

## University of Southampton Research Repository

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis and, where applicable, any accompanying data are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis and the accompanying data cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content of the thesis and accompanying research data (where applicable) must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder/s.

When referring to this thesis and any accompanying data, full bibliographic details must be given, e.g.

Thesis: Author (Year of Submission) "Full thesis title", University of Southampton, name of the University Faculty or School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

Data: Author (Year) Title. URI [dataset]

University of Southampton

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

School of Psychology

**Exploring Adolescent Boys' Perceptions of  
Violence Against Women and Girls  
and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse in Schools**

by

**Anna Burnett**

ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5152-1015>

Thesis for the degree of Doctorate in Educational Psychology

September 2025

**Abstract**

Feeling safe is a basic human right for children and an important pre-requisite for optimal learning. The 'Everyone's Invited' movement revealed thousands of testimonies from women and girls about their experience of sexual violence in schools, leading to a growing realisation that violence against women and girls (VAWG) in UK schools has, according to Ofsted, become so frequent as to be considered normal or even expected. Alongside this, there is growing concern about the rise of the manosphere - a loose network of online male influencers and platforms - with schools reporting increasing levels of misogynistic behaviour among pupils, leaving many teachers feeling unsure how to respond.

Research suggests a disparity between the perceptions of boys and girls regarding the likely occurrence of harmful sexual behaviours (HSB), particularly contact forms, with boys much less likely to think these things happened regularly. However, there is an increasing recognition that efforts to prevent VAWG must include men.

As such, my empirical study seeks to obtain boys' views about peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools, seeking to understand more about what secondary school boys believe makes a safe school, both for themselves and for their female peers. Alongside this, my Systematic Literature Review explores boys' views about VAWG through a thematic synthesis of research published in the UK, Europe and America answering the question: How are adolescent boys' attitudes and understanding of violence against women and girls shaped by gender norms?

*Keywords:* adolescent boys, VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls),

peer-on-peer sexual abuse, gender norms, safety in schools

### Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Table of Contents .....	3
Table of Tables .....	6
Table of Figures .....	7
Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship .....	8
Acknowledgements.....	9
Definitions and Abbreviations.....	10
<b><u>Chapter 1: Exploring Adolescent Boys' Perceptions of Violence Against Women and Girls and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse in Schools .....</u></b>	
and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse in Schools .....	11
Personal Reflections and Motivations.....	12
Epistemology and Approach.....	13
Ethical Issues.....	15
Evolving as a Researcher .....	16
<b><u>Chapter 2: Exploring Adolescent Boys' Attitudes and Understanding of Gender Norms in Relation to Violence Against Women and Girls: A Systematic Literature Review of Qualitative Empirical Literature.....</u></b>	
The Role of Gender Norms .....	19
Gender Norms Relating to Masculinity .....	19
Methods.....	22
Literature Search.....	22
Evaluation of Data: quality assurance .....	23
Data Analysis.....	24
Reflexivity Statement.....	25
Results.....	25
Study Characteristics .....	25
Introduction to Thematic Synthesis.....	26
Defining Violence and Abuse.....	26
Thematic Synthesis Results .....	29
Biologically Determined Strength of Men .....	29
Violence as a Tool to Maintain Hegemony.....	30
Violence as a Tool to Protect Masculine Identity .....	31

Control Used to Maintain Male Hegemony.....	32
Violence as an Alternative to Emotional Expression .....	33
Discussion .....	34
Limitations and Avenues for Further Research .....	36
Implications for Educational Psychologists .....	37
Broader Implications and Concluding Remarks.....	37
<b>Chapter 3: "I doubt it'd be traumatising": Exploring Adolescent Boys' Views about Safety in School and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse.....</b>	<b>39</b>
The Extent of Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse .....	39
Differing Perceptions .....	40
Aims of this Research.....	41
Methodology .....	41
Design .....	41
Materials.....	42
Procedure.....	43
Ethics.....	43
Participants and Recruitment.....	44
Researcher Positioning .....	44
Data Analysis.....	45
Analysis .....	45
Girls are Accountable Too.....	45
Teachers Protect by being Present and Responsive.....	48
Peers Offer Safety – and Risk.....	51
Boys Face Risks in School Too.....	53
Boys Interpret - and Sometimes Downplay - Impact.....	55
Discussion .....	57
How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on a sense of safety? .....	58
How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on the safety landscape for girls? .....	59
What do secondary school boys believe about their ability to promote a safer environment for girls? .....	60

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research .....	61
Implications for Practitioners .....	62
Policy Implications .....	64
Conclusion.....	66
Appendix A Extract from Research Diary .....	66
Appendix B Extract from Research Diary .....	68
Appendix C Extract from Research Diary .....	69
Appendix D Expression of Interest Form.....	71
Appendix E Healthy Relationships Presentation.....	72
Appendix F Quality Assurance Example.....	73
Appendix G Study Descriptions and Characteristics .....	79
Appendix H Focus Group Guide & Prompts .....	83
Appendix I Letter to Year 10 Parents .....	84
Appendix J Parental Consent Form .....	85
Appendix K Parent Information Sheet .....	87
Appendix L Participant Information Sheet: Year 10.....	91
Appendix M Pupil Assent Form .....	95
Appendix N Participant Debrief Form .....	97
Appendix O Ethics Application Form.....	99
References.....	112

**Table of Tables**

<b>TABLE 1: SPIDER FRAMEWORK USED TO IDENTIFY KEY TERMS-----</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>TABLE 2: INCLUSION CRITERIA -----</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>TABLE 3: VIGNETTES USED AS PROMPTS FOR FOCUS GROUPS -----</b>	<b>42</b>

**Table of Figures**

<b>FIGURE 1: PRISMA CHART .....</b>	28
<b>FIGURE 2: THEMATIC MAP .....</b>	29
<b>FIGURE 3: THEMATIC MAP .....</b>	46

**Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship**

Print name: Anna Burnett

Title of thesis: Exploring Adolescent Boys' Perceptions of Violence Against Women and Girls  
and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse in Schools

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: .....

Date: 27/05/25 ...

### **Acknowledgements**

I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to research a topic that is so close to my heart and am grateful to the amazing team of people who have provided support and guidance along the way.

To my brilliant supervisory team, Tim Cooke, Ffion Davies and Henry Wood-Downie. I have looked forward to our meetings, enjoyed our discussions hugely, valued your expertise and greatly appreciated the time and effort you have dedicated to this thesis. Your support as I've navigated the emotional impact of researching this topic has also been invaluable.

An extra big thank you to Tim. As Supervisor-in-Chief and also my personal tutor, you have provided steadfast support throughout both the academic and personal aspects of my doctoral journey. Your meticulous attention to detail, strong logical reasoning, and extensive psychological knowledge have been invaluable in shaping this thesis. In addition, I have repeatedly drawn on your problem-solving skills to navigate the many challenges I have encountered throughout the duration of the course, and I am deeply grateful for your support and encouragement.

I am also immensely grateful to my participants for their open and frank discussions, which I hope that I have represented fairly here. Special thanks also to the staff members at the school my participants were drawn from, who welcomed me into their community and went out of their way to support me at every stage. Teaching is tough and I know that the staff who supported me were often busy with many competing demands, but they still made the time to make this research happen, which I am hugely grateful for.

Neither this, nor my undertaking of the Doctorate itself, would have been possible without the constant support of my husband, John – you have not only provided hours of solo-parenting while I've been working but also just been there - day in, day out - through all the many ups and downs that life has thrown at us over the last three years of the course. In the end, that's been the most important thing. Thank you.

To my gorgeous children, who have heard 'sorry, I'm working today' far too many times over the past few years – I love all three of you so much and look forward to finally being able to spend more time with you all over the summer.

And last but by no means least, a huge thank you also to my wider family for their constant emotional support, which has meant so much to me, and to my parents in particular for their invaluable childcare services.

**Definitions and Abbreviations**

BBC	A British public service broadcaster, known as the British Broadcasting corporation.
EP	Educational Psychologist
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
HSB	Harmful Sexual Behaviours
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
SSRP	Small Scale Research Project
WHO	World Health Organisation
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PICO	Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes
PRT	Psychological Reactance Theory
RSE	Relationship and Sex Education
SPIDER	Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

## **Exploring Adolescent Boys' Perceptions of Violence Against Women and Girls and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse in Schools**

This research explores boys' attitudes to violence against women and girls (VAWG) and how gender norms shape these attitudes. In 2017, the Me Too hashtag went viral following the exposure of Harvey Weinstein's crimes (metoo movement, 2006), bringing renewed attention to the prevalence of sexual violence. Soon after, the "Everyone's Invited" (2020) movement highlighted thousands of testimonies from women and girls about their experiences of sexual violence in educational settings. This led the Department for Education to ask Ofsted to conduct a rapid review, which found peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools to be so widespread that it had become normalised or even expected (Ofsted, 2021). In response, the Department of Education updated their statutory safeguarding guidance for schools to stress the need for a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and harassment (Department for Education, 2023).

While I've been on the course, it has been frankly terrifying, as a woman and mother of a daughter and two sons, to see this issue remain so topical. Since the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, men's violence against women has barely left the media spotlight. Research has considered the impact of sexual abuse on girls (Girl Guides, 2021; Revealing Reality, 2022; Ringrose et al., 2021) and how this has impacted on them in school (Firmin, 2019; Women and Equalities Committee, 2023). Alongside this, concerns have grown about the rise of the manosphere, which can be thought of as comprising of a decentralised network of digital actors and platforms, such as men's groups, niche social media figures and online sites (Haslop et al., 2024), as well as influencers like Andrew Tate (Milne et al., 2024; Wescott et al., 2024). A recent BBC-commissioned survey of 6,000 teachers found that over a third had witnessed misogynistic behaviour from pupils in the past week, with 40% feeling ill-equipped to respond (McGough & Dunkley, 2025).

Given this wider context, it seemed important to begin to develop a more detailed understanding of adolescent boys' attitudes to VAWG, particularly with regards to situations that girls have identified as impacting on their feelings of safety within schools. This led to the development of my empirical project, that uses vignettes within focus groups to explore boys' attitudes and understandings of safety in schools, for both girls and boys, with a focus on peer-on-peer sexual abuse. In order to understand adolescent boys' understanding of VAWG in schools, it is also important to explore adolescent boys' understandings of VAWG more generally, which is why my Systematic Literature Review (SLR) focuses on adolescent boys' understanding of VAWG and how these are shaped by gender norms. Whilst my SLR focuses primarily on papers that consider dating abuse rather than abuse in the school context, they are linked by shared understandings of adolescent masculinity in contemporary society and offer valuable insights into the influences and pressures boys experience.

