in class

The interview with Mark, Tim and Louis on 17 October 2000 gave some important insights into the boys’ social self thoughts. When the group was asked as to how things had changed since the school had gone co-educational, Tim replied “You have to behave now that the girls are here. You can’t say anything that might offend the girls or something like that.” When Mark was asked as to why some boys now sat back and didn’t answer questions, he replied “(They’re) scarred of getting embarrassed, and like that, they don’t want to get paid out by the people trying to be cool and stuff like that.” Mark goes on to note that this occurs in any class; Science, Mathematics, English; what ever. This point shows that a young boy’s social (and probably his academic) self-worth appears to have been diminished by the presence of female students, who have changed the way the boys react in class to answering questions. The cool boys now have an audience of females.
Later in the interview Tim reflects: “With girls here it just makes it a lot more embarrassing with stuff ups”. Louis continues: “When it was just guys you could say whatever and get away with it. And like no one would care”. When asked as to whether the girls actually say anything, Tim replies: “It’s mainly how you feel inside, I think”. He later notes: “If a guy pays you out you don’t take it to heart. But if a girl kind of does then you think about it a bit more”.

Allen (interview with Allen and Rod, 9 November 2000) notes that he thinks a lot more about questions he may ask in class “Just in case of embarrassment if it’s wrong or anything like that”. Rod continues by stating “You think about things before you say it. I don’t answer questions that I know; I just sit back and let someone else do it because; just in case everyone laughs at you”. He continues by noting that if it was just boys in the class “you wouldn’t really care, but with the girls you’d sort of go urh” In his following reflection he expands “Yer, cause if like, you never know what girls are thinking because they’re opposite sex, they could be thinking different, like be smarter and be answering every question and they think you’re a nerd and they won’t like you”. It would appear that the presence of girls in the classroom has lead to increased feelings of embarrassment and anxiety for both the boys.

These boys had had two years of single sex schooling. When girls came on the scene, the classroom became a social place, where the threat of embarrassment in front of the females became a new complexity to learning and socialising. If a boy is embarrassed, through answering a question incorrectly, or perhaps answering correctly, the cool guys may pay out, and the girls may laugh. An academic environment has become, for some boys, an anti-social one.

When Tim was asked as to whether or not the girls had affected answering questions in class, he replied:

“It doesn’t affect me. But I have seen it. Like before the girls came, guys would volunteer the answer, but now they’re a lot more cautious unless they think it’s absolutely right.”
The inference of this statement appears to be that if the answer is wrong, a social disaster may brew. The girls may or may not respond to a boy answering a question wrongly, but it would appear that the boy is affected negatively inside whether or not there is a response. He believes the girls (or that girl) thinks less of him.

Jack (11 September 2001) was asked whether he had noticed any differences in the classroom with the girls present. He shared his feelings quite openly “Yer. I don’t know; just feel a bit afraid a bit, something like that; shyness comes into that”. When quizzed as to what he was afraid of he replied “I don’t know; just people asking me sometimes”. I asked “Girls?” Jack replied “Just what people think, basically, yer”. Later in the interview he again refers to “those shyness factors”. It would appear that Jack feels inhibited, generally, in his approach to school life. He appears more confined to himself, and more self-conscious, as he attempts to integrate fully into school life; as he comes to terms with the boarding school going and more particularly girls coming.

Anthony and Harry are Pacific Islanders and both agreed the group of Islander boys had been distracted by the girls, “Before the girls came, like they would have stuck together, they didn’t have any distractions”. Both commented after the tape recording that they didn’t feel as confident expressing themselves with the girls in the classroom, “Because you feel you might be embarrassed”. Chris summerised all the boys’ feelings when he stated “It all comes into being more self-conscious”.

It would seem that even the confident boys have been affected in their social (and school academic) self-esteem by the presence of females. Answering questions in class is now, for them, a social activity. Something to be considered socially, before an answer is volunteered. The classroom has turned from a place where one could feel comfortable about expressing oneself, with little fear of retribution, to a place where the opposite sex are observing; where it is better not to answer the question than to be seen as a dork or uncool.
4.5.2 The boys speak of being more self-conscious about dress and looks.

The boys and the teachers commented on the boys now reflecting more concern about their dress and looks since the coming of co-education. Mark, Tim and Louis (17 October 2000) were asked how they feel about themselves, since the girls have come. Has that changed at all?

Louis answered:

“When it was just guys, you could see a lot more people walking around with scruffy hair styles and that stuff like that, they wouldn’t care about having their sox right up or their shirt in. But now there’s girls, people are wearing longer shorts, and cooler hairstyles”.

Boys, it would seem, are now more concerned about how trendy they look. The longer shorts spoken of refer to the trend in the school of recent times, for the boys to buy school shorts that are too big for them, but as the shorts drop down below the knee, they are seen to be more trendy. This was not an issue until the advent of co-education.

In an informal interview, a boy mentioned to me that he now no longer looks forward to casual clothes days (an event once or twice per term for fund raising). He noted that when it was all-boys it didn’t matter what you wore; but now it does, and he now “hates casual days”.

The boys’ apparel at swimming carnivals has also been affected. Teachers and students have observed that boys now wear their board-shorts in their races, rather than Speedos. As Jack notes in his interview (11 September 2001) “(They used to wear) just stickies (Speedo type swimmers)”.

Now, with little consideration of how much slower they will swim, they wear board-shorts, because of their embarrassment to be seen in racing swim-wear or “stickies”. Informally, teachers have noted that in the past most of the boys wore Speedo-type swimmers when the school was single-sex, but now it is unusual for boys to wear anything but board-shorts in the carnival. It is worth noting that women have always come to the swimming carnival each year; mothers, sisters and girlfriends. The trend to board shorts has only been significant since the school has gone co-educational, when the boys’ peers were girls.
School has become, for these boys, a more socially aware environment. It used to not matter if you had a traditional haircut, wore the proper school shorts and perhaps looked a little regular. Now school is a place of social pressure, where how your hair sits and you looks are important and whether you look trendy and cool is an issue.

4.5.3 The boys are embarrassed at sporting events

The boys are not only more embarrassed in class, but reflect an increased embarrassability at sporting events. In an interview with Dane, Ken and Steve on 5 December 2000, the boys refer to the sporting carnivals as now being considerably different to what they were in the single sex environment. They say that the carnivals were an event, a social event, where the boys would lose their voices shouting and cheering. Steve notes “….. this year you just didn’t notice that.”

“Why would that be?” I asked.

“Trying to be cool!” Steve replies.

“Trying to be cool?”

“Trying to impress the girls, probably.”

Thus the Swimming and Athletics carnivals, that had been events where the boys could feel uninhibited, and where they could express themselves in their cheering, banner making, war cries and participation, have become events where the boys watch what they are doing, and try to be cool. Supporting your team, as they had, is now not seen to be cool.

I asked: “Now what do you mean by cool at the carnival?”

Steve replied: “Oh if you yell out you’ll be paid out.”

Dane said: “Don’t embarrass yourself.”

In the interview with Year 9 students Dane, Ken and Steve on 5 December 2000, the aspect of embarrassment at sporting events is reiterated. Steve puts it down to the boys “Trying to be cool”; Ken recons it’s “Trying to impress the girls” and “They don’t want to make a fool of themselves”.
Senior boys in Year 12 had similar feelings as the junior boys. The group consisted of five boys; Anthony, Chris, Dan, Harry and Martin (interview on 5 October 2000). When discussion lead to the boys’ cheering at the sports carnivals and football matches all agreed the involvement and support had dropped off since the school had gone co-educational. Chris noted the boys were now more “self-conscious”. Anthony commented that it was because “they (the boys) don’t want to look stupid in front of the girls”.

This self-consciousness (or embarrassment) in front of the girls at sporting events includes Rugby League, which has a great sporting tradition at the school. Chris and Anthony commented on 5 October 2000 that socially the school wasn’t what it had been because the support for the League team had dropped off. When discussing the reasons why this was so, Anthony noted:

“A lot of guys don’t want to get into it anymore… And you go down to the football games for the First XIII and you watch them and half the guys don’t want to cheer; none of them will get up to do the ‘tunnel’”.

When asked why the guys wouldn’t support them as they had, he answered:

“Because of the girls. Because they don’t want to look stupid in front of the girls. And that has just killed all school spirit or whatever …. they’re just too cool”.

Jim (7 December 2001) despondently notes:

“Guys don’t do sport because girls don’t …. With all boys everyone would just get into it. Whereas now they just sit down; who cares”.

He expressed his disappointment in the new lack of focus on sport. He says:

“It’s also the friendships and stuff that you gain between sports mates and things like that. And if you get along with the guys you play sport with, …. you’re better friends you feel more comfortable in like the classroom”.
It would seem the previous emphasis on sport was good for these boys as it broke down the barriers between rivals. Bob expressed his disappointment in the boarding school closing as well as the girls coming. Some of the sporting prowess of the school, it would appear, was related to the boarding school as well as the all boys’ aspect.

