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Future perspectives on the promotion of gender equality:

Boys, Young Men and Gender Equality

Michael Flood

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Boys and young men are unavoidably involved in gender issues. While the term ‘gender’ is used often as code for women and girls, gender relations shape boys’ and men’s lives just as

The lives of boys and young men are structured by

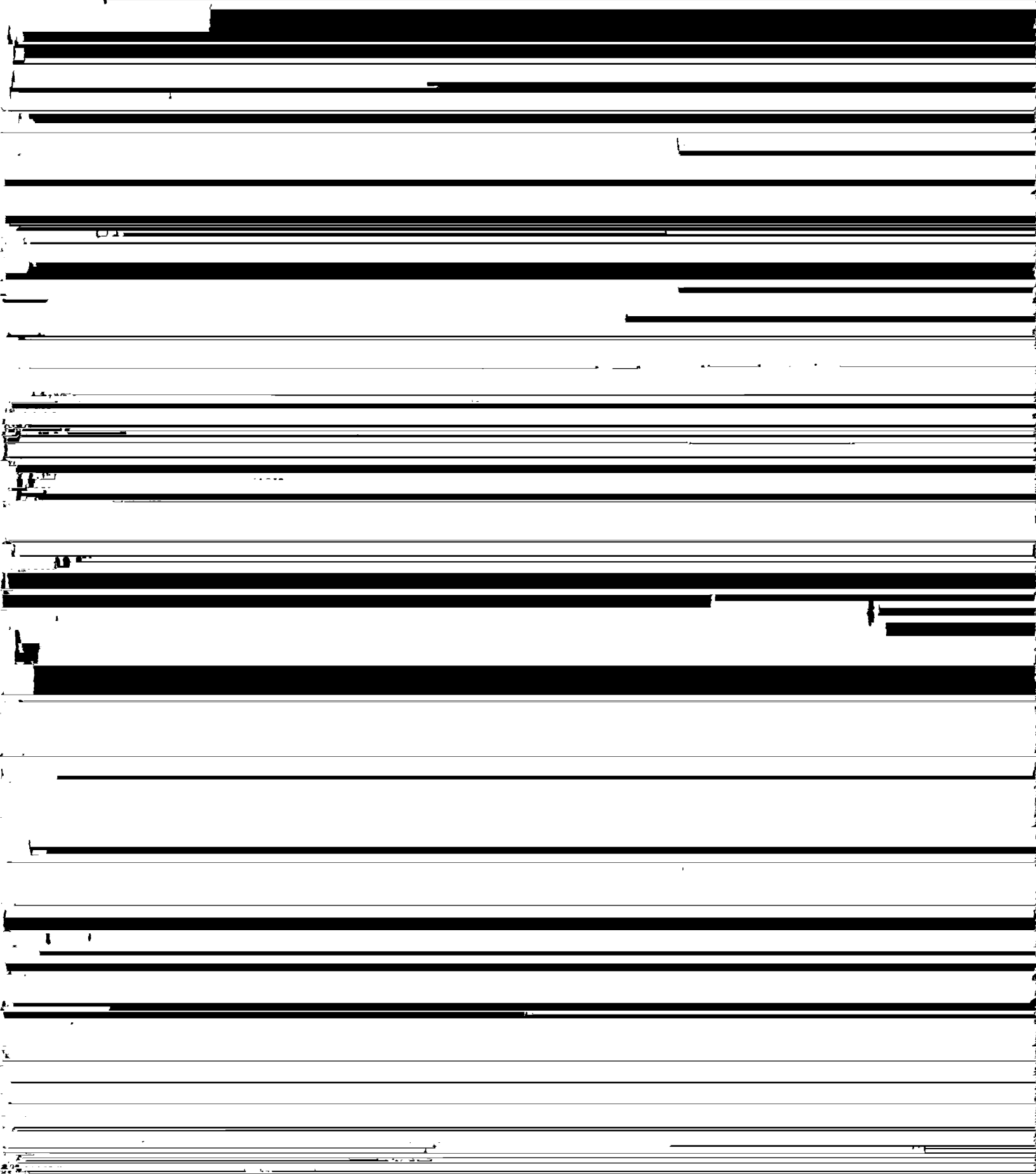
likely to increase its presence (Flood and Hamilton 2003). Boys' cultures often involve an ambivalence towards girls. On the one hand, boys show contempt for femaleness and the stereotypical qualities of femininity, and conflate feminine behaviour with homosexuality (Mac an Ghail 1994, p. 164). On the other hand, girls are objects of sexual desire, fascination and even obsession.

Boys and young men experience pressure to gain sexual experience, as a marker of masculine status. There is pressure to have sex, from male friends, older brothers, occasionally fathers' banter, and the mass media. There is a sexual double standard, in which boys who are sexually active are judged in positive ways while girls seen to be sexually active are subject to negative labels and sanctions.

Boys learn to be stoic and inexpressive, becoming both emotionally incompetent and emotionally constipated (Doyle 1989, p. 158). As a result, in heterosexual relationships men

First, boys and young men participate in gender relations throughout their lives. Whether boys behave and think in gender-equitable or inequitable ways, their everyday behaviours and understandings have an impact on girls and other boys. Second, we must 'teach early and teach often' in order to build gender equality. In relation to violence for example, early intervention is important because adolescence is a crucial period of development for men's (and women's) formation of healthy, non-violent relationships later in life. In relation to safer sex, the evidence is that if boys can learn to practice safer sex they often carry this behaviour

reluctance to explore one's own position in multiple and overlapping systems of domination (Hogeland 1994, p. 21; Trioli 1996, pp. 58-59). In addition, young women may have experienced relatively little overt or firsthand discrimination (Hogeland 1994 p. 20).



emphasize the relationship of sexual assault to other issues (Berkowitz 2001, p. 82). Finally, effective programs offer *positive messages* which build on boys' and men's values and predisposition to act in a positive manner. They document and reinforce healthy behaviors and norms and encourage individuals to focus on what they can do, not on what they should not do (Berkowitz 2001, pp. 82-83).

We know that comprehensive school-based programs are most effective when they are

Fifth, we must intervene in the male peer groups, gangs and sub-cultures that foster sexism and violence against women (Flood 2002-2003, pp. 29-30). One of the most promising strategies here is peer education. For example, in an action-research project in low-income settings in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, young men who questioned prevailing violence-supportive views were trained as peer educators to foster gender-equitable relations in their communities (Barker 2001).

While addressing such challenges in work with boys and young men is important, what is required most is the expansion of this work. The rationale for involving boys and men in work towards gender equality has been well articulated (Expert Group 2003; Flood 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). And key educational and organizational strategies are increasingly well documented (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2003, 2004; Instituto Promundo 2002). But what is needed above all is the widespread adoption of this work, and this requires funding, institutionalization, and policy and professional development.

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