I initially questioned this topic's relevance to Educational Psychologists (EPs). My experience of EP practice in schools over the past three years of my training has mostly been restricted to working with individual pupils with special educational needs, with limited opportunities to interact with the wider school community. However, as I read about the impact that VAWG had on girls' feelings of safety in school (Girl Guides, 2021) and thought about the impact that this might have on their ability to learn, I increasingly felt that this is an area where EPs can make a valuable contribution. EPs are integral to promoting the emotional and social wellbeing of young people (Cline et al., 2015). Given the significant impact of peer-on-peer sexual abuse on girls' wellbeing within school settings (Mendes et al., 2022; Ringrose et al., 2021), I believe that EPs are well placed to contribute to systemic interventions that create safer and more supportive environments.

As much as I believe this research to be important, I recognise that it can only be useful if it reaches an audience. Therefore, I will seek to publish both papers and have written them with potential journals in mind. Whilst researching the SLR, I read a critical qualitative review that also explored adolescent views on gender roles and VAWG, although this review focused on both male and female adolescents (Edwards et al., 2022). This was published in the Journal of Gender Studies, so I have written my paper with this journal in mind. For my empirical paper, I am exploring the possibility of publishing in the Journal of Sex Roles as this journal has previously published papers focusing on girls' views about peer-on-peer abuse. As such, I believe that they might be interested in my work.

### **Personal Reflections and Motivations**

I have long been critically attentive to how gender norms influence behaviour, from challenging perceived unequal treatment by elderly relatives towards myself and my brother, to winning a school speech competition with a speech titled "Why Women Are Better Than Men". When training to be a teacher in secondary schools in East London, I remember my shock at discovering that the pupils addressed their male teachers as "Sir" and their female teachers as "Miss". The gender norms reinforced by these Victorian terms of address angered me initially - although I eventually had to accept the convenience of these generic terms of reference for other adults, in the face of learning the names of 1,500 pupils and 50 plus members of staff. As my career progressed, I became a Form Tutor and was often asked to deliver warnings to young people about the dangers inherent in the texting of naked images. Following guidance from the school and the police, these warnings were directed almost exclusively towards girls. This left me with a lingering sense of unease, but I had neither the training nor time to develop a different approach. By the time of the Everyone's Invited movement, I no longer taught in a mainstream school but reflected on the way that schools that I had worked in had minimised and overlooked incidents of peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools. This

prompted a deeper reflection on the potential impact on girls, alongside increasing curiosity about how boys make sense of this behaviour.

During the first year of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology, I had the opportunity, along with a group of peers, to develop a Small-Scale Research Project (SSRP) in partnership with a local authority, that used personal construct psychology to explore secondary school boys' views on what makes a safe school. A similar project, conducted by the previous year's cohort of trainees, had found that worries about peer-on-peer sexual abuse were at the forefront of girls' minds when asked about their safety in schools. We wondered if boys would also recognise this as a concern. In the course of conducting this research, when I read Firmin's (2019) paper about how school policies can reinforce gender norms that underpin harmful sexual behaviours creating conducive contexts for peer-on-peer abuse, the discomfort I felt, both when telling girls not to send naked images and addressing my male colleagues as 'Sir,' suddenly made sense.

Whilst our SSRP suggested that the boys that we interviewed viewed safety within school differently to the way that girls had, our study had a number of limitations. Due to time constraints, we had only been able to recruit three participants. Another limitation was that our methodology had not allowed us to ask boys directly about situations that girls had identified as making them feel uncomfortable. Having found the research that we conducted for the SSRP both shocking and compelling in equal measure, I was motivated to continue this research for my thesis, focusing, this time, on exploring boys' attitudes towards their own and girls' safety in school, by directly asking them about situations that girls had identified as making them feel uncomfortable.

I hoped that researching this topic would allow for a more nuanced understanding of views around peer-on-peer sexual abuse to be developed by schools, that would in turn guide more responsive practice. From a psychological point of view, I was interested in understanding the sense that boys made of the behaviour of their peers, alongside the factors that influence their own behaviour.

### **Epistemology and Approach**

My undergraduate degree was in English Literature and Language, reflecting my longstanding interest in the narratives we construct about ourselves and others. Through studying literature from diverse cultural backgrounds and living and working abroad, I developed an understanding of the subjectivity of reality and how it is shaped by culture, language, and social context. This was particularly apparent when I lived in Swaziland in Southern Africa, where friendships within both the indigenous Swazi community and the expatriate community provided opportunities to reflect on differing constructions of reality, with the Swazis' deeply collectivist culture often contrasting sharply with the expats' individualistic values.

These experiences have informed the dominant social constructionist epistemology, which has influenced the way that I have approached this project. According to social constructionism knowledge depends on human activity - it arises through our interactions with the world and is shaped, shared, and sustained within a fundamentally social environment (Crotty, 1998). As such, social constructionists view meaning as constructed by humans as they engage in the world around them. This fits with the relativist ontology that I have applied to my empirical research (Braun & Clark, 2022) and also with my decision to include gender norms in my systematic literature review, in order to acknowledge the importance of the social context within which VAWG occurs. Whilst social constructionism is the dominant paradigm in my work, it could also be conceptualised as being influenced by social constructivism. Social constructivism holds that individuals build meanings from their own experiences. While social interaction shapes and refines these meanings, they remain rooted in personal, subjective experience (Raskin, 2002). Whilst there is no agreed definition of what the distinction between these two terms is (Braun and Clark, 2022), my work could be said to be influenced by both paradigms as I consider both the social structures that influence the thoughts and opinions of participants and the way in which they create meaning on the basis of their experiences. In addition, as described in the Evolving as a Researcher section below, I also grappled with my own feminist beliefs, and elements of this are also likely to have influenced my epistemology. As such, my epistemological stance could be conceptualised as being based on three overlapping circles of social constructionism, social constructivism and feminism. Whilst I admire the explanatory power of quantitative research, the ability of qualitative research to explore the influence of the wider social context on individuals' experiences (Willig, 2013) resonates deeply with me. It also fits with my objectives for this study – to understand and explore boys' sense-making around violence against women and girls and peer-on-peer sexual abuse. For my empirical research, I chose vignettes to explore participants' perceptions and beliefs (Barter & Renold, 2000). I was mindful of my gender, as a female researching with male participants, and aimed to avoid provoking defensiveness. Using vignettes, based on girls' views from previous research about situations that made them feel unsafe in schools, allowed me to present narratives in a non-confrontational way. I was conscious of debates around vignette construction (Erfanian et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2010) and calls for alignment with research paradigms (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Although there are concerns about whether vignettes accurately reflect real behaviour (Barter & Renold, 2000), I believed they would usefully support the exploration of social norms. I took care to ensure my vignettes followed Murphy et al.'s (2021) advice and were evidence-based, peer-reviewed by my supervisory team, and aligned with my research aims.

I was drawn to Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic synthesis for data analysis as it enabled deep reflection not only on participant narratives but also on my own subjectivity. I kept a research diary throughout, using it to reflect on both the context in which the data was generated and my own

assumptions and biases (see Appendix A: Reflections on Positioning, Appendix B: Reflections Whilst Coding SLR and Appendix C: Reflections Whilst Coding Empirical).

I planned my empirical project alongside writing the thematic synthesis for my SLR. As thematic synthesis and thematic analysis are methodologically similar, I thought carefully about the place of reflexivity within a qualitative systematic review. Although systematic reviews draw on positivist traditions aiming for scientific replicability (Maeda et al., 2022), qualitative synthesis inevitably involves interpretation. Thomas and Harden (2008) recognise this particularly during stage three of thematic synthesis, when generating analytical themes, whereby they conceptualise the researcher's role as becoming more explicitly active. In keeping with Braun and Clarke (2022), however, I would argue, that the researcher's role is active throughout stages one (hand coding) and two (grouping codes) too. After supervisory discussions about this tension, I decided that a researcher positioning statement was as crucial in my SLR as it was in my empirical paper, in order to recognise my active role in the construction of the analysis.

### **Ethical Issues**

As I developed my empirical project, I was aware of the difficulty of recruiting adolescent boys and obtaining parental consent (Claussen, 2018). In my ethics application, I initially proposed using opt-out consent: contacting all Year 10 parents via email, explaining the project, and providing instructions for opting out. I then planned to deliver a presentation in assembly to invite boys to volunteer, aiming to empower them to exercise autonomy. However, the university's ethics board rejected opt-out consent due to the sensitivity of the topic and concerns that school communications often go unread.

In devising an opt-in recruitment strategy, I sought to maintain pupil autonomy while ensuring parents actively agreed to participation. I first informed parents about the project through an email to all Year 10 parents and then invited pupils to express interest in participating (Appendix D) after viewing a recorded presentation about healthy relationships and the project (Appendix E). Following a low uptake, I adapted my strategy: I visited each Year 10 tutor group in person, explained the project, answered questions, and invited expressions of interest. This approach yielded 30 expressions of interest.

A further blanket email to parents produced two or three additional consents. I subsequently sought and obtained ethics board approval to contact the parents of interested pupils directly via the Head of Year 10. I emailed these parents and spoke to the remaining pupils who had expressed interest again, encouraging them to ask their parents to check their emails if they wished to participate. Ultimately, I was able to match 18 expressions of interest with parental consents. While I was satisfied with this number, it was frustrating to know that 12 pupils who had expressed interest

were unable to participate. In future research, I would invest more time in understanding the school's most effective methods of parental communication or consider alternative strategies, such as that proposed by Claussen (2018), where adolescents are given a parental consent form shortly before data collection and incentives like pizza are used to encourage prompt responses.

### **Evolving as a Researcher**

I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of developing a more critical and reflective stance throughout this research, as I have learnt to question both the methodological rigour of studies and their assumptions and biases. Reflecting on both these, and my own assumptions and biases, has given me new insight into how research is shaped, conducted and interpreted. Reflection on my own biases has been particularly important given the nature of the topic and my own long-held feminism. I decided not to adopt a feminist epistemology as I wanted to engage with the male participants on their own terms. I worried that a feminist epistemology might encourage me to externally impose my own preoccupations and biases onto participants' narratives. Instead, I wanted to remain open to their multiple different perspectives and to stay as close as possible, in my interpretations, to what I believed the participants' thoughts and feelings to be. Nonetheless, I recognise that my work shares much of the approach of feminist epistemology in that, by its nature, it explores how gender and gender-related social structures influence the production of knowledge.