Bob says that when it was all boys and a boarding-school one would “Get to know people a lot better; better friendships”. The boarding school closing may have had an effect on the boys’ self-esteem, but it is worth noting that the boarding aspect of the school did not close until the year after the girls were welcomed to the school (i.e. at the end of 1999).

Socially the boys appear constrained by the presence of the girls. A college social event, like the carnivals and footy games, have been turned into a social quandary. The boys still want to cheer, compete and carry on as they have in the past, but the psychological pressure, real or imaginary, that the girls pose, prevents the boys from doing their acts of self-expression. It is interesting to note (as was done above) that mums, sisters and girlfriends have always come to these events, so it is not the presence of females as such, but apparently the presence of female students and female peers that affect the boy’s feelings. They won’t “cheer and muck about and compete” in case they are paid out; in case they are seen as a fool, as they now want to be seen to be cool in front of their female peers.
4.5.4 Boys are embarrassed to sing, to debate, to participate.

Singing and the school scholar (choir) is an area a number of the boys commented on in interviews, highlighting the embarrassment that they now feel being involved in such.

When singing in the chapel was discussed, Clem, Allen and Stan (10 August 2000) expressed their views. Clem noted that “They (girls) look at you funny sometimes”. And Stan continued “Like that’s so uncool”. The boys are aware of the girls’ presence in chapel, conveying a negative message of looking ‘uncool’ due to their singing up. When the boys were specifically asked about participation in the choir Allen noted “It’s not good to be a churchie singer”. When asked why that was so, he continues “Embarrassment and it’s not cool”. Stan went on by stating “They’re (the boys) afraid of what the girls will think of them”. Allen finishes by stating “I reckon it’s pure and simply embarrassment”.

In a previous interview with Clem and Stan on 27 July 2000 the feelings were similar when reflecting on the past two years. Clem says “In Year 7 I’d have a go…..Now you even have to watch your speaking with the girls. I used to be in the choir. I feel embarrassed now. He agreed that he is now more self-conscious, “I am worried about what people think”.

For these students participation in the choir is now highly questionable due to their feelings of embarrassment and of being seen to be uncool by the girls. An avenue that may have lead to increased social self-worth through a gift they have is now not followed due to their poor feelings.

Paul, Dan (both Year 11) and Charles (Year 10) were interviewed on 8 August 2000. The three boys are very confident students and the top of their respective classes in English. Dan explains that people are “just too embarrassed to do certain things any more. Just getting out there and having a go at cheering and things like that”. On the choir, Charles notes that “Boys don’t want to be in the scholar because they didn’t want to seem like woosers in front of girls”. The boys had been used to coming together socially at carnivals and sporting venues, at choir and debating. Now, largely due to
feeling embarrassed, they are much more reticent to compete, to barrack and to get involved. Things that inspired their social-self have been discarded due to embarrassment, due to self-consciousness and/or due to shame. He went on to state that “(there is) just not as much enthusiasm; people not showing up, stuff like that”.

In an interview with one of the English teachers, she noted:
“For the boys in junior high school, an all-boys school allows the boys to become themselves.” If this is true, it would appear that the presence of the girls, in fact, slows down that process of becoming oneself.

The boys seem to be saying that the whole general tone of the school has changed. They are withholding what they really want to say and do in class and what they say and do socially with their friends for fear of what others, particularly girls, think of them. They are living an image of themselves, rather than being themselves. They are not as free in themselves and are more self-conscious. Socially, they do not appear to think as positively of themselves as they had in an all-boys environment.

4.6 Summary
Using Grounded Theory principles this study analysis has identified three factors and related concepts that appear to have had a detrimental affect on the boys’ self-esteem. Teachers and boys agree that the dawning of co-education at the school has brought with it some subtle changes to the classroom, to sporting events and to the general school interactions. This has been manifest in the boys doing more poorly in their Board of Honour grades, in their participation in class, in their participation in sport and in co-curricular activities. The boys reflect significant feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment in the class and at sporting events. They are also much more aware of how they are looking and what they are wearing.

In Coopersmith’s terms, it would appear that the boys’ Academic Self-Esteem and their Social/Peer Self-Esteem have been lowered with the introduction of co-education. The following chapter will bring together the views of previous research on the aspect of self-esteem.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified three categories which emerged from the Grounded Theory study. It was argued that the phenomena that related the three categories was to do with self-esteem. As part of the Grounded Theory methodology, these factors are discussed in this chapter in relation to relevant literature. Related to the first category discussed in Section 5.3 below were the self-conscious emotions and also self-efficacy and thus a review of the literature for both is incorporated into this section.

5.2 Everybody’s Looking at Me – Social Self-esteem.

The boys in the study generally appeared more self-conscious, concerned about their looks and dress, susceptible to social pressure, less confident, more embarrassable, more shame-prone and less likely to participate fully in the educational process. In general, they appear to have a diminished social self-esteem. The girls in the classroom, at the sporting events and in the playground have, it would seem, made the boys feel less socially able, and thus their feeling of social self-worth has shrunk. I will now explore some important terms surrounding social self-esteem and link them to the literature.

Shame and embarrassment are seen to be two of a number of self-conscious emotions (Fischer & Tangney, 1995). Thus, when referring to the self-consciousness of an adolescent boy, we are actually alluding to their embarrassability/shame-proneness (depending on the researcher). It would appear from the data that the boys’ embarrassability or shame proneness has increased over the period in question (i.e. 1998 to 1999). Embarrassment, or being embarrassed, is one of the most repeated terms in the interviews with the boys and is referred to a total of thirteen times in seven of the interviews. Al’s quote from his interview on 10 August 2000 rings loud “I reckon it’s pure and simply embarrassment”.
Fischer & Tangney (1995) consider the self-conscious emotions to be fundamentally social, and to be founded in social relationships; relationships that not only interact but *evaluate and judge*. The findings of the qualitative study point to the boys feeling evaluated and being judged differently by teachers and by their new peers; the girls.

Miss Judy notes: “Now a lot of boys don’t go in (swimming) races because they worry about what they look like” and “Girls make their presence known”. The boys reflected on this feeling of being evaluated by the girls. They worried about “what they’ll think”, feeling more “noticeable”, being called a “nerd” and being “uncool”. Socially, the environment has changed for these adolescent boys and their self-conscious emotions have been affected.

The boys appear more aware that the girls are not just watching, but judging. Judging the nerds, judging any uncool behaviour and judging the boys dress. The boys now have to break through the wall of adolescent embarrassment to become themselves at sport, at choir, in the pool and in the classroom. To quote one of the teachers (16 February 2001) “For the boys in junior high school, an all-boys’ school allows the boys to become themselves”. For many boys in the study, they were struggling to now become themselves.

Miller (1995) found the most intense form of embarrassment occurs when one is concerned for how one is being evaluated by others, calling such “social evaluation”. Many of the boys note this feeling of being evaluated by the girls; an evaluation that is considerably more intense and acute when seen to be by female peers rather than male peers. Louis (17 October 2000) noted: “But if they say something really stupid in class then they’ll think that the girls hate them and that and they’ll have a real low self-esteem”. Louis was afraid of answering questions in class for fear of being adversely evaluated by the girls. The boys were now more prone to embarrassment due to the school being more of a place of social evaluation. Miller (1995) argued that in such situations, the boy’s *social self* has been imperiled and that there is the fear in the boys that the girls may be judging negatively.

Tangney (1995) notes that a proneness to shame (or embarrassment) is positively correlated with a tendency to externalize blame, and to project blame outward. This was
reflected in the boys’ attitude towards the transition in the school and particularly towards the girls. The girls were blamed for the decline in the sporting achievements of the school (Stan, 27 July 2000), for the lack of spirit at the sporting fixtures (Anthony, 5 October 2000), for the breakdown in friendship groups (Chris, 5 October 2000) and for the boys’ themselves not doing as well at school (Clem, 27 July 2000). With the advent of co-education, the boys had become more prone to shame, and this is manifested in their tendency to blame the girls, and the transition itself, for a litany of sins.

As noted above, many of the boys talk of being more embarrassed in the school environment with the coming of the girls to the school. Lewis (1995) notes that we would expect embarrassment to occur under conditions of social anxiety, social interaction or evaluation of failure. The boys’ feelings of embarrassment and their recognition that the girls are the focus of this embarrassment supports Lewis’ view that we can expect an increase in feelings of embarrassment (embarrassibility) under conditions of social anxiety and under conditions of evaluation. Clem (10 August 2000) notes “I don’t (normally) get embarrassed but when girls are hearing the speeches, you read straight from the palm cards”. Clem is confirming that his feelings of embarrassment have intensified with the change in the social conditions of school.

The division between shame and embarrassment does not appear to be well defined. Some research has concentrated on embarrassment, and defined it separately to shame (Miller, 1992, 1994, 1995) and Lewis (1995). Harder (1995), however, includes embarrassment under the ‘shame’ umbrella (p.370). Lewis (1995) notes that embarrassment is closely linked to shame, and argues that the most noticeable difference between shame and embarrassment is in their intensity level.

Harter (1999) uses the term shame rather than embarrassment when analyzing the self-conscious emotions. Harter notes that shame is provoked by feelings of incompetence where the self doesn’t measure up to social standards. The boys in the current study don’t mention the word ‘shame’ but the feelings of incompetence are woven through many of the interviews. Paul (8 August 2000) notes “Debating is a bit different…. You tend to get the girls that are incredibly English orientated and they are better for the job”; Simon (13 December 2000) “girls are probably renowned for being smart compared to boys”; Stan (10 August 2000) “Girls are better singers”; John (7 September
2000) noted: “(the girls have) more developed brains. The boys are just thinking of parties”. Many of the boys expressed these feelings of incompetence when in front of the girls, thus provoking shame.

Lindsay-Hartz et al (1995) noted that shame can cause the individual to shrink in relation to previous images of self, contributing to feelings of worthlessness. Various responses by the boys reflected a worthlessness and a change in their self-image. Allen (9 November 2000) noted his concern about answering questions in class as the girls “are smarter” and if you answer questions in class “they’ll think you’re a nerd and they won’t like you”. Jim (7 September 2001) was concerned that his self-image of being a physically robust friend with other boys would be seen by the girls as having homosexual connotation: “Guys are scared to male bond when girls are around cause they’ll think you’re gay or something”. Oscar (7 September 2000) noted “they’re (the girls) are obviously much smarter than we are”. These feelings of worthlessness and change of self-image have affected the boys’ proneness to shame (and embarrassment). They are not now being themselves. They feel less worthy, and this is reflected in teacher observations as well: “The boys find it difficult to stand up and say its okay to do well ..... the girls don’t seem to suffer from that” (Mr Kane, 6 July 2001).

Kerschenbaum and Miller (1991) found that ones embarrassability was linked to the fear of negative evaluation and the motive to avoid exclusion. Social-esteem is clearly related to susceptibility to embarrassment. It appears clear from the boys’ statements that they are both more fearful of negative evaluation (especially from the girls) and of being excluded socially. To quote from Miller (1995) “highly embarrassable people are keenly aware of others’ evaluations of themselves” (p.325). It would appear from the boys’ statements, that their embarrassability has risen significantly, and that they are much more aware of others (especially the girls’) evaluations of themselves.

In line with the findings of Kerschenbaum & Miller (1991), Barrett (1995) outlined the characteristics of the social emotions, including shame. A number of the characteristics are reflected in the present qualitative study. Barrett noted that shame’s behavioral functions include distancing oneself from evaluating agents and reducing exposure. The teachers in the present study appeared aware that the boys in the survey have done just
this. Mr Chris (1 June 2001) noted: “The boys compare themselves with the girls. They avoid producing in case it’s compared” (Mr. Chris, 1 June 2001). Miss Judy (25 November 2000) noted: “They’re not answering questions .... They’re unsure of themselves”. Various boys confirm this reluctance to answer questions in class for fear of being adversely evaluated by the girls. Allen (9 November 2000) notes that he thinks a lot more before answering questions “Just in case of embarrassment if it’s wrong”. Rod (in the same interview) continued by stating “just in case everyone laughs at you”, continuing by stating that in an all boys class “you wouldn’t really care”. This quote is reminiscent of Rowe (1988) where he notes a typical response from the girls in a girls-only setting “It’s easier to talk to the teacher with just girls. Because boys sometimes laugh and make you feel stupid” (1988, p.197). It would appear that shame in front of the opposite sex can be avoided if exposure to failure is reduced.

In early studies of embarrassment, Modigliani (1968) argued that an embarrassing incident leads to the diminution of a person’s public (social) esteem, which leads to the diminution of the person’s self-esteem. This increased embarrassability (or shame-proneness); this strong fear of negative evaluation; this dreading of public violations and expecting the worst; leads to a decrease in self-esteem.

Research conducted by Tangney, Burgraf and Wagner (1995) support Modigliani. Their studies of shame-proneness (embarrassability) was consistently negatively correlated with measures of self-esteem (correlations -.53 to -.63) and positively correlated with self-consciousness, fear of negative evaluation, social anxiety and use of defence splitting. This confirmed the present quantitative study which found a significant drop in the boys’ self-esteem over the transition period. The question as to why the boys’ self-esteem dropped may be answered in the boys’ increased shame-proneness (embarrassability). The boys had an increased proneness to being shamed with the girls around them. They are ashamed to be seen singing. They are ashamed to be seen in Speedos at the swimming carnival. They are ashamed by answering questions wrongly in class. They are ashamed to barrack for their team at the athletics carnival. With this increased shame-proneness their self-esteem has dropped and as a group the mean self-esteem has dropped significantly. With this, the ‘Everyone’s looking at me’ factor, has risen, and the boys’ social self-esteem diminished.
Barrett (1995) notes that the shame-prone person is concerned that “everyone is looking at me”. It is interesting to note that the present study independently named the section on social self-esteem just that: “Everyone’s looking at me”. This is the term that best fitted the qualitative study’s category that embraced social self-esteem. Many of the boys’ statements reflect this concern that the girls, in particular, are looking at them. They are now more concerned about their looks, and about the girls watching them as they interact in class and at sport. They are concerned about their singing, their public speaking, debating and participation in liturgies. The boys noted that these used not to be concerns. Jack (11 September 2001) stated “Like when it was just an all boys school, no one really cared what you wore and stuff like that. Now you just do. You just do care”.

Similarly, Watterston (2000) reported in her review of relevant literature that both boys and girls in lower secondary single-sex physical education classes felt less concerned with body image and performing than they did in front of the opposite sex. It would appear that, particularly for adolescents, there are added pressures and expectations when the opposite sex is present in physical educational classes. For our boys, dress and body image are more important generally, now that the girls are a part of their school peer group. Micky (13 December 2000) felt the need to impress “Cause the girls are there; impress, have to impress, impress, impress all the time”. Mr McNeill (1 June 2001) agrees: “Boys seem to be now more worried about appearance. They’re more self-conscious about being cool”.

Harter (1999) linked global self-esteem with an adolescent’s perceived physical appearance. She notes, in fact, that physical appearance most highly correlates with self-esteem out of the four factors analyzed. Similarly, Granleese and Joseph (1993) found that with girls in co-educational schools, appearance was the single-best predictor of global self-worth. The boys in the present study were unambiguous in their acknowledgement that the girls have made them more aware and self-conscious of their dress, appearance and their ‘coolness’. They are now wearing trendy shorts and cooler hairstyles, having not cared about scruffy hair nor having their shirts tucked in when it was all-boys (Louis, 17 October 2000). The boys were observed to wear board-shorts in the swimming carnival to look trendy and ignore the fact they will swim much slower. They were afraid to be seen in their ‘stickies’ (Speedos) (Jack, 11 September 2001).
They now felt that they had to impress the girls. With this concern of how one looks, of how ‘cool’ one is, some boys have perceived that they are not (Steve, 5 December 2000). Others have expressed the fear and the shyness they now feel in front of the girls (Jack, 11 September 2001). Some boys in the present study now see themselves as being less attractive due to the girls now looking on, and thus have a diminished view of self. For many of the boys in the present study, it would appear that their self-esteem has diminished due to this new preoccupation with looks.

*Social pressure, being cool, and inhibition* were terms used by the boys and referred to in the literature. They are linked to both embarrassability and social self-esteem. Hulse (1998) notes that single sex schools are less susceptible to social pressures and have a more egalitarian attitude towards women’s and men’s roles in society. In line with this, Mark (17 October 2000) noted in his interview that the girls have brought with them an adherence to social pressure: “you have to behave now that the girls are here”.

Watterston (2000) reported that boys felt it was easier to ask questions in a single-sex environment as they weren’t hiding behind a façade or fear of being put down; they were less inhibited. Boys felt that they didn’t have to live up to a stereotype. She goes on to note that the assumption is that each sex is more inclined to participate because the fear of ridicule or rejection from the opposite sex is eliminated. Various boys in the survey supported this notion. Tim (17 October 2000) stated: “Like before the girls came, guys would volunteer the answer, but now they’re a lot more cautious”. Oscar (7 September 2000) noted: “The inhibition thing again. Like I won’t answer a question cause it might be wrong”. Similarly, Marian Cox (cited in Biddulph, 1997) found that the boys in single sex classes in her study became more expressive and open and the girls became more assertive. “It gave the boys a safe environment where they wouldn’t feel stupid in front of girls, who are so much more articulate” (Cox, cited in Biddulph, 1997, p.139). Examples from the present study include Pete (7 September 2000) who notes “Yer, like Oscar said, people (boys) are quieter”; and Stan (10 August 2000) “You’re afraid to speak out; to say your opinions”.