I have also been very aware throughout the process of the way that interpretation and context shape understanding. For example, while analysing the empirical data, I noticed expressions of victim-blaming attitudes in some participants' narratives. In interpreting this, I revisited feminist research on violence against women and girls (VAWG), such as Horeck et al. (2023) and Ringrose (2021), which situate victim blaming narratives within patriarchal norms. Whilst I felt it likely that these influences were subconsciously entrenched in the minds of my participants – having grown up within structures that support male hegemony - I also noticed the extent to which their narratives were shaped and influenced by each other. If one participant expressed more reflective views, other participants tended to move towards them in the views they expressed too. As such, in my analysis, I have tried to more fully consider the way that such attitudes are socially constructed and reproduced, while also considering the situational and cultural factors shaping them.

Initially, the complexity and ambiguity of thematic analysis felt overwhelming, especially given the emotionally charged nature of the subject matter. I often experienced frustration and anger when encountering boys' justifications for abusive behaviour. In my systematic literature review, for example, I was shocked by the casual dismissal of violence against women in response to perceived slights, such as talking to other men or wearing "inappropriate" clothing. That so many adolescent boys appeared to not just excuse, but actively endorse, such attitudes made me feel both angry and disheartened. I had to consciously compartmentalise my anger at times, to stop it from permeating

into other areas of my life. Reflective journalling, in which I documented my emotional responses (see Appendix B and C), proved both cathartic and a useful aide-mémoire for supervisory discussions, where we explored how emotions might influence analysis. Ultimately, I learnt to embrace contradictions in the data, using them to deepen my understanding of participants' experiences.

On a practical level, I have strengthened my research skills, gaining confidence in reviewing and synthesising literature, and in designing and conducting methodologically rigorous, ethically sound research. My commitment to producing work that is both academically robust and socially meaningful has been reinforced, and I believe this thesis achieves both aims. Although the process has been technically demanding and emotionally challenging at times, the potential of this research to amplify the voices of adolescent boys and inform educational psychology practice has sustained me.

Ultimately, I have been left with a feeling of hope. The narratives of my participants demonstrate the power that relationships, both with their peers and teachers, have to impact on their lives. I am left believing that these in-person relationships, if harnessed and guided positively, have the power to exert a stronger influence than those encountered by adolescent boys online and that these can play a pivotal role in encouraging safer behaviour by and for all.

**Exploring Adolescent Boys' Attitudes and Understanding of Gender Norms in Relation to Violence Against Women and Girls: A Systematic Literature Review of Qualitative Empirical Literature**

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive problem both in the UK and around the world and is both an abuse of human rights and a major public health problem (WHO, 2018). The United Nations defines VAWG as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (United Nations, 1993). Global estimates suggest that around 30% of women will experience a form of violence in their lifetimes (WHO, 2018), with evidence suggesting that abuse may be particularly high amongst young people (ONS, 2023a). The latest Crime Survey for England and Wales suggests that 8% of 16 to 19 years olds were victims of domestic abuse in the year ending March 2023, compared to 4.2% of 45-54 year olds (ONS, 2023a). In the UK, it is difficult to estimate rates of abuse amongst younger adolescents because government definitions of domestic abuse typically focus on people who are 16 years old and above (The Children's Society, 2020). However, a recent Girl Guides survey found that 59% of girls and young women aged 13-21 had experienced some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year, including sexist jokes, being sent sexually explicit pictures or experiencing unwanted touching (Girl Guides, 2021). In research conducted by Ofsted in 2021, nearly 90% of girls and nearly 50% of boys said that being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see happens a lot or sometimes to them and their friends (Ofsted, 2021). The report concludes that harmful sexual behaviours happen so often that children and young people have come to consider them normal. Experiencing abuse can have long lasting and often complex consequences, leading to mental and emotional problems (ONS, 2021).

Attitudes play a key role in violence perpetration, victims' responses and community responses to VAWG (Flood & Pease, 2009), with the statistics above suggesting that there is a need for greater clarity around the attitudes and understandings of adolescents towards VAWG. Adolescence is a time when identities are explored, and behaviours are shaped, suggesting that this is a critical time for intervention (Sawyer et al., 2018). Whilst men can be the victims of abuse, the victim was female in 73.5% of domestic abuse related crimes in the UK in 2023 (ONS, 2023a). As such, an understanding of the attitudes of men and boys towards VAWG is crucial to efforts to prevent VAWG. Whilst there is an increasing body of research that considers men's views about VAWG (Gracia et al., 2020; Krivoshchekov et al., 2023; Salter, 2016), there is comparatively less research that focuses on the views of adolescent boys. Similarly, whilst there has been some attempt to explore the attitudes of adolescents about VAWG (Aghtaie et al., 2018; Bowen et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2021), some of which distinguishes between attitudes and opinions of boys and girls (Courtain & Glowacz, 2021;

Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry, 2010a), to my knowledge, there has not been a review that has focused specifically on boys' attitudes and opinions in this area. It is important to hear and understand their views and perspectives, to ensure that violence prevention programmes are targeted in a way that will enhance boys' engagement and participation.

*Gender is a sociocultural construct encompassing the attitudes, emotions, and behaviours that a specific culture associates with an individual's biological sex (APA, 2012). Gender identity refers to an individual's internal, psychological sense of their gender, whereas the term "sex" refers to the biological designation typically assigned at birth based on physical characteristics (APA, 2025). The terms which I use to identify individuals or groups of individuals in this review are consistent with their gender identity. Where I have used the terms men or boys, I am referring to male-identifying individuals and where I have used the terms women or girls, I am referring to female-identifying individuals.*

### **The Role of Gender Norms**

There is an increasing recognition that gender relations, gender norms and gender inequalities are key determinants of VAWG (Flood, 2020). The World Health Organisation (WHO) refers to gender as the socially constructed characteristics of men and women (WHO, 2024). As such, gender encompasses the social values, roles, behaviours and attributes that are expected and considered appropriate for men and women by a society (Jewkes et al., 2015). Gender norms, then, refer to socially expected ways of behaving according to one's gender and are shaped and formed by formal and informal institutions in society (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Lombard & McMillan, 2013). They influence how men and women think about themselves (Jewkes et al., 2015) and impact on the resources, experiences and opportunities that are available to men and women (Lombard & McMillan, 2013), which are often unequal (Jewkes et al., 2015). As gender norms and social norms are interrelated, they vary across different societies and the way that they impact on adolescent boys will be shaped by various intersectional factors around them related to race, age, ethnicity and social class, amongst others. As such, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of boys' experiences to avoid the risk of measuring boyhood against the norms of white, middle-class notions (Equimundo, 2022). Nonetheless, it has been suggested that there are certain factors, common across different societies to a greater or lesser extent, that shape and influence masculinity.

### **Gender Norms Relating to Masculinity**

Two theories are of particular interest here: hegemonic masculinity and precarious manhood. Both theories were developed in an attempt to understand and explain masculinity in societies that have been shaped by patriarchy, a system that positions men as dominant in families, governance

and communities. Connell's theory (1987) referred to hegemonic masculinity in the context of an effort to develop a broader understanding of gender, power relations and inequalities. He used the term to refer to the most broadly culturally accepted definition of masculinity. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity "embodie[s] the currently honoured way of being a man, [requiring] all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (p. 832). In its emphasis on traits such as toughness, competitiveness and emotional restraint, hegemonic masculinity positions itself as superior to and the opposite of, femininity and other, "lesser" forms of masculinity. In doing so, it provides a justification for men's dominance over women, ideologically legitimising women's subordination.

Another important and related theory, when considering masculinity, is Vandello and Bosson's (2013) precarious manhood thesis. They note the way that boys are frequently called upon to prove their masculinity throughout their childhood, with terms such as "man up" being commonplace. This begins to demonstrate, they say, the precarious nature of manhood as a status that can be won or lost. They compare this to womanhood which they consider to be achieved through biological changes and to be secure once earned. According to Vandello and Bosson (2013), there are three key features of manhood: i) it is a status that must be earned, ii) once earned, it can be taken away, so is precarious, iii) it is confirmed by others so requires constant demonstrations of proof. According to this theory, men are under constant pressure to demonstrate and prove their masculinity and will both avoid situations that might put their manhood status at risk and engage in risky or dangerous behaviours that might demonstrate their manhood. In particular, Vandello and Bosson (2013) suggest that manhood is, in part, defined through its opposition to femininity, leading men to eschew feminine behaviours, preferences and traits. Interestingly, their research suggests that manhood threats activated both physically aggressive cognitions and behaviours in men (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). Addis and Schwab (2013) have taken issue with the dichotomous nature of Vandello and Bosson's (2013) positing of men and women as opposites, suggesting instead that efforts be focused on "investigat[ing] the tenuous and precarious nature of gender in general" (p116).

Nonetheless, in more recent research, Bosson et al. (2021) have demonstrated the psychometric isomorphism of precarious manhood beliefs, using data from university samples in 62 countries across 13 world regions, suggesting its comparability in meaning and statistical properties at both individual and country levels. For example, in order to assess whether beliefs about precarious manhood cohere meaningfully with the hostile and benevolent gender ideologies associated with ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1997), they tested a five-factor gender ideology model, comprising of hostile and benevolent stereotypes about men and women, as well as beliefs about the precariousness of manhood. They found that precarious manhood beliefs and measures of ambivalent sexism can be used and interpreted similarly at individual and country level. They also

found that precarious manhood beliefs relate to national gender equality and development, beyond the effects of sexist attitudes.

Adolescence is a time of both biological change and social role transition for young people (Sawyer et al., 2018) and Connell argues that is it also an important time for the development of masculinities (Connell, 2005). Gender norms are widely held to impact on adolescent views about VAWG, and Edwards et al.'s (2024) recent review explores the way in which gender norms interact with and shapes their views about VAWG. However, the suggestion from research into masculinity is that gender norms influence the way that men, and by extension boys, view the world in ways that are specific, and different from, the ways that women do. Previous reviews have considered the views of girls alongside boys (Edwards et al., 2024; Storer et al., 2020) but I am unaware of any previous reviews that focus exclusively on the views of adolescent boys. This review, then, will employ thematic synthesis as a means of focusing specifically on boys' views within the literature, to allow for deeper exploration of their understandings and perspectives. The focus will be on studies of European and North American origin. Cislaghi and Heise (2020) suggest that gender norms are "embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction" (p. 415-416). Focusing on studies produced in Europe and North America allows for an exploration of gender norms in countries that have had broadly similar cultural histories as developed, Westernised countries. Whilst there may be some similarities culturally between these countries, participants in each of these countries are likely to be influenced by a range of different cultural, intersectional and contextual influences. One indicator that demonstrates this, for example, is the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2025), which ranks countries according to their progress towards gender parity in four areas: economic opportunities, education, health and political leadership. The report shows considerable disparities between the countries represented in the sample for this review. Some countries appear towards the topic of the ranking: Norway (3<sup>rd</sup>), Great Britain (4<sup>th</sup>) and Sweden (6<sup>th</sup>). It is possible that boys in these countries may feel less pressure to conform to traditional masculinity norms than boys in other countries. At the other end of the scale, Bulgaria is ranked 83<sup>rd</sup> in the index, whilst Cyprus is 82<sup>nd</sup>. Aghtaie et al. (2018) note in their discussion that participants from these countries in particular viewed intimate partner violence as a normal part of their relationships, which they linked to culturally constructed, gendered attitudes about differences between boys and girls. In the United States, which ranked 42nd, men have been found to adhere to masculinity norms to a greater extent than in other Western countries (Holmqvist Gattario et al., 2015).