Dorr, Rummer, and Green (1976) found linear relationships between self-esteem and personal and social adjustment. It appears from the present qualitative study that the boys have struggled with the social adjustment to co-education. The presence of the
girls in the class, sport and in a general sense, socially have all adversely affected. The boys are embarrassed answering questions, they are self-conscious by the pool in their ‘stickies’ and singing in the choir. Their social adjustment has been awkward and this may have affected their self-esteem. The teachers in the present study note that trying to impress the girls is now more of an issue. Mr Manning (11 April 2001) reported that “They (the boys) appear more concerned about impressing the girls”. Mr Pearce (16 February 2001) notes “They want to appear cool in front of the girls”. Watterston (2001) reports that teachers in her study felt the dynamics in the all-boys’ class changed as the boys didn’t feel the need to ‘show off’. These examples are indicative of mal-social adjustment, and of diminished self-esteem.

Coopersmith (1981) linked confidence with self-esteem. In the present study, various teachers reported a change in the boys’ confidence levels. Miss Judy (25 November 2000) commented on the boys’ change of confident levels noting “The all boys’ classes are more self-confident. They don’t worry about what they say. They’re freer to express how they feel”. The boys reflect a diminished confidence in their social interactions; in their participation in athletics and swimming carnivals, in their dress and hair styles and in their interactions with friends. Conversely Seitsinger, Barboza & Hird (1998) reported that “both girls and boys (in a single sex environment) seemed more confident, spoke out more confidently, spoke out more often, took responsibility, and refrained from self-depreciating remarks” (p. 9). The girls in their study reported positive differences in their attitudes, including being more comfortable and outgoing (p. 9).

Watterston (2000) reported a snapshot of findings of the last decade regarding single-sex schooling within a co-educational context, reflect much of the data in the present study. She noted that both boys and girls in lower secondary schools felt less concerned with body image and performing in front of the opposite sex. This fits true with various statements by the boys in the present study.

In summary, the boys in the study reflect a decreased social self-esteem. They are more reticent about participation in sporting events, in choir, in debating and in the classroom. This has largely been due to their increased embarrassability or shame-proneness; reflected in their increased self-consciousness, their inhibitions, their
decreased self-confidence and their concern about what to wear and how they look. This increased embarrassability, or shame-proneness, the increased concern about physical appearance and the diminished confidence, has lead to a decrease in their social self-esteem. This confirms the results indicated by the initial quantitative study which showed a significant change in both the boys’ total self-esteem and their social self-esteem.

5.3 Academic Stuff

The findings of Chapter 4 would indicate that the academic environment has changed dramatically for the boys at the school. That the boys have experienced such changes compliments the research that has compared the two systems of education.

5.3.1 Board of Honour and Academic Achievement

As noted in the literature review, various studies confirm the positive relationship between academic success and self-esteem. (e.g. O’Malley & Bachman, 1979. The boys argue in their interviews that they were doing better academically when it was an all boys’ schools. Both they and the teaching staff identified the Board of Honour as a touch stone indicating less teacher recognition and indicating a poorer classroom performance. As noted in the discussion of the qualitative data, girls were seen to dominate the Board of Honour at the school (see Table 4.1). Rosenberg et al (1995) notes the reciprocal effects of school marks on global self-esteem. He states that school marks significantly affect self-confidence and concludes school marks do produce an effect on self-esteem, whether we consider academic self-esteem, global self-esteem or self-confidence (1995, p.153). Put simply, if a young person is seen to fail academically, there is a drop in their confidence and a drop in their self-esteem.

Woodward, Fergusson and Horwood’s New Zealand’s study (1999) found consistent achievement differences between single-sex and co-educational schools, with coeducational pupils having lower mean pass rates in the School Certificate (p<.001), and more frequently leaving school (p<.05). Marian Cox (quoted in Biddulph, 1997),
reported that boys assigned to all boys English classes in their fourth year of high school showed significant improvement. She notes that such classes increased the number of boys in the high scoring range by almost 40%. The opposite appears true in the present study, if we take the Board of Honour as being indicative of the boys’ achievement levels. Since the advent of co-education, the boys’ Board of Honour grade has generally dropped in the boys’ minds, in the teachers’ comments and in what is recorded in the school’s Journals.

Covington (1989) links self-esteem with achievement, and argues that if one perceives that one has ability, then one will achieve. This is in accord with early studies by Wattenberg & Clifford (1964). The boys in the interviews often noted that the girls had more ability than they, especially in English. The introduction of girls to the school in our study introduced a new reference group, and the perception by the boys of their own ability changed. Ken (5 December 2000) observed that the girls dominated debating in English: “Heidi just seemed to dominate it. Even when she wasn’t in the debate she’d come up with something to say”. Steve continued “Girls just gotta talk. Gotta be in the spot-light all the time”. For these boys, there is a lost opportunity to grow in their confidence as regards language. There is a subsequent loss of opportunity to grow in their academic self-esteem.

5.3.2 Polarization of the Curricula and the Co-Curricula
Polarisation of attitudes towards types of subjects, academic and recreational activities are recognized in the study by the boys and by the teachers. The boys talked of being shyer in the coeducational environment, hesitating about entering debating teams and the choir. They talked of feeling less confident participating in pursuits that require language. This is manifest in data collected by the author in recent years. In 2002 there were no boys choosing Year 9 Italian elective (15 girls); in 2003 there was one boy. In 2003 the Year 7 debating team consisted of 10 girls and 3 boys.

This polarization is noted throughout the literature, and even by coeducations greatest proponent; Dale (1974). He noted that French was seen as a ‘sissy’ subject and not chosen by boys in a co-educational environment. He cites Stevens (1962) who felt that this may be due to the boys’ feeling of inferiority in French especially in oral work.
Stables (1990) confirms this polarization of attitudes towards French. West (1996) highlights “the power women have in speech”. Polarisation of subject preferences in coeducational schools is supported by Colley, Comber & Hargraves (1994), Foon (1986) and Watterson (2002).

Stables acknowledges that boys’ have a different perception of Music and Drama, whereby in mixed schools it rated well below their single-sex counterparts. Colley, Comber & Hargraves (1994) found similar results in their study of 11-12 year olds whereby the female stereotyped subjects of music and art were higher in preference order for boys from single-sex schools than those from co-educational schools (p.389). In an Australian study, Foon (1988) reported that subject choices for both boys and girls was less stereotyped in the single-sex environment.

In the present study it was found that girls dominated the choir, the liturgies and the debating. The boys spoke of their hesitation about joining the choir. Micky (13 December 2000) noted, when asked why he dropped out of the choir, “I felt weird, being surrounded by a lot of girls singing .... cause they must think that men aren’t supposed to sing”.

The polarization of the curricula, especially in language, and the polarization of the co-curricula since the introduction of co-education, has meant that boys who may have entered these fields are no longer doing so. It means that they are not fully reaching their potential and that they are not excelling in areas of their gifts. They are being held back in areas that they may have otherwise grown in confidence and grown in self-esteem.
5.4 Girls Hold You Back a Step

Various studies had indicated that the single-sex educational environment is conducive to the development of more confidence. Ditchburn and Martin (1986) found that boys in single-sex schools were the most confident of the groups surveyed (quoted in Gill, 1988, p.11). Rowe (1988) found that being placed in single-sex class was associated with greater confidence which, in turn, significantly increased the likelihood of their subsequent participation in senior mainstream mathematics education. He quotes a typical response from one of the girls “It’s easier to talk to the teacher with just girls, because boys sometimes laugh and make you feel stupid” (p.197). Seitsinger, Barboza & Hird (1998) studied middle school in the USA, grouping sixth and seventh graders into single-sex mathematics classes. The teachers noted “both boys and girls seemed more confident, spoke out more confident, spoke out more often” (p.9).

Teachers in the present study noticed a deterioration in the boys’ confidence levels in the co-educational environment. Mr Manning (11 April 2001) noted “The boys appear more reluctant to speak up in class now”. Ms Judy (25 November 2000) noted “The all-boys classes are more self-confident”. The students confirm the view. Allen (11 August 2000) was quoted saying “It’s a lot easier to work without them. I feel more confident without them”. Stan (in the same interview) agrees “I don’t feel as confident as I did when it was all boys. I sort of hold back a bit; don’t talk as much”. Clem, now has to “read straight from the palm cards”. He worries that “They’d laugh at ya. Uncomfortable….. They hold you back a step. A cog. I wonder why they do?” This quote is reminiscent of Seitsinger, Barboza & Hird (1998, p9) who reported that the girls in a single sex environment felt “being more comfortable, outgoing, and interested in mathematics and less afraid to make mistakes”.

Positive results for both boys and girls were found in an Australian study of a Year 7 class which trialed single-sex classes (Callum 2000). The qualitative results reflect what has been found in the present study. One of the boys reports “I am more confident and don’t have to worry about the girls” and I am better at reading in front of the class now” (p.39). A parental quote was “In the single gender class, they can concentrate on learning without the distractions of the opposite sex” (p.39). Similarly, Woodward, Fergusson & Horwood (1999) explain their results that point to single-sex schools having better School Certificate results (and staying at school longer) as a reflection of
the social climate at single-sex schools, whereby there are fewer opportunities during school time for cross-gender interaction that could potentially interfere with children’s academic development (p.14). Miss Judy (25 November 2000), supports the idea that the cross-gender interaction is interfering with the boys’ academic achievement “The boys are worried about their relationship with the girls; “Are they cool……. They seem worried that they might be wrong. They seem afraid of looking silly. In the past it wouldn’t have mattered with their mates”. Louis (17 October 2000) notes “… if they say something really stupid in class then they’ll think that the girls hate them and that and they’ll have a real low self-esteem”. It would appear that cross-gender interaction affects participation in class. Lee & Bryks (1986) stated that: “It may be that some separation of students’ academic and social environments removes the distractions that can interfere with the academic development of some students (p.394). This is supported by Watterston (2001) who notes research evidence indicating that boys in single-sex environment are less distracted and more willing to contribute during lessons and to take risks answering questions.

Callum (2001) quotes one of the boys in his study as saying “I am more confident and don’t have to worry about the girls” and “I am better at reading in front of the class now” (p.39). These quotes are remarkably similar to some of the boys in this study. Allen (10 August 2000) noted “I feel more confident without them (girls)” and Stan went on “I don’t feel as confident as I did when it was all boys. I sort of hold back a bit; don’t talk as much”. Micky (13 December 2000) reflected that “I felt more comfortable reading out aloud when it was all-boys. Because now with the girls I feel that if I don’t do this right, then down hill I go again”. These quotes reflect a downward trend in general self-esteem, not just an academic feeling of self-worth.

Morrison, Thomas & Duane (1975) found that students with low self-esteem say less in class, contribute a smaller portion of their thoughts to class discussion and sit farther back in the classroom than students with high self-esteem. Various boys in the present study noted a reticence about contributing their thoughts to classroom discussion. Bob (7 September 2001) noted “We’re just scared to say what we feel, like with the girls”. Teachers agreed, for example Mr Manning “The boys appear more reluctant to speak up in class now”. This reticence to speak and participate may indicate a lowering in the boys’ self-esteem.
This lessening of confidence in the co-educational environment may be due to the stage of physical development. The boys are gangly and living through adolescence and it’s just easier if you’re dealing with others who are doing the same. To quote Watterston (2001) “for those who see inherent male-female difference in the pace and style of physical and cognitive maturation, learning, social and moral development, schooling is best tailored to each sex’s unique needs” (p.19).

As noted above in Section 5.2, embarrassment and self-conscious emotions appeared to have affected the boys’ social self-esteem. The term “embarrassment” also arose in the boys’ and the teachers’ statements referring to their academic progress. Miss Judy (November 2000) notes that “They’re (now) embarrassed if they make a mistake in class. They participate less in class”. Allen (9 November 2000) now thinks a lot in class about answering questions “Just in case of embarrassment if it’s wrong or anything like that”. Mark (17 October 2000) notes that boys now say little in class as they’re “scarred of getting embarrassed” and Louis responds in the same interview by stating that the boys are “too embarrassed to put in any effort as well”. The boys’ embarrassibility in the classroom would appear to have risen. They, as a group, are now more embarrassable, and thus less themselves. Their academic self-esteem; their academic self-worth; has diminished through their inhibitions in class that stem from their increase embarrassability. Their reticence about being exposed has lead to their embarrassability increasing, with a subsequent effect on their academic performance and self-esteem. Miller (1995) notes that “highly embarrassable people dread public violation of social norms and expect the worst when they occur”. The boys no longer see their role in the classroom as a purely academic one and are embarrassed by the presence of the girls; expecting the worst if they participate as they had. Their academic self-esteem has diminished due to the girls “holding them back a step”.

Research described above comparing single-sex schooling (including single-sex classes within a co-educational environment) and co-educational schooling tends to point to boys doing better academically in a single-sex environment, largely due to their level of confidence. It would appear that the boys in the present study have, in fact, experienced a significant drop in their confidence and an increase in their embarrassability (or shame-proneness). They are not seen in the same light by their teachers nor importantly
by themselves. They have experienced a decrease in their academic self-esteem and the girls have ‘held them back a step’.

5.5 Conclusion

The survey using the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory indicated that the changes at the school, and most notably the introduction of co-education, had adversely affected the boys’ self-esteem. When a qualitative study was undertaken, through a series of interviews with students and staff, we have some insight into why this occurred.

It may be that the girls’ language skills outshone the boys, which makes them dominant, especially in English classes. It may be that the boys lost some form of tribal grouping that once supported cheering at the football and carnival. It may be that the boys are a year or two physically and emotionally behind the girls, who now dominate classroom issues.

A word that has come up in nearly every interview has been “embarrassed”. The boys are embarrassed to answer questions for fear of being laughed at by the girls. They are embarrassed to cheer for the footy team as they are afraid of girls laughing at them. They are embarrassed to wear Speedos at the swimming carnivals. Perhaps this fear of embarrassment is an important aspect of their apparent drop in self-esteem. The young, adolescent boys do appear self-conscious of girls being in the classroom and more generally at school. This appears particularly salient in English and other language rich courses. This self-consciousness leads to embarrassment and inhibition, making the boys reticent about fully partaking in the classroom learning. The boys’ social, academic and total self-esteem has been affected by the transition to co-educational schooling.
Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study’s findings noting their practical and theoretical significance.

The research set out to explore any changes in boys’ self-esteem when going through the transition from a single-sex school to a co-educational school. The quantitative study indicated that the boys in Years 7 and 8 at the school did drop significantly in total self-esteem during a one year period immediately after the introduction of co-education.

A subsequent qualitative study, using the methods of Grounded Theory, sought to understand this phenomenon. Twenty seven boys and nine teachers were interviewed over a period of two years and a number of informal discussions and observations were made. The interviews were dissected and reconstructed. The result of the reconstruction was the emergence of three significant categories related to self-esteem. These categories were related to the boys’ social self-esteem and to the boys’ academic self-esteem, and were named “Everybody’s looking at me”, “Academic Stuff” and “The girls hold you back a step”.

The literature on self-esteem is vast as is the literature on single-sex schooling verses co-educational schooling. Funneling the work done on both of these issues over the decades, it would appear that single-sex schooling has a claim to better develop and sustain a young person’s self-esteem. This is well supported by the literature on the relatively modern technique of having single-sex classes within a co-educational environment.

The literature is supported by the qualitative study. The boys speak strongly of how they have been adversely affected socially and academically by the presence of the girls. Their self-conscious emotions of embarrassment and shame have been heightened with the girls’ presence. The boys’ increased embarrassability has led to a binding of their
emotions such that they feel much more inhibited about expressing themselves academically in class and socially throughout the school and all kinds of events and situations. They’re not joining the choir as they did, they are not doing a second language as they did, they are not competing at sport as competitively as they did. The boys are also more aware of their dress and their appearance; aware that the girls are now looking on. Academically the teachers and the boys acknowledge that the boys are not doing as well. This is evident in the boys’ Board of Honour results and in the teachers’ overall assessment of the boys’ progress.

6.2 Implications for Theory

Boys’ success at school has been diminishing over the past three decades. Girls are significantly outshining them in all fields. Educators throughout the world have struggled with the ‘why’ for some time. The significance of boys doing particularly poorly has repercussions for youth suicide and for an imbalanced society. All should be given the best of opportunities to reach their potential; boy or girl. Our culture and our society need to deal with boys’ underachievement.

As self-esteem is so prime an aspect in a young person’s development, it is something worth developing and cherishing. It is an important aspect of what many boys are lacking, leading to degraded school results. It is a major part of the ‘why’ boys are not achieving to their potential. If self-esteem can be encouraged and grown in our boys, then the academic and social growth may follow.

6.3 Implications for practice

This study has shown, in both the quantitative and qualitative studies, that boys’ self-esteem was adversely affected by the introduction of co-education to the school. It supports much of the theory emerging over the past two decades, indicating that single-sex schooling is positive for boys’ self-esteem.

It is not practical, nor indeed necessarily desirable, to revert co-educational schools to single-sex schools. Educators should be open, however, to the consideration of these proposals:
a. It is not necessarily the best option for the remaining single-sex schools in the various systems, to be converted to co-educational schools. The trend to co-education has been especially rampant in the Catholic secondary school system in Australia over the past twenty years. Due consideration ought to be given to promoting the single-sex schools that are left, to add to the diversity of educational options.

b. Where transition does occur, care needs to be taken in preparing for the change and in carefully monitoring and responding effectively to the impact of change. Clearly the transition has the potential to be at least moderately traumatic for both individuals and the school environment.

c. Schools should be encouraged to experiment with single-sex classes in the co-educational environment. The research would indicate that these are most successful for boys (in language based subjects) and for girls in mathematics and science.