As a practitioner working in England, I wanted to ensure that this review would be useful for and relevant to practitioners working in a similar context to my own. In considering whether to include geographical restrictions in my search criteria, I was cognisant of the diversity within the societies in my chosen search areas and was attentive to whether the papers included were broadly

representative of the populations of boys within those regions. I judged that the papers identified were adequately reflective of the cultural, socio-economic and ethnic diversity to be found within these regions, providing adequate heterogeneity within the sample, which is considered desirable by Thomas and Harden (2008)

Thomas and Harden (2008) also highlight the danger inherent in any synthesis of qualitative research which is, by its nature, highly specific to the particular context, time and group of participants on which it focuses. However, with them, I believe that there is value in bringing together findings from across different papers. It was not my intention to assume psychological universality amongst populations (Henrich et al., 2010) when bringing this research together. Instead, in order to capture the 'context and complexity' (Thomas & Harden, 2008, p. 3) of the original data, I have included a detailed Study Description and Characteristics table (see Appendix G). This captures participants' characteristics in detail, along with other details about the original studies, in order to try to preserve their context (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

It is hoped that this exploration of boys' views within the literature will support the development of new policy initiatives aimed at preventing VAWG whilst helping to shape and guide prevention efforts. The research question that this review seeks to answer is: how are adolescent boys' attitudes and understandings of violence against women and girls shaped by gender norms?

## Methods

### Literature Search

The method for systematic reviews set out by Tricco (2011) was used to guide the review process. Accordingly, a clear question to guide the review was formulated through the use of an organising framework. For this review, SPIDER (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type) was used rather than PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcomes), as it has been suggested that it is a more applicable framework for qualitative research (Cooke et al., 2022). This framework was also used to identify key search terms (see Table 1).

**Table 1: SPIDER Framework Used to Identify key Terms**

Search Terms	
Sample (S)	"young people*" OR "youth*" OR "adolescen*" OR "teenage*" OR "young adult*" OR "young male*" or "boy*"
Population of Interest (P I)	"gender based violence" OR "violence against women" OR "dating violence" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "IPV" OR "partner violence" OR "relationship violence" OR "sexual violence" OR "interpersonal violence"
Design (D)	interview* OR qualitative OR "focus group*" OR "mixed-method*" OR "content analy*" OR feedback OR "thematic

	analy** OR "grounded theory" OR "interpretative phenomenological analysis" OR "narrative analysis"
Evaluation (E)	"attitude*" OR "perception*" OR "opinion*" OR "thought*" OR "feeling*" OR "belief*" OR "understanding*" OR "views"
Research type (R)	"qualitative research" OR "qualitative study" OR "qualitative methods"

**Table 2: Inclusion Criteria**

	<b>Variable</b>
	<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>
Study Type	Empirical research containing substantive qualitative data
Participants	Adolescent boys between the ages of 11-19
Research focus	Participants' perspectives and understandings about VAWG
Data	Research findings (quotations) were clearly differentiated by gender
Geographical	Study participants were located in a European country or in North America

A comprehensive search strategy was used, following that outlined in Thomas and Harden (2008). Studies were included if they were focused on attitudes, interpretations, and/or understandings of VAWG or related forms of violence, rather than focusing on experiences of VAWG. Studies that also addressed gender and gender norms were selected for inclusion. Inclusion criteria are outlined in Table 2.

The databases that I searched were: PsycInfo, ERIC, Sociological Abstracts, Web of Science and ProQuest Dissertation and Theses. I chose these databases because I recognised that research in this area was likely to cut across different social sciences. All searches included grey literature, thought to be important to include to reduce publication bias (Winters & Weir, 2017).

#### **Evaluation of Data: quality assurance**

The CASP Checklist for Qualitative Research (CASP, 2022) is widely used in systematic reviews (Long et al., 2020) and was used in this this review (see example in Appendix F). A strength of the studies was that detailed explanations were generally provided about the procedures followed, including information about participant recruitment, ethics and research design. However, study authors were less likely to justify why they chose the methods that they employed or to explain how these were relevant to the research conducted. Across all of the studies, data analysis was clearly supported by evidence, with findings discussed in relation to the research questions. One area of weakness that stood out across many of the studies was a lack of reflexivity on the part of the

researchers of their own positionality in relation to participants and how this might impact on their analysis. This seemed a particularly notable omission where the researchers were from a different ethnic group or of a different gender than their participants.

I judged that, because all of the studies contained interesting and important data about the views and opinions of adolescent boys, they should be included. I reflected on the quality assurance process throughout the analysis phase. When I encountered data that was inconsistent with findings from other studies, I reviewed the individual paper's quality assurance checklist, discussing my observations with the wider research team, to explore potential reasons for the discrepancies.

### **Data Analysis**

I chose Thomas and Harden's (2008) thematic synthesis as the method for data analysis. This method of synthesis has been found to be helpful in research that seeks to understand the views and priorities of a target population (Yardley et al., 2021). I hope that a fuller understanding of adolescent boys' perceptions and understandings of VAWG might help to inform development of future policy and interventions in this area, which Thomas and Harden (2008) suggest as an appropriate aim for thematic synthesis. I followed their three stages of thematic synthesis. The first involved hand coding of the data. I extracted data from the findings section of the papers, to include both the views of the participants and the researchers' interpretation of these views. During line-by-line coding of the data, I coded all data relevant to the research question with descriptive coding. The inductive nature of this process resulted in some data being allocated more than one code. Two papers drew on data from the same research study, McCarry (2010) and McCarry and Lombard (2016). I took great care to ensure that the same data was not coded more than once. During stage two I grouped these descriptive codes thematically, according to those which had similar content and meaning. The synthesis, at this stage, remained very close to the original themes in the primary data and did not attempt to go beyond them.

Stage three involved a more interpretative approach to the thematic analysis, where I attempted to go beyond the data to generate new interpretations, in a manner conceptually similar to Noblit and Hare's (1988) "third order interpretations," which they discuss with reference to meta-ethnography. This stage is identified by Thomas and Harden (2008) as the most potentially controversial, given its reliance on the judgement and inferences of the reviewers. To increase transparency, I have made efforts to distinguish clearly between what participants themselves said and the researcher's interpretations throughout the results section. I drew inferences, throughout this stage, between what participants and authors of the original studies expressed and how they felt that gender norms affected their views and attitudes towards VAWG. Themes were discussed and continually refined with the research team.

### Reflexivity Statement

I am a White British, middle-class woman, and this research formed part of my Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology. I was particularly aware that as a woman interpreting data from adolescent boys it was important to reflect on how my own beliefs and concerns might impact on my interpretation of the data. As such, I reflected on my subjectivity and role in shaping the research by keeping a reflective journal (see extracts in Appendix A and B) and discussing insights with my supervisory team.

## Results

I identified a total of 1,480 articles, of which 527 were duplicates and removed 48 because they were not published in English. This meant that I title and abstract screened 905 articles, selecting 35 articles for full text screening. Of these, I was unable to retrieve two (see Table 3: PRISMA table). Discussions amongst the supervisory team were used to support final decision making on article selection, resulting in the selection of ten papers for inclusion in the review. I reviewed the references of each of these articles alongside the references of other reviews in this area, most notably, Edwards et al. (2024), which resulted in the inclusion of one further paper. As such, eleven papers were included in this review.

### Study Characteristics

Demographic information from across the studies has been summarised in the appendices (see Appendix G: Study Descriptions and Characteristics) to ensure that the results are considered in the context of the participants' characteristics and individual circumstances. Eleven papers met the inclusion criteria. Two focused on intimate partner violence (IPV: Love & Richards, 2013; McDermott-Thompson, 2015), which was broadly defined as threatened or actual physical, verbal, sexual or psychological abuse within romantic relationships. Five papers focused on dating violence (Bowen et al., 2013; Haglund et al., 2019; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Storer et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021) which was defined as physical, sexual or emotional/psychological abuse within a dating relationship. Two papers focused on interpersonal violence (Aghtaie et al., 2018; McCarry, 2010a), defined as violence and abusive behaviours within interpersonal relationships. One paper, Adams and Williams (2014), focused on jealousy as a pathway to dating violence; and one paper, McCarry and Lombard (2016) focused on men's violence against women. The majority of the papers focused on exploring the views of adolescents of both genders, with only Haglund et al. (2019) focused on exploring male adolescents' views exclusively. Most studies, eight of the total included, collected data through focus groups (Adams & Williams, 2014; Aghtaie et al., 2018; Bowen et al., 2013; Haglund et al., 2019; Love & Richards, 2013; McCarry, 2010a; Taylor et al., 2021). Reeves and Orpinas (2012) was a mixed methods study, and McCarry and Lombard (2016) combined two different studies, one of which

drew on focus groups and one on focus groups and interviews, whilst Storer et al. (2020) used interviews alone.

Across the studies, there were a total number of 675 participants (accounting for only the participants involved in the qualitative elements of mixed methods studies). 278 of participants were boys and 397 were girls, taking into account that 77 of these participants were included in both McCarry's (2010) and McCarry and Lombard's (2016) papers. This systematic literature review only included data drawn from the 278 boys included in these studies. Participants' ages ranged from 11 to 19 years old. The data includes participants living in the following countries: Scotland, England, Belgium, Bulgaria, America, Sweden, Germany, Cyprus, Italy and Norway. Within the sample, a range of different ethnicities are represented including white British and American, African American, Mexican American, Roma and Scottish-Southern Asian. However, most of the participants were white.

### **Introduction to Thematic Synthesis**

Despite the cultural, geographical and linguistic diversity of the sample, boys across each of the studies appeared to hold remarkably similar attitudes and opinions about VAWG, which were clearly moulded and shaped by the gender norms that exist in the societies around them. Whilst there were notable cases of active resistance to the prevailing gender norms, such cases were minority views in all of the papers. The themes that were identified across the data were: i) biologically determined strength of men, ii) violence as a tool to maintain hegemony, iii) violence as a tool to protect masculine identity, iv) control as a tool to maintain hegemony, v) violence as an alternative to emotional expression (see also Figure 1 for a thematic map). Before considering the themes in more detail, it is helpful to consider how boys across the studies defined VAWG, as this is instructive to understanding their meaning making around it.