6.4 Further Research

This study was very limited in its focus, as a single case study, and therefore limited in the recommendations that can be made. There are various interesting avenues for further research into self-esteem and the single-sex verses co-educational environment.

One possibility would be to undertake further studies, before and after, of schools going through the process of changing from single-sex to co-education. Related studies could also be done in any co-educational school that was open to studies involving single-sex classes in the co-educational school. These studies might look at a range of psychological variables as well as self-esteem.

Established single-sex schools could be compared to co-educational schools, with a rigorous control for like student backgrounds. Many studies in the past have been less than acceptable due to this lack of control.
The move in Australia and overseas away from single-sex schooling has been taken in the past decades with a blind eye on the consequences for adolescents. In nearly all tribal groupings, boys and girls, once reaching puberty, have been separated for education and training in their roles for society. For the sake of economics and for the sake of an intuitive bias towards co-education, we have waved the flag of co-education for fifty years. For some youth, and in particular for some boys, the single-sex environment for learning and developing is the best option. This could be considered for their sake.

6.5 Summary

This study was borne out of curiosity. With the announcement in 1998 that the school would become a co-educational school, after 70 years of being an all-boys college, I was curious as to the effects on the boys, and especially the effects on my area of interest; that is self-esteem. The initial quantitative study indicated that, indeed, the boys self-esteem had been adversely affected by the transition to co-educational schooling. A qualitative study beckoned to confirm this and to explore why.

The qualitative study, involving interviews with students and staff and ethnographic data, indeed drew a picture of change in the boys schooling lives. Socially they appeared less confident and outgoing. Academically they appeared to be achieving less. Their self-conscious emotions of embarrassment and shame appeared to be affecting their social interactions and their performance in class. Their self-esteem appeared to have been adversely affected with an increased embarrassability and a decrease in confidence. The transition to co-education had been a difficult time for the boys at the school, but it was through the difficulties of transition that the positive aspects of single-sex schooling emerged. Single-sex schooling appeared to be a more encouraging place for the boys’ academic achievement and a less socially difficult environment to grow through school.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix 1

Coopersmith’s SEI (short form).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Like Me</th>
<th>Unlike Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Things usually don’t bother me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I find it very hard to talk in front of a group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There are lots of things about myself I’d change if I could.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I’m a lot of fun to be with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I get upset easily at home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It takes me a long time to get used to anything new.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’m popular with persons my own age.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My family usually considers my feelings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I give in very easily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My family usually expects too much of me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. It’s pretty tough to be me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Things are all mixed up in my life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. People usually follow my ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I have a low opinion of myself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. There are many times when I would like to leave home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I often feel upset with my work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I’m not as nice looking as most people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. If I have something to say, I usually say it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My family understands me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Most people are better liked than I am.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I usually feel as if my family is pushing me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I often get discouraged with what I am doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I often wish I were someone else.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I can’t be depended on.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

**Everyone’s Looking at Me**

Some people showing off. When they first arrived they’re all trying to show off (Jack, 11 September 2001).

Just stickies (were worn) (this refers to the Speedo type swimmers that were worn by all boys. The boys now wear board shorts at the swimming carnival). (Jack, 11 September 2001).

I don’t know, just feel a bit afraid a bit, something like that; shyness comes into that (Jack, 11 September 2001).

I don’t know, just want to look good (Jack, when asked why the boys are more shy, 11 September 2000).

Just normal things like dying their hair (Jack, when asked how the boys now dress differently with the girl’s presence, 11 September 2000).

Like when it was just an all boys’ school, no one really cared what you wore and stuff like that. Now you just do. You just do care (Jack, 11 September 2000).

People are just too embarrassed to do certain things any more. Just getting out there and having a go at cheering and things like that (Paul, 8 August 2000).

Boys that didn’t want to be in the scholar because they didn’t want to seem like woosers in front of the girls and that (Charles, 8 August, 2000).

It probably cuts deeper (put-downs by girls) (Charles, 8 August 2000).

It takes out whole Australian thing of where we are all mates (Daniel, 8 August 2000).

Before the girls came we were just one group. There wasn’t any different groups between us. In the classroom; we all talk together like do stuff together in the classroom and after school. And now the girls come (and there’s) one group over there with the girl heads (those that group with the girls) talking with their group, now we have separate groups..... (Pete, 7 September 2000).

I think that all people (boys) are scared of being outgoing (John, 7 September 2000).

The inhibition thing again. Like I won’t answer a question cause it might be wrong (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

So then you get a reputation of being a quiet person (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

Yer, it’s like Oscar said, people are quieter (Pete, 7 September 2000).
Yer, like if I want to talk to Oscar about something he’s probably with another girl I can’t just go in and ask, I need to be more polite. Like when we were just boys we would just came and say ‘What you doing?’ (Pete, 7 September 2000).

Yer, cause with the girls here you have to be a bit more sensible. Everyone’s morale is really dull down. There’s not the mateship that there was when it was all boys. Which in turn lowers the academic because you’re still worrying about ‘Oh yer, me mate hasn’t seen me for awhile, what’s going on here? And all that (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

... like the girls have caused a bit of a hassle with all the boys (Al, 10 August 2000).

You’re afraid to speak out (with girls around); to say your opinions (Stan, 10 August 2000).

I don’t get embarrassed, but when girls are hearing the speeches, you read from the palm cards (Clem, 10 August 2000).

You get embarrassed when you’re in front of all your friends and so you might have friends that are girls and someone might pay you out. You feel embarrassed then (Stan, 10 August 2000).

They (girls) look at you funny sometimes (Clem, 10 August 2000).

Like that’s so uncool (the way girls look at you) (Stan, 10 August 2000).

Embarrassment and it’s uncool (why now aren’t boys in the Scholar) (Al, 10 August 2000).

They’re afraid of what the girls will think of them (Stan, 10 August 2000).

I reckon it’s pure and simply embarrassment (Al, when asked why boys are less involved in college activities, 10 August 2000).

The breakdown of that close mateship (Chris, 5 October 2000).

Because of the girls; they don’t want to look stupid in front of the girls (Anthony, 5 October 2000).

They’re too cool (Chris, when asked why the boys don’t want to cheer at the sporting events, 5 October 2000).

The guys are probably intimidated by that sort of thing, or they want to get back with their mates (Chris, when asked why only girls were doing the top English course in Year 12).
For our case, you don’t want to make mistakes (in front of girls) (Dan, 5 October 2000).

Before the girls came, like, they would have stuck together (Harry, 5 October 2000).

It all comes into being more self-conscious (Chris, 5 October 2000).

We are a lot more conscious of what others think now (Bob, 7 September 2001).

We’re just scared to say what we feel, like with the girls, cause I don’t know, what they’ll think of us, or what we think they’ll think of us. I don’t know people are just scared to say what they want to say (Jim, 7 September 2001).

Like now you gotta have like an image for yourself. Hold up an image, stuff like that...(Len, 7 September 2001).

Since the girls have come around, like all the laws.. there’s a possibility that you could be sued now (Len, 7 September 2001).

I don’t know, guys now just don’t do sport, cause the girls don’t really like sport. Guys don’t do sport because girls don’t; and they just couldn’t be bothered. With all boys everyone would just get into it. Whereas now they just sit down; ‘who cares’ (Jim, 7 September 2001).

...guys are scared to male bond when girls are around cause they’ll think you’re gay or something (Jim, 7 September 2001).

Like at the swimming carnival, everyone would be cheering and yelling and that, there’d be a real good atmosphere (Len, 7 September 2001).

(so why don’t we cheer and yell anymore?) Cause it’s just not cool, I guess (Jim, 7 September 2001).

Cause the girls don’t do it (Bob, 7 September 2001).

You have to behave now that the girls are here. You can’t say anything that might offend the girls or something like that (Tim, 17 October 2000).

(How about kids that sit back and don’t answer questions) Scarred of being embarrassed, and like that, they don’t want to get paid out by people trying to be cool and stuff like that (Mark, 17 October 2000).

It’s just mainly because the guys are trying to impress. They feel a lot more secure if the girls give them attention. And if someone, a guy, feels that they’re loved or liked by a girl, they feel a lot better inside. But if they say something really stupid in class then they’ll have a real low self-esteem (Louis, 17 October 2000).
You do want to be accepted by everyone else, but you get over it if you say something stupid. It’s not that important unless you really, really like the girl in class (Louis, 17 October 2000).

With girls here it just makes it a lot more embarrassing with stuff-ups (Tim, 17 October 2000).

When it was just guys you could say whatever and get away with it. And like no one would care (Louis, 17 October 2000).

When it was just guys you could see a lot more people walking around with scruffy hair styles and that stuff like that, they wouldn’t care about their sex up or wearing longer shorts, and cooler hair styles (Louis, 17 October 2000).

Some of the guys try to show off and that a bit….like trying their best; making sure people see them (Rod, 9 November 2000).

...if a guy’s mucking up and showing off the girls don’t really take any notice and some of them like say “shut up” but do that “that’s stupid, be an idiot” (Rod, 9 November 2000).

You know how um you have an all boys class and you all participate in it and now they’re all afraid if the answer’s wrong they’re gonna be laughed at so no one answer’s it anymore (Allen, 9 November 2000).

(Imagine what you used to feel like in the classroom, in the playground and now) When it was just boys like you didn’t really care about it, but now …. (Rod, 9 November 2000).

About like what you feel like and um but now with the girls here you just think about it more like ...(Rod, 9 November 2000).

Like you wait and think if it’s the right thing to say or not (Rod, 9 November 2000).

I used to answer questions all the time. Now I think about it a real lot more to make sure they’re right (Allen, 9 November 2000).

Just in case of embarrassment if it’s wrong or anything like that (Allen, 9 November 2000).

You think about thing before you say it. I don’t answer questions that I know, I just sit back and let someone else do it because just in case everyone laughs at you (Rod, 9 November 2000).

Yer but um you wouldn’t really care (if it was just boys in the class), but with girls you’d sort of go urg (Rod, 9 November 2000).

they think you’re a nerd and they won’t like you (Allen, 9 November 2000).
Everyone is just too cool to do it (cheering at carnivals) now that the girls are here (Micky, 13 December 2000)

They think that if they do that then the girls are gonna pick them out; don’t like them; their nerds, cheering and carrying on, not so good (Micky, 13 December 2000).

No, when it was all boys it was full on; really into it; everyone did what they wanted to do; screamed, carried on, yer so it was good (Micky, 13 December 2000).

Cause the girls are there; impress, have to impress, impress, impress all the time, I think (Micky, 13 December 2000).

It’s not cool to hang with all boys; it’s not the thing to do (Micky, 13 December 2000).

It’s just mainly because the guys are trying to impress. They feel a lot more secure if the girls give them attention. And if someone, a guy, thinks they’re loved or liked by a girl they feel a lot better inside. But if they say something really stupid in class then they’ll think that the girls hate them and they’ll have a real low self-esteem (Louis, 17 October 2000).

It all comes down to being more self-conscious (5 October 2000).

I reckon it’s pure and simply embarrassment (Allen, 8 August 2000).

Because you would have got over it in about two minutes, but with girls you kind of think “oh are they thinking about my stuff-ups in class?” (Micky, 13 December 2000).
Appendix 3

Girls Hold You Back a Step

Quotations from Interviews.

The boys compare themselves with the girls. They avoid producing in case it’s compared (Mr. Chris).

Cause the girls are there, impress; have to impress, impress all the time, I think (Micky, 13 December 2000).

There’s like a standard that the girls set, cause girls are probably renowned for being smart compared to boys and um they set pretty high standards which us boys should meet… (Simon, 13 December 2000).

Yer, I reckon there is a pressure, there is a standard that you have to meet or exceed their expectations, in the academic area (Simon, 13 December 2000).

Yer, I felt more comfortable reading out loud when it was all boys. Because now with girls I feel that if I don’t do this right then down hill I go again. So I felt more comfortable when it was all boys (Micky, 13 December 2000).

Would that have mattered when it was all boys?
Not really, because you would have got over it in about two minutes, but with girls you kind of think, “Oh are they thinking about my stuff ups in class?” (Micky, 13 December 2000).

(with debating and girls) it’s really hard to compromise, to put it together (Simon, 13 December 2000).

I reckon like brainy kids, like some of the brainy kids; like they’re not brainy anymore. They’re more focused on the girls than what they were on the school work….. They were focused on work before the girls got here and now they’re not…. You know um you have an all boys class and you all participate on it and now they’re all afraid if the answer’s wrong they’re gonna be laughed at so no one answer’s it anymore (Allen, 9 November 2000).

How do you feel about yourselves now that girls are here?
When it was just boys like you didn’t really care about it, but now you do (Rod, 9 November 2000).

Like you wait and think if it’s the right thing to say or not (Rod, 9 November 2000).

Um, well in Science like Mr W. he asks questions all the time, um, I used to answer questions all the time. Now I think about it a real lot more to make sure they’re right (Allen, 9 November 2000).
You think about things before you say it... I don’t answer questions that I know, I just sit back and let someone else do it because just in case everyone laughs at you (Rod, 9 November 2000).

Yer, but um you wouldn’t really care, but with the girls you’d sort of go urh... (Rod, 9 November 2000).

Yer, cause if like, you never know what girls are thinking because they’re the opposite sex, they could be thinking different, like be smarter and be answering every question (Allen, 9 November 2000).

I know that I’ve done better in an all boys classroom than with girls (Rod, 9 November 2000).

*Now why is that?*
Probably because a lot of the girls are smart, smarter, and therefore the expectations of the teachers go up more (Rod, 9 November 2000).

*Have you noticed, with girls in the class, any differences? Do they make you feel different?*
Yer. I don’t know, just feel a bit afraid a bit, something like that; shyness comes into that (Jack, 11 September 2001).

There are people that can perform well under relaxed rules but there are people who really need the discipline to get through their education to keep motivated (Paul, 8 August 2000).

Ever since the girls have come a couple of years ago, none of us express ourselves like we did,........ We don’t muck around and I suppose have as much fun as what we did when it was just the boys, but we are a lot more conscious of what others think now. And so we keep to ourselves (Bob, 7 September 2001).

We’re just scared to say what we feel, like with the girls, cause I don’t know, what they’ll think of us, or what we think they’ll think of us. I don’t know, people are just scared to say what they want to say (Jim, 7 September 2001).

I suppose we don’t give as silly answers as what we used to... (Bob, 7 September 2001).

Also if you’re scared of the girls have an opinion about something and you have the opposite to that opinion, you’re scared to just say it, what they’ll think of you. They’ll think, ‘Oh, you’re just an idiot.” And that they’re better than you or whatever (Jim, 7 September 2001).

Like all the boys have gone off their work a bit now since Year 7 it was a lot different then (Allen, 10 August 2000).
The boys have taken more interest in the girls and what they look like and what their school works like and all their marks have dropped (Allen, 10 August 2000).

I felt that I worked a lot better. I’m in one of the classes with the girls in food tech and maths. It’s a lot easier to work without them. I feel more confident without them (Allen, 8 August 2000).

You’re afraid to speak out (with girls around), ....to say your opinions (Stan, 8 August 2000).

I don’t feel as confident as I did when it was all boys. I sort of hold back a bit; don’t talk as much (Stan, 8 August 2000).

When the girls are hearing the speeches, you read straight from the palm cards (Clem, 8 August 2000).

No, it’s the boys are being held back and the girls are going forward (Clem, 8 August 2000).

They’re afraid of what the girls will think of them (Stan, 8 August 2000).

Definitely, yer, the chick dominate it (English) (Chris, 5 October 2000).

They have a lot more confidence, I don’t know (Chris, 5 October 2000).

*I think you were saying, Chris, that in the past there would have been guys doing Three Unit and Related English, but these days there wouldn’t be, what’s your reasoning there?*

Because the girls are the first to be put into that and they get up there and they dominate the subjects, probably more in numbers and that sort of thing, the guys are probably intimidated by that sort of thing, or they want to get back with their mates (Chris, 5 October 2000).

For our case (being from Papua New Guinea) you don’t want to make mistakes (in front of the girls) (Dan, 5 October 2000).

What I’ve noticed is that a question gets asked you see half a dozen painted finger-nails go up and only one or two blokes try to answer the question (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

Not really basically, some of them are probably afraid to ask, like speak about their opinions, a few of them just don’t think it’s the same any more, and don’t really like being here I suppose. (Simon, 13 December 2000).
When the girls came in Year 11, that's when it changed. Like the girls knew all the answers, they put their hands up and we just sort of looked; and when the teacher asked the question we just expect the girls to do it. It's sort of been like that now (Pete, 7 September 2000).

The girls are more conscientious (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

The girls, like, they've got time for everything (Pete, 7 September 2000).

And girls talk better (Pete, 7 September 2000).

Because we're ranked against the girls and they're bringing in all the work, they're obviously much smarter than we are. Our ranking drops if we were an all boys school we all learn at pretty much the same speed and that way we'd be more equal the average would be higher (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

Cause when the girls come in the class with the boys it can be a distraction to the boys. (Pete, 7 September 2000).

The inhibition thing again. Like I won't answer a question cause it might be wrong (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

So then you get a reputation for being a quiet person (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

Yer, it's like Oscar said, people are quieter (Pete, 7 September 2000).