### **Defining Violence and Abuse**

Across the studies, whilst different types of abuse were recognised by the boys, abuse involving physical violence was generally foregrounded in their thinking and prioritised as the most serious type of abuse. One participant summed this up: *"When people think about dating violence, they mostly think of physical violence. They think of a bruised up girl and, like, maybe some stitches or something"* (Taylor et al., 2021, p. 450). Besides physical violence, other types of violence and abuse were recognised, such as emotional and psychological abuse, although sometimes this was only recognised by older children (McCarry & Lombard, 2016) or was an exception in that it was only recognised by one participant (Love & Richards, 2013). In other cases, emotional and psychological abuse was only identified by boys in response to stimuli that had been seen in vignettes or video clips (McDermott-Thompson, 2015; Storer, Talan, et al., 2020) or in response to exploratory questioning from the researcher (McDermott-Thompson, 2015; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012).

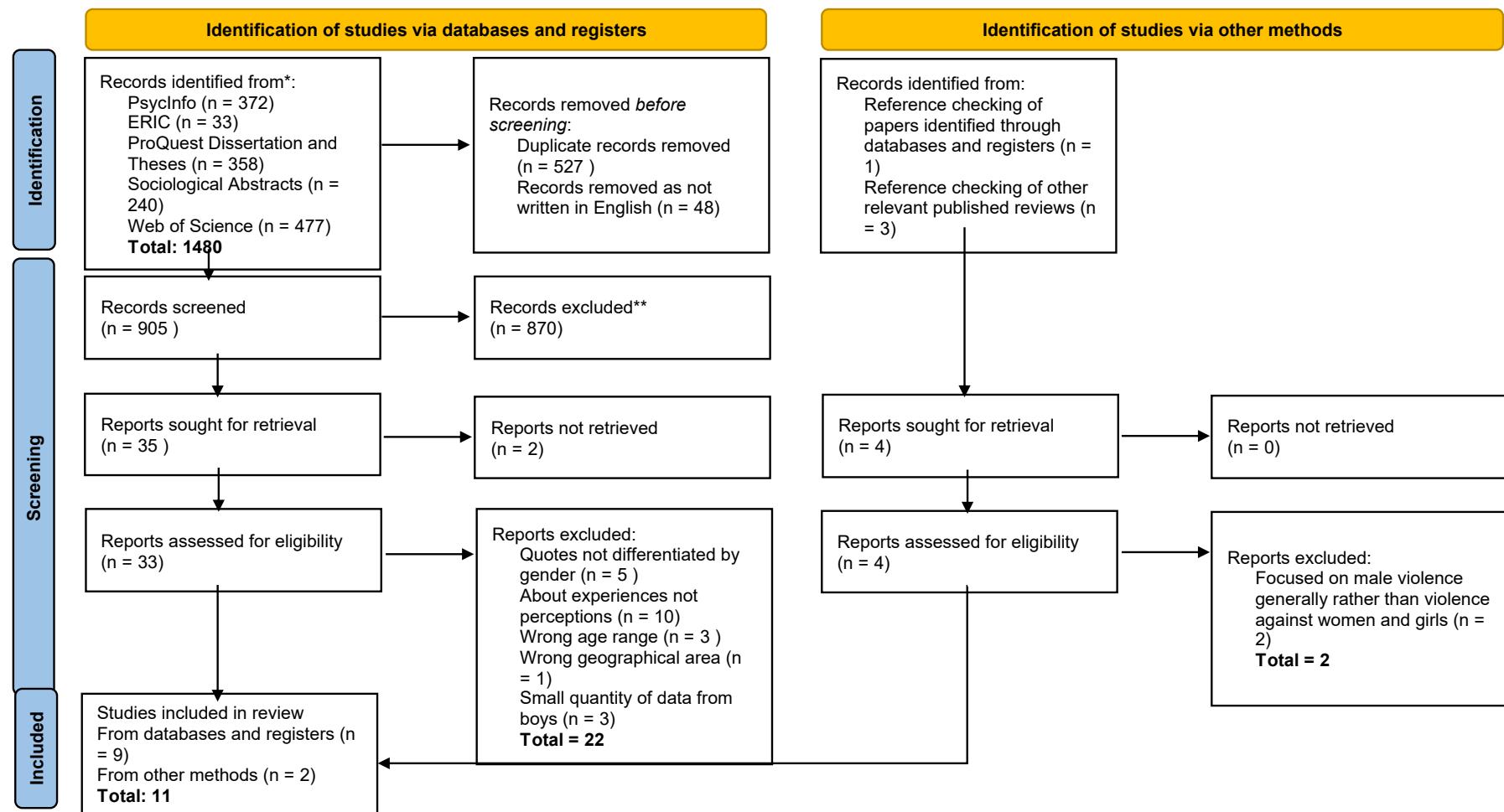
In general, physical violence was considered as more serious than emotional or psychological abuse: *"if you call a girl something [bad name], that can always be fixed. You can always talk it out and, you know, apologize. If you hit a girl, smack her in the face, there's no 'I'm sorry'"* (Reeves & Orpinas, 2012, p. 1697). There were some exceptions to this where boys recognised how serious emotional or psychological abuse could be, putting it on a level with, or even above, physical violence. For instance, in Storer et al.'s work (2020), one of the participants responds to a scenario where a male partner criticises their girlfriend's clothes, describing the act as "*definitely dating violence*" because *"he is just breaking down her self-esteem, man. I think that is the worst thing you can do to a girl"* (p. 84). However, views such as this were the exception rather than the norm.

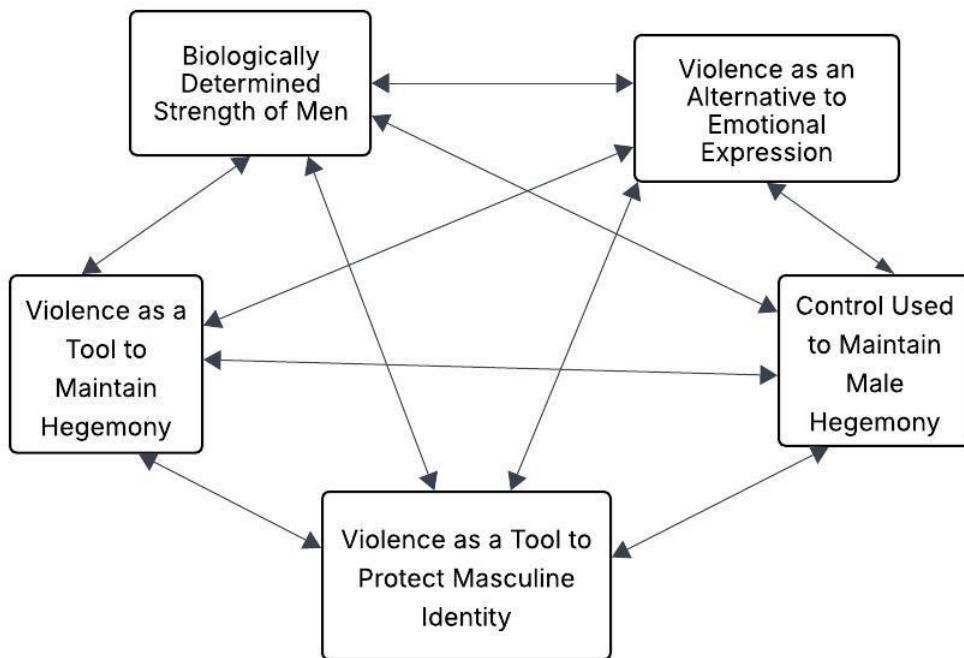
Boys appeared to make a distinction between violence, which could be a single act, and abuse which was considered to be a pattern of behaviour (Adams & Williams, 2014; Haglund et al., 2019; Love & Richards, 2013; McCarry & Lombard, 2016): *"[the vignettes used in this study] weren't abusive 'cos abuse is further than that. Like more, it's more of I don't like you smack, punch, push down the stairs and then they might break their back and they are paralysed"* (McCarry & Lombard, 2016, p. 131). Despite the shared understanding about the serious nature of physical violence, across many papers, a level of violence appeared to be accepted as normal within dating relationships. For example, these participants discuss a level of violence that might be acceptable:

*Kyle: I reckon there's a line isn't there really (pause) cos like (pause) there's a slap round the face then there's (pause)*

*Andrew: A head butt* (McDermott-Thompson, 2015, p. 48).

Here, a slap is positioned as more acceptable and less serious. In Love and Richards' (2013) paper, in particular, the boys discuss the line at which play fighting, which is considered to be a normal part of a dating relationship, crosses over into physical aggression. In their commentary, Love and Richards (2013) note: *"Male participants acknowledged that there was a very fine line between physical aggression that constituted playing rather than IPV, but they adamantly asserted that they could tell the difference between the two"* (p. 3356). The boys in this paper describe the way that they monitor their partners' facial expressions and reactions to decide when this line has been crossed. This could be viewed as suggesting how normal physical aggression is considered to be within dating relationships for these participants, even if it is considered to constitute play rather than violence. Love and Richards (2013) highlight the difficulty inherent in this playful behaviour by drawing attention to the physical power imbalance between girls and boys – the girls are more likely to be hurt in this play, and the balance of power remains with the boys, who make decisions about when the play has gone too far.

**Figure 1: Prisma Chart**

**Figure 2: Thematic Map**

### Thematic Synthesis Results

Each of the identified themes will now be considered in turn with a summary of the key findings presented for each.

#### **Biologically Determined Strength of Men**

Boys across the studies demonstrated a belief in the biologically superior strength of men which was frequently linked to a strong prohibition of physical violence against women (McCarry & Lombard, 2016; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Storer et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021). As one participant in Bowen (2013) puts it: *"No [boys and girls] are not [equal] because the boy is stronger, he could hurt her more"* (p. 6). In contrast, women's physical weakness was accepted as normal. The dichotomy between men's strength and women's weakness was expressed particularly clearly by boys in Reeves and Orpinas (2012), for example: *"if a girl gets hit [it will hurt] because her bones are kind of tender and she's weak"* (p. 1698). These narratives serve to reinforce views about male hegemony by positioning men as naturally stronger and more aggressive, whilst women are positioned as passive and in need of protection (Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry, 2010a; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012). These gender roles are also explored by Haglund et al. (2019), whereby the authors note that the Mexican American boys in their study are brought up according to the tenets of their machismo cultural heritage to see women as precious and valuable – making it clear that boys should protect them.

Only one participant across all of the studies problematised this perception of gender roles. Ian, in McCarry's (2010a) research, explicitly problematises the socialisation of male gender roles: *"If they*

*[boys] are being rough it's said "well, they are only being boys". That makes it say that the two things are interlinked in a way that they shouldn't be" (p.23).* He highlights the way that aggression and violence are accepted as a normative aspect of masculinity. In problematising this he rejects this naturalisation of male violence, whilst in the main, the boys across these studies appear to accept it as an implicit element of masculinity.

### **Violence as a Tool to Maintain Hegemony**

Whilst the majority of boys in these papers were assured of their physical superiority and the resultant position of dominance that this afforded them, there was, nonetheless, an awareness of the need to maintain their dominance and acceptance that doing so may occasionally involve the use of physical force (Aghtaie et al., 2018; Bowen et al., 2013; Haglund et al., 2019). This was most clearly seen when boys were asked to consider violence perpetrated by women against men. The threat that this might pose to the dominance of men is most clearly articulated by a Belgian participant in Bowen's (2013) study: *"If you're a man, you need to stand up; otherwise a girl will become dominant and it will never stop" (p. 6).* A similar fear of challenge is expressed by one of Haglund et al.'s (2019) participants:

*If the girl is more controlling than the boy, then the boy would want to change that and be even worse than the girl has been, and that would show how much fear there is in him and that's how the abuse would start (p. 1047).*

The use of the word "fear" is interesting here. This could potentially refer to fear of being hurt by "the girl" or may refer to a more existential fear, the fear of losing his position of dominance. The fact that the boy is described as having to "be even worse than the girl has been" perhaps suggests an awareness of the need to reassert the gendered hierarchy by comparably greater force. However, as Bowen et al. (2013) recognise, this leaves boys with something of an ideological dilemma, as they are expected both to stand up to girls, whilst also being aware of the social pressure not to use violence against them.

A further example of similar thinking is found in an exchange between participants in McCarry's (2010a) study, where a participant describes how sometimes violence can start when a man thinks that a woman is not *"carrying out their duties as a wife"* (p. 27), in which case they might think it is acceptable to use violence to force them to do so. Whilst this participant makes clear that this is not a view that they personally hold, another participant in their group suggests that: *"it starts with the wedding vows, doesn't it? Love, honour and obey"* (p. 27). McCarry argues that this interaction illustrates how societal constructions of gender roles reinforce and legitimise hierarchical relationships. The participants suggest that violence can arise when this is challenged.

The notion that women should acquiesce to the inherent dominance of men and submit unquestioningly to their wants and desires is also articulated by a Bulgarian participant, Peter, in Aghtaie et al.'s (2018) study: "*The boy should be the boss, the girl should do everything that he asks. But he should treat her well... I said to her: Let's go to dance! I was a bit drunk. She did not want to. I took her out and started beating her*" (p. 302). The direct nature of the delivery here shows the strength of Peter's belief that this is the natural order, and as such, is not open to question. This is made particularly stark by his statement: "*But he should treat her well.*" It appears as though Peter does not consider beating his girlfriend for transgressing the gendered hierarchy to be at odds with treating her well.

### **Violence as a Tool to Protect Masculine Identity**

Across many of the papers, boys expressed views suggesting a belief that the behaviour of a girlfriend or dating partner can impact on the reputation of their boyfriend (Aghtaie et al., 2018; Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry, 2010a; McCarry & Lombard, 2016). As such, it was considered important by many of the boys to ensure that girlfriends and partners behave and act in certain ways to avoid reputational damage, consistent with the threat to manhood hypothesis. If a girl refuses to act in the appropriate way, for example, by refusing to dress in the way prescribed by their boyfriend, a male participant in McCarry's (2010a) study explained the way that a man's "*emotional endurance is just worn right down*" (p. 30), at which point, violence is considered to be a legitimate way of reasserting control. The word "*endurance*" used by this participant could be seen to convey just how emotionally draining he considers challenges to male authority to be, highlighting the strength of the need to conform to this gender norm. As McCarry and Lombard (2016) highlight, this process of justification of violence through victim blaming is related to the sexualisation of women's bodies. Where the problem is located in the women rather than the men perpetrating the violence, the men subscribe to the notion that women are defined by how men view them. Female clothing and behaviour are viewed through a sexualised lens and encoded with the means of appealing to or displeasing men.

Emotional abuse, in particular, is legitimised as a way of demonstrating masculine ideals of dominance to peers (Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry, 2010a; McCarry & Lombard, 2016). Haglund et al. (2019) note the way in which a boy might make fun of his girlfriend or make false claims about the level of their sexual involvement in order "*to protect or promote his own image*" (p. 1046). One of their participants sums this up:

*I think that every teenage boy has this vision of them being manly. To them manly means being tough as in talking about a girl like that in front of their friends, just to try to make them feel that they're in charge of the relationship, not the female (p. 1046).*

This participant appears to have a clear sense of both what masculinity entails – being tough and dominant – and of the way in which boys are required to constantly reassert their masculinity, even if this is done at the expense of women.

Also linked to this idea is the way that a partner being unfaithful is often cited as a justification for violence (Adams & Williams, 2014; Aghtaie et al., 2018; Bowen et al., 2013; Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry & Lombard, 2016). This is expressed particularly clearly by a Swedish participant in Bowen et al.'s study: "*Yeah . . . 'cause you really deserve it [a slap] if you have, for example, been cheating. Yeah, then you deserve even more than that*" (p. 10). Whilst participants do not explain exactly what it is about cheating that they find so reprehensible, given that a girlfriend's behaviour is thought by many boys to impact on their reputation, it may be that cheating is seen as a direct threat to masculinity, as the girl is choosing another boy over them. In doing so, the girl directly challenges the dominance of boys by exerting her own power, upending the hegemony, and leaving the usurped boy feeling lesser in the perceived hierarchy of masculinity. In such circumstance, violence appears to be viewed as justified as a means to restore masculinity and dominance.

In some papers the boys appear to express an ownership of their female partners (Aghtaie et al., 2018; Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry, 2010; Taylor et al., 2021). An example of this is seen in relation to a discussion focused on rape myths in McDermott Thompson's (2015) study. Whilst most of the boys in this study appear able to identify "*rape [as], forced upon sex from one person on the other*" (p. 38), when they are shown a video clip of a heterosexual couple who have an argument that ends in the male partner forcing his female partner to have sex with him, one of the boys, Kai, responds:

*and at the end he's pretty much forcing sex upon her (pause) because she's obviously not going to want to, especially after being hit, and it's kind of (pause) rape on a lesser level like on a lower level because obviously they're together so it's not exactly rape but she doesn't obviously want it and he's forcing it on her* (p. 46).

Kai does not appear to consider forced sex where the victim and perpetrator are in a relationship with each other to be the same as forced sex by a stranger, which would constitute rape. Instead, he sees this as being at a "*lower level*," perhaps reflecting the way in which, for some boys, a feeling of entitlement accompanies being in a relationship.

### **Control Used to Maintain Male Hegemony**

For participants across many of the papers, some degree of male control was considered to be normative in relationships (Aghtaie et al., 2018; Haglund et al., 2019; Love & Richards, 2013). Haglund et al. (2019) note the way that participants used phrases such as "*too controlling*," or "*demands too much*," implying that some level of control is viewed as acceptable (p. 1046). This could be interpreted as demonstrating the threat to manhood status that is present in their participants' narrative regarding control, linking to the points above about the role of emotional

abuse in demonstrating masculinity. Interestingly, this was the case, even though their participants had theoretically rejected controlling behaviour as “*weird*” and “*too much*” typifying controlling men as “*control freaks*” (p. 1046).

Participants in other studies go further in their views around control: “*cos if they've done something you would hit them rather than doing nothing*” (McCarry & Lombard, 2016, p. 143). Some boys expressed certainty in the belief that defiance demands physical retribution.. This links to the themes of violence as a tool to maintain hegemony and violence as reputation management in that uncontrolled women are seen as a threat to masculinity. This view is echoed by participants in other studies who describe the way that women are expected to dress and behave in certain ways when they are in a relationship (Adams & Williams, 2014; Aghtaie et al., 2018; Haglund et al., 2019; McCarry & Lombard, 2016). This is summarised, succinctly, by a participant in Haglund et al.’s (2019) study, who, when discussing the way in which he would expect a girlfriend to refrain from dressing provocatively or talking to other boys, says: “*I'd give her freedom to do whatever she wants but just remember that you're with me*” (p. 1046). Haglund et al. (2019) note that such expectations were not viewed by their participants as “*an exertion of control*” (p. 1046). Instead, there was a normalised expectation that if a girl likes a boy, she will naturally want to act in a way that pleases him. Whilst this suggests the extent to which the gender norm of male hegemony is internalised by some boys, there was one participant in this same paper who made clear that they also expected that they would modify their own behaviour when in a relationship. This can be seen as challenging the idea that behaviour modification within relationships is only expected from girls.

In addition, in Storer et al.’s (2020) study, there are two participants who problematise coercive control, recognising it as abusive. In response to a scenario where a man threatens to split up with his girlfriend because she does not want to hang out, he says: “*that is giving him more power and making him believe that he can control her in the relationship and that is really bad, he shouldn't do that*” (p. 84). Another participant also recognises the danger inherent in controlling behaviour, describing how coercive behaviour can build from telling a girl what to wear to where they can go. He recognises the danger in this, highlighting that “*one thing leads to another and she is probably be trapped [sic]*” (p. 85).

### **Violence as an Alternative to Emotional Expression**

Across many of the studies, boys discuss an awareness of the way in which violence can be resorted to by men and boys when they are emotionally overwhelmed and are unable to find alternative ways to express their emotions (Adams & Williams, 2014; Bowen et al., 2013; McDermott-Thompson, 2015; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Taylor et al., 2021). A Belgian participant in Bowen et al.’s study sums this up: “*If you're frustrated, you sometimes can't control yourself and then it happens that you push a girl*” (p. 629). Taylor et al. (2021) draw attention to the way in which boys

in their study focus on actions rather than emotions when describing violence and abuse, suggesting that the emotional impact of abuse is not fully recognised. For Taylor et al. (2021) this is linked to the stigma that exists against males expressing emotions. This stigma causes males to accumulate stress for which they are unable to find an outlet: *"When they do release their stress, it ends up being inflicted on their partner in the form of violence"* (p. 8).

However, there is, across the papers, a recognition from boys that violence is indicative of relationship difficulties (McDermott-Thompson, 2015) and that being able to talk through your feelings can provide a preferable alternative to violence (Adams & Williams, 2014; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Taylor et al., 2021). As this participant in Reeves and Orpinas (2012) puts it: *"You just try to talk it out as much as you can and try to get her to understand what you're trying to say"* (p. 1698). While this participant appears to have an understanding of how discussion is preferable to violence as a means of communication, a different participant in Adams and Williams' (2014) study demonstrates how difficult this can be for boys:

*I know I am the jealous type. Like I always see something, I'll be like "What the hell is going on?!" . . . But then I would talk to her and ask her. Like I can't just jump into it . . .*  
(p. 302).