You have to behave now that the girls are here. You can't say anything that might offend the girls or something like that (Tim, 17 October 2000).

The competition levels have gone up (Mark, 17 October 2000).

I know some boys trying to impress the girls in science and stuff. Other people just sit back and take it (17 October 2000).

So that's why the guys don't want to do it; they don't want to go hard in front of the girls (Tim, 17 October 2000).

Why do you think that (there's only one boy in the debating team)? The girls are more feisty ..... They've got more competition to play (Mark, 17 October 2000).

They're just quick off the mark. They come back with more confidence (Mark, 17 October 2000).

It doesn't affect me. But I have seen it. Like before the girls came guys would volunteer the answer, but now they're a lot more cautious unless they think it's absolutely right (Tim, 17 October 2000).
When it was just guys you could say what ever and get away with it. And like no one would care (Louis, 17 October 2000).

Some (girls) are really smart (Mark). Especially at our school (Louis, 17 October 2000).

If a guy pays you out you don’t take it to heart, but if a girl kind does then you think about it a bit more (Tim, 17 October 2000).

The boys compare themselves with the girls. They avoid producing in case it’s compared (Mr Chris).

I think the boys are now less free to offer a genuine response.

Mainly behaviour in class. Most of the boys are really smart arses, and carry on so (Micky, 13 December 2000).

I felt more comfortable reading out aloud when it was all boys. Because now with girls I feel that if I don’t do this right then down hill I go again (Micky, 13 December 2000).

I feel more confident without them (girls) (Al, 10 August 2000).

I don’t feel as confident as I did when it was all boys. I sort of hold back a bit, don’t talk as much (Stan, 10 August 2000).

It’s also the friendships and stuff that you gain between sports mates and things like that. And if you get along with the guys you play sport with, you’re around them all the time, you’re better friends you feel more comfortable in like the classroom (Jim, 7 September 2001).

I think that the boys hide behind things; they avoid having a go in case they get knocked down. I have computer studies in mind particularly (Mr Chris).

In the co-ed classes the boys are 20 marks lower that the all boys class. The girls make their presence known. They are more forthright. The boys sit back before saying anything (Miss Jody).

The boys appear more reluctant to speak up in class now. They appear concerned about what the girls will think of them. They don’t want to be seen as unpopular with the girls. They don’t want to be seen as dorks or fools……less able students would be affected by the girls….I think the more vulnerable kids would have their self-esteem affected by the girls coming. These boys would have been less inhibited in the all boys environment. (Mr Manning)
Appendix 4

Academic Stuff

It took awhile to get used to, the girls (in the scholar) I dropped out for a while, but then I thought to myself, “I want to do it so” (Micky, 13 December 2000).

Most of the boys are embarrassed now singing in front of all the girls cause they must think that men aren’t supposed to sing (Micky, 13 December 2000).

I felt weird, being surrounded by a lot of girls singing; like an individual cause there wasn’t very many boys when the girls came. Yer, so I dropped out then (Micky, 13 December 2000).

The girls are a lot smarter at English (John, 7 September 2000).

They’re a lot more artistic (John, 7 September 2000).

More articulate (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

More expressive (John, 7 September 2000).

Like they get a bit more special attention. Some teachers are more lenient to them (Mark, 17 October 2000).

Yer in English, that’s the sort of stereotype (John, 7 September 2000).

Especially in the scholar there’s about four or five men, the rest are all girls. I don’t know about debating but I was in the debating team this year; I was the only boy (Charles, 8 August 2000).

I reckon if it was still an all boys school they’d be pushing the top guys to be doing top level English, and striving for excellence where as now that there’s girls here just pushing all the girls; they show more interest (Louis, 17 October 2000).

But if I had to say, I would say that for a girl to get straight As or Bs, it’s a lot easier for girls rather than for guys (Louis, 17 October 2000).

I don’t reckon that the boys have changed but girls, they’re better, like for what they do in class they get some pretty good Board of Honours, compared to what the boys get (Tim, 17 October 2000).

I suppose English, Religion definitely. Because they’re more opinion orientated, rather than yes or no.
*How about Board of Honours?*

They get it so much easier (Mark, 17 October 2000). I reckon that the girls get it so much easier (Louis, 17 October 2000).

Probably me personally, if it was an all boys school I’d probably go for the top level English, cause probably I used to be like one of the toipish students and now quite a few of the girls are come along and they’re more interested in English and stuff like that so that they could kick me easily (Tim, 17 October 2000).

Yer, …..I was getting A’s all the time (for Board of Honour). And same last year, but it’s sort of gone down and I’ve been getting B’s and C’s (Rod, 9 November 2000).

Yer, there’s more drive to, like you have to put.... I work a lot better; ….to get up in the ranking (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

Since girls have come, a lot of girls, especially in the Food Tech; if a test is out of 20 some of the girls get 21 out of 20 (Mark, 17 October 2000).

And especially when they first introduced co-education, they were so much more lenient on girls; like if a girl did something bad it would be just like it doesn’t matter but if a guy did it they’d make an example of the guy and really get up him (Louis, 17 October 2000).

I reckon in all subjects other than Maths and Science, the girls are encouraged to perform well, and strive for excellence (Louis, 17 October 2000).

I believe that there has been a fall in the academic prowess of boys in general and I reckon that it is still dropping (Mr Kane).

Where we’re going, I don’t know. Males just seem to lack direction. (Mr Kane)

I think that the way the education system is set up suits girls. Girls are better at keeping quiet and listening. And they tend to be better at handing things in; boys are probably better at doing exams. I think the boys sense that girls are more mature, and teachers probably relate better to girls who are acting more maturely (Miss Jody)

“The girls don’t worry about lipstick or jewelry. They just get on with their education.” (Miss Mary).

“For the boys in junior high-school, an all-boys school allows the boys to become themselves”. (Miss Alison)
I think that they sense the girls to be more articulate than the boys, though they’re not necessarily of lesser ability (Mr Pearse).

Girls have a go and get results; they have good presentation and put in a quality effort. Boys say to themselves that they’re not prepared to do that (Mr Chris).

It might be because they see the girls perform better. The boys seem to avoid hard work. Before the girls came they didn’t realise what people could do (Mr Vince).

The boys don’t express themselves well verbally or in writing (Mr Chris).

The boys are the biggest smart alecs. They’re more immature (Mr Chris).

In Design and Technology (D & T) the boys participate better especially in practical exercises. In D&T they’re happy to work on their own. That’s not true in theoretical exercises (Mr Chris).

The girls appear to have good study, working habits and listening skills. The boys see the girls as so smart all the time, but it’s just they listen more conscientiously (Mr Brian).

As a staff, I believe that we have been conscious of trying to keep the boys involved in things like debating. We’ve been conscious of the boys not wanting to volunteer for debating and public speaking. I like to encourage the boys to get involved. But the boys are less confident than the girls (Miss Anne-Marie).

I think actually the girls in subjects like English and that the girls put in a bit more work than boys did (Tim, 17 October 2000).

I just didn’t buy it. I noticed the girls were all in the top 50% of the class and the guys pretty much predominately in the lower 50% of the class (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

When it was an all boys choir, I felt that there was a tradition, that being in a single sex school choir back then that it was a better sound, like everyone was singing that basically the whole school was singing, an all boys school. But now everyone, now that its co-ed, now no one seems to care about singing and that (Simon, 13 December, 2000).

I’d say there’s a pretty high percentage of girls and a low percentage of boys; which I thought would happen too; that there would probably be more girl involvement that boys involved, I know a few people who used to be in the scholar and are not in it any more. (Simon 13 December 2000).
So you think you would do better under an all boys regime rather than co-ed? Yep, due to female dominated class and subjects, areas in the school such as scholar (Chris, 5 October 2000).

Girls are better singers (Stan, 8 August 2000).

Usually the classes used to be really co-operative with the teacher, now they’re really noisy (Allen, 8 August 2000).

*What did you drop out of the scholar for?*
I felt weird, being surrounded by a lot of girls singing, like an individual cause there wasn’t very many boys when the girls came. Yer I dropped out then Micky, 13 December 2000).

Most of the boys are embarrassed now singing in front of all the girls cause they must think men aren’t supposed to sing... (Micky, 13 December 2000).

I think that maybe um the girls enjoy the bantering more; academic stuff like the debating more than the boys and that. Boys that didn’t want to be in the scholar because they didn’t want to seem like woosers in front of the girls and that, I suppose (Charles, 8 August 2000).

Debating is a bit different, debating is more, you tend to get the girls that are incredibly English orientated and they are better for the job, than a lot of the males (Charles, 8 August 2000).

They’re smarter (Oscar, 7 September 2000).

More developed brains; the boys are just thinking about parties (John, 7 September 2000).

Because they like reading more than we do. Girls do a lot more reading than guys. They read flippin magazines all day (Louis, 17 October 2000).