This participant appears to struggle against what he considers to be his natural first response to any suggestion that a partner may have been unfaithful, which is characterised by jealous anger. However, he fights to suppress this urge, instead favouring talking to his partner and trying to resolve the situation without violence.

## Discussion

This thematic synthesis explores how adolescent boys' attitudes and understandings of violence against women and girls are shaped by gender norms. Earlier reviews have considered the role of gender norms in relation to adolescents more generally (Edwards et al., 2024) and dating violence (Storer et al., 2020), but, to my knowledge, this is the first to solely consider the views and opinions of adolescent boys. The findings of this synthesis suggest that boys' views and perceptions about VAWG are heavily influenced by the gender norms of the society around them and that transgression of, or pressure to live up to, perceived gender norms may result in VAWG being seen as normal or even acceptable.

This review suggests that societal gender norms influence boys to believe that their biologically superior strength gives them an inherent position of dominance over girls. The vast majority of boys in these studies were aware of a strong societal prohibition around men's violence against women. The assumption inherent in this prohibition seems to be that because men are physically stronger, women are, by definition, weak and in need of protection. As such, this becomes a justification for hierarchical relationships and men's hegemony. For boys then, as for men, hegemonic masculinity

appears to be defined by toughness and ability to be strong and provide protection (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Boys are under constant pressure to define themselves in relation to this idea of masculinity, which this review identifies as a pathway to violence.

This review also suggests that boys' views about VAWG are influenced by an awareness of the precarious nature of masculinity (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Boys appear to be hyper-vigilant to threats to their masculine status and feel justified to act in hyper-masculine ways, for example asserting their authority through violence, when they perceive a threat to their masculinity. The findings of this review suggest that boys may justify violence or see it as more acceptable in cases where they perceive that masculinity is threatened, such as when a partner dresses in a provocative way or talks to other men. This fits with research that suggests that for some men, when masculine norms are threatened, they feel compelled to reassert their dominance in intimate relationships (Smith et al., 2015). Whilst boys clearly understood the strength of the social prohibition of violence against women and girls, when given examples of girls who had been unfaithful to their partners, they almost without exception considered this to be adequate justification for violence. In this way, violence is legitimised when it is used to defend against a threat to masculinity (Vescio et al., 2025). This is closely tied to the sexualisation of women's bodies, whereby females are seen as possessions of men, rather than individuals in their own right. The sexual objectification of women has long been viewed by feminists as a tool to reinforce the existing gender hierarchy by promoting the subjugation of women and derogation of their value (Bareket & Shnabel, 2020). When their masculinity is threatened, men have been found to increase their sexual objectification of women and this is thought to be a means of attempting to re-establish their dominance (Bareket & Shnabel, 2020; Dahl et al., 2015).

This review suggest that boys often situate the reasons for violence with females and their actions and behaviours rather than with the men who perpetrate the violence. Females were generally seen as having done something to deserve the violence that was inflicted on them (McCarry & Lombard, 2016). This echoes research that suggests that men attribute higher levels of blame to women who violate traditional gender roles in rape cases (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Similarly, these findings suggest that boys may use emotional abuse as an explicit tool to bolster their masculinity. In the studies reviewed, boys acknowledged belittling their female partners as a means of showcasing toughness to their peers, reflecting an acute awareness of the pressure to conform to and consistently project adherence to hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, they demonstrate the precarious nature of masculinity, and an awareness of the need to constantly demonstrate and defend it (Connell, 1987). The acceptance and normalisation of violence that appears to result from this is particularly troubling.

This review highlights an important finding that that has not been explored in previous reviews considering the role of gender norms in adolescent views about VAWG. It emphasises how gender

norms impact on boys' expression of emotions. Men learn that expressing sadness can impact on their masculine standing, whilst expressing anger can enhance their status (River & Flood, 2021). This review suggests that some boys also use violence to enhance their masculine standing, for example, in cases where they feel that male hegemony is challenged. However, violence against female partners was also recognised by boys as being connected to a release of frustrations and emotions that they felt could not be expressed in another way. Research has suggested that men direct emotional distress into aggression and violence (Branney & White, 2008; Johnson, 2012) and some boys in this study appear to follow this pattern. This puts boys in a difficult position where they are denied a more positive outlet for their frustrations and yet are simultaneously aware of the social prohibition against the violence that may otherwise result from that frustration. However, this review also shows that some boys are aware of the potential connection between suppressing emotions and violence and recognise that a healthy relationship relies on open emotional communication.

### **Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

There are limitations that should be noted both within the process of conducting the review itself and also within the papers that the review draws on.

Decision-making regarding final article selection for inclusion in the review was complicated by the criteria that articles be predominantly about boys' views and perspective, whilst also discussing gender norms. Many papers discussed both experiences of *and* perceptions of VAWG. Some of the papers included relatively few references to young people's attitudes and perceptions, with some containing few references differentiated by gender. As I was the only researcher working on this thesis, I decided that papers with only a very small amount of data, two or three differentiated quotes for example, be excluded. Whilst I only excluded three papers for this reason, this may have resulted in the exclusion of data of relevance. During the selection process, it was interesting to note the number of papers that purported to provide the views of adolescents but had far more female participants than male (cf. Heleniak, 2018; Herrman, 2013). This suggests that in some papers, there is a skew to female perspectives that may not be noted by the casual reader. The relatively low number of papers included in this review gives an indication of the lack of priority afforded to exploring the views and opinions of adolescent boys in relation to VAWG to date, and this is suggested as an area for future research.

In addition, this review excluded papers from outside the geographical area of North America and Europe. My decision to focus this review on papers from North America and Europe risks prioritising voices from Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich et al., 2010). However, the ethnic, racial and socioeconomic diversity of the participants included in this review goes some way to countering this. For example, both Aghtaie (2018) and Haglund (2019) note

the cultural diversity of their samples, highlighting ways in which different cultural influences appear to impact on their participants' views. Boys' adherence to traditional gender norms is likely to be influenced by various factors and it is possible that levels of gender equity may play a role here (Holmqvist Gattario et al., 2015). I have included detailed information about the participants in my Study Description and Characteristics table (Appendix G), which contextualises the studies and highlights the demographic diversity of participants, allowing readers to consider this in more detail. I have also attempted to draw attention to the cultural heterogeneity of participants where appropriate in my findings. Indeed, given the cultural diversity of the sample, it is notable that this did not appear to preclude the emergence of similar themes across the papers, which may suggest that the attitudes towards VAWG identified here are relatively widespread and possibly deeply embedded.

Whilst participants across the studies are to some extent reflective of the ethnic and cultural diversity found across these regions, this review does not fully explore the impact of this diversity. In part this is because this is not a priority within most of the studies. However, it was also beyond the scope of this review to fully analyse the many and complex ways in which different and intersecting aspects of the boys' identities may have impacted on their views. Nonetheless, a fuller investigation into such factors may yield important insights that would deepen future understanding in this area, so this is also suggested as an area for future research.

### **Implications for Educational Psychologists**

Schools can and should play a vital role both in supporting young people affected by abuse and in promoting healthy, respectful attitudes to prevent it (Gallagher, 2014). Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support schools to develop and implement curricular that address healthy relationships, drawing on their knowledge of child development, to promote more nuanced discussions. This includes encouraging schools to explore the cultural dimensions of gender norms and how these may influence attitudes toward peer-on-peer abuse (Setty, 2024). In addition, EPs could work with schools to provide opportunities for boys to develop emotional literacy, helping them better understand and manage their emotions, which can contribute to healthier relationships. Finally, EPs are in a unique position to be able to collaborate with local authority colleagues on initiatives that aim to challenge gender norms both in schools and in society more generally (Lopez, 2023).

### **Broader Implications and Concluding Remarks**

The findings of this review suggest that boys are more likely to recognise and problematise physical violence than emotional abuse or coercive behaviour. This is particularly problematic given that the majority (88%) of partner abuse victims in the UK in the year ending 2023 experienced non-physical abuse (ONS, 2023b). This strongly suggests an increased need for education around this. The

papers included in this review generally focused on violence within relationships and did not explicitly explore image-based abuse - an increasingly concerning issue, as highlighted by Ofsted's (2021) research, which found that both girls and boys frequently reported receiving explicit images or videos themselves or knowing friends who had. At the same time, I noticed that many of the papers (Bowen et al., 2013; Storer, Talan, et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021) explored attitudes towards women's violence against men alongside explorations of attitudes about VAWG, providing vignettes that prompted discussion in this area. Although these discussions revealed important insights into how gender norms shape perspectives, it is important to recognise that men's violence against women continues to be far more prevalent than women's violence against men - as statistics indicating that females accounted for 73.5% of domestic abuse victims suggest (ONS, 2023a). Given this fact, whilst it is important to acknowledge and understand female violence too, this should not distract from the urgent task of understanding and challenging male violence.

The findings of this review suggest that prevention campaigns have been successful in that the societal prohibition against physical violence is so widely understood. However, they also suggest that prevention campaigns may not currently focus enough on the impact of gender norms on boys' views about VAWG, and that they may not provide a space for boys to openly reflect on the implications of these. In addition, it is notable that prevention campaigns often focus on encouraging women to moderate their behaviour (Oppenheim, 2021), rather than on changing the attitudes and behaviours of men who perpetrate the abuse. This review highlights the shortcomings of such strategies with regard to adolescent boys and points towards the urgency of engaging adolescent boys in prevention initiatives (Flood, 2020).

Firmin (2019), when considering peer-on-peer abuse, emphasises the need to examine the interplay between young people's agency, power, and the social environments they navigate, and this seems relevant here too. Adolescents are developmentally less mature than adults and likely to be more easily influenced by peers and the messaging that surrounds them (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). The findings of this review, and the impact that they reveal of gender norms on boys' views about VAWG, appear to confirm this. This suggests that interventions that seek to influence boys' views about VAWG may need to consider the impact of the social environments in which boys live and the messaging that they receive, whilst also empowering them with the skills to find positive outlets for emotional expression.

**"I doubt it'd be traumatising": Exploring Adolescent Boys' Views about Safety in School  
and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse**

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) establishes the right to feel safe as fundamental for children and young people. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs also identifies safety as a pre-potent need, which is often prioritised before higher level learning and self-actualisation can occur. In the context of schools, this shows the importance of students feeling physically and emotionally secure in order to engage effectively in learning. Traditionally, safe school environments have been understood as spaces where students are protected from bullying, violence, and victimisation (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). Consequently, efforts to ensure student safety have largely focused on mitigating these threats. However, the "Everyone's Invited" (2020) movement, which brought to light thousands of testimonies from women and girls detailing their experiences of sexual violence in educational settings, has sparked increased awareness of the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in UK schools. A recent Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges in England concluded that such incidents are so widespread that they have become normalised or even expected (Ofsted, 2021).

At the same time, there are increasing concerns about misogynistic attitudes being spread online by so-called "misogyny influencers" (Haslop et al., 2024) such as Andrew Tate, and the impact that this might have on adolescent boys. Misogynist views and gender essentialist philosophies are spread through the "manosphere," which Haslop et al. (2024) describe as "constituting a decentralized array of online communities, actors and digital spaces, which include men's groups, niche social media influencers, [and] websites" (p. 2). These online communities seek to exploit feelings of aggrievement amongst some men and boys about a perceived loss of gender power in the face of increasing gender equality (Milne et al., 2024). Whilst this is still a developing area of research, initial studies have suggested that misogynistic narratives from the manosphere are becoming increasingly mainstream and impacting on adolescent boys' views and attitudes (Haslop et al., 2024) and that they may be leading to an increase in sexist behaviour in schools (Wescott et al., 2024).

### **The Extent of Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse**

Ofsted's (2021) review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges was based on interviews with 900 adolescents aged 14–16 and highlighted the extent of peer-on-peer sexual abuse. The report identified three forms of harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) that girls reported as happening "a lot" or "sometimes" to girls of their age. HSBs are defined in the report as developmentally inappropriate, harmful, or abusive sexual behaviours by children and young people under the age of 18. The report refers to non-contact physical abuse as behaviour causing harm, fear, or intimidation without direct bodily contact. The most prevalent of these was non-contact, but face-to-face forms of abuse, including sexist name-calling (92%) and rumours about their sexual activity (81%). The second most

widespread was non-contact forms of HSB that were online or on social media, including being sent images or video that they did not want to see (88%) or being put under pressure to provide sexual images of themselves (80%). The girls in this study also identified contact forms of HSB as being prevalent, such as sexual assault (79%) or unwanted touching (64%). In addition to this, a survey conducted by Girl Guides (2021), involving 400 girls aged 13 to 18 across the UK, found that 67% had experienced sexual harassment from their peers within school.

It is notable that Ofsted's (2021) findings highlighted significant differences in how boys and girls perceive HSB, particularly in relation to contact forms of misconduct. Boys were generally less likely to acknowledge the frequency of HSB. For example, the findings revealed that almost 90% of girls, but only half of boys reported that receiving unsolicited images or inappropriate content was a common or occasional occurrence among their peers (Ofsted, 2021). The report further noted disparities in how each gender perceived peer-on-peer abuse, citing an example where girls identified sexual comments, objectification, and name-calling as their primary concerns, whereas boys framed such interactions as joking or offering compliments, and were instead more focused on issues such as racism and homophobic abuse (Ofsted, 2021). This aligns with earlier research that suggests that boys tend to associate violence with physical altercations between men, often occurring in public spaces, which may contribute to their lack of recognition of HSB as problematic (Lombard, 2016).

### **Differing Perceptions**

Further evidence about different perceptions between boys and girls around HSB comes from Revealing Reality (2022) in their research on teenagers' experiences of naked image sharing, known as "nudes." In this research, 5,197 pupils aged 14-18 were surveyed, and 22 interviewed in depth to explore their experiences further. Their findings suggest that boys and girls have different experiences of nude image sharing, with girls tending to experience it more negatively. Boys often sent the images in the belief that the recipient would be turned on by them or to prompt girls to send them back. However, seven in ten girls reported that their reaction to receiving unsolicited images was one of disgust, with only 2% saying that they felt flattered or pleased to receive an image that they had not asked for (Revealing Reality, 2022). Meanwhile, Horeck et al.'s (2023) research on gendered differences in teenagers' awareness of sexual violence also suggested differences in perceptions between boys and girls. They found that boys were less likely to recognise the problem of sexual violence against women and were more likely to draw on discourses that appeared to be influenced by the manosphere regarding false rape accusations. Horeck et al. (2023) also found that boys deployed defensive masculinity, adopting a discourse of male victimhood. Whilst roughly equal numbers of girls and boys participated in the Revealing Reality (2022) research overall, a gender breakdown is not provided for the participants in the qualitative interviews. It is notable that the majority of the respondents quoted in the report are girls. To my knowledge, there is not currently

any qualitative research that directly focuses on exploring boys' understandings of their own safety and that of their female peers in relation to peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools. My research seeks to address this gap in the research literature.

Throughout this chapter, I refer to individuals on the basis of their gender. Gender is understood as a sociocultural construct that comprises the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours a given culture associates with a person's biological sex (APA, 2012). Gender identity refers to an individual's internal, psychological sense of their gender, whereas the term "sex" refers to the biological designation typically assigned at birth based on physical characteristics (APA, 2025). The terminology used to describe participants in this chapter aligns with each individual's gender identity as all participants self-identified as male. Therefore, references to "men" or "boys" denote male-identifying individuals, and references to "women" or "girls" denote female-identifying individuals.

### **Aims of this Research**

According to Ofsted (2021), a truly safe school is one where leadership takes a firm stance against sexual harassment and online sexual abuse, ensuring that staff intervene promptly to safeguard students. They identify school safety as a priority, a stance reinforced by the Department for Education's statutory guidance on safeguarding, *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (2023), which emphasises the necessity of a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and harassment in schools. There is increasing recognition that addressing VAWG requires the inclusion of men in prevention efforts (Flood, 2020; Orchowski et al., 2020) and exploring boys' views is crucial for fostering inclusive and effective approaches to school safety. I hope that the findings of this research will contribute to the development of prevention strategies, school policies and a school culture (Firmin, 2019) that fosters a safer school environment for all students. Additionally, I hope that this study may help shape curriculum enhancements, particularly within the context of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). The research questions were:

1. How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on a sense of safety?
2. How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on the safety landscape for girls?
3. What do secondary school boys believe about their ability to promote a safer environment for girls?

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

This qualitative research aimed to explore how boys conceptualise their own safety in schools and that of their female peers I decided that a focus group methodology was appropriate for this study as

recent research has suggested that disclosures of personal or sensitive information may be more likely in a focus group than individual interview context (Guest et al., 2017).

## Materials

Given the sensitivity of the topic under discussion, I decided to use vignettes to prompt discussion in the focus groups, rather than asking the boys to relate their own experiences (see Table 1). Vignettes can be thought of as "short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond," (Finch, 1987, p. 105).

**Table 3: Vignettes Used as Prompts for Focus Groups**

No.	Vignette Text
1	Amy walks down the corridor wearing a short skirt. Raheem makes a sexual gesture at her and laughs as she walks past. Amy complains to the teacher in her next lesson. The teacher tells her she might want to cover up to avoid that kind of attention next time.
2	Other boys at school regularly refer to girls as 'sluts' or 'bitches.' If anyone asks them about it, they say, 'It's just a joke and the girls don't mind' - but there is one teacher who gets really angry if they hear anyone using those words. They'll usually give the person who said it a detention and call their parents about it.
3	It's break-time and a group of boys your age are chatting in the playground. One of them asks how many naked images of girls from school the others have on their phones. He says that he's gotten and everyone is impressed, but one of the boys accuses him of lying. He takes out his phone and starts showing the other boys the pictures to prove it.
4	Bob and Aneeka are your age and have been friends since primary school. Aneeka tells Bob that she has received a naked picture from one of Bob's friends from football. He has asked her to send a naked picture back. She has never met him – he doesn't go to Aneeka and Bob's school – but he got her details through snapchat.
5	Helen is standing with a group of male and female friends at lunch. Everyone is joking around and one of the boys, James, leans over and flips her skirt up so everyone can see her underwear. She was wearing shorts and laughs it off. A teacher comes over and asks what's going on. James says 'nothing Miss, we're just playing around.' Everyone laughs and moves on.

I developed the vignettes to provide an opportunity to discuss each of the three areas of HSB identified in the Ofsted (2021) report on peer-on-peer abuse: i) non-contact forms but face-to-face, ii) non-contact forms online or on social media, and iii) contact forms. I based them on accounts provided by girls in existing research, such as the Women and Equalities Committee Report (2023) into attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings and Ringrose et al.'s (2021) research on teens girls' experiences of image based sexual harassment.

I asked participants how they thought a typical year 10 boy might respond to each of the situations presented. I followed this up with questions (Appendix H) that prompted them to consider different aspects of the situation, including how they thought that the scenario might impact on girls' sense of safety and what they thought could be done to make the situation safer.

### **Procedure**

I conducted the focus groups on site in the school in the South of England that participants were drawn from. Initially, a letter was sent to the parents of all Year 10 pupils explaining the project (Appendix I) and including a consent form (Appendix J) and information sheet (Appendix K). I then recorded a presentation on Healthy Relationships, which also contained information about the project, that was shown to all Year 10 pupils (Appendix E), after which boys were invited to express interest in participating (Appendix D). A convenience sample of Year 10 boys were invited to participate in the research, subject to their parents' consent. Participants were grouped according to friendship groups in order to facilitate a safe and comfortable environment in which to discuss sensitive issues (Renold, 2001, 2007).

At the start of each focus group, participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix L) and asked to assent to participation (Appendix M). I used an introductory activity as an icebreaker (see Appendix F). Data from these tasks was not included in the analysis as this was primarily a rapport building exercise. I then provided participants with a written version of each vignette in turn, also reading them aloud, before facilitating a discussion around each scenario using the question prompts in the focus group guide (Appendix F). Each focus group lasted an hour and a half and was audio recorded, allowing me to subsequently transcribe the discussions. At the end of the focus groups, I asked participants if they had any concerns or if there was anything they wanted to discuss further, before providing them with a de-brief sheet with resources to signpost them to services that are able to support them if required (Appendix N). Participants were allocated pseudonyms at point of transcription.

### **Ethics**

This project was approved by the University of Southampton's ethics committee (ID - 90843.A1: Appendix O). I was particularly mindful of the need to maintain confidentiality within the discussions,

reminding participants not to name other pupils and to keep the discussion private from those not present.

### **Participants and Recruitment**

The participants in this research were secondary school boys in Year 10, aged 14-15 years old. I focused on pupils in this age range because Ringrose et al.'s (2023) research into image based sexual harassment found that 76% of their sample of female pupils who were mostly under 15, had received unsolicited penis images. 70% had been asked to send naked images of themselves. Given this prevalence and the impact that this has on girls' feelings of safety in school (Girl Guides, 2021), it is instructive to begin to develop a deeper understanding of how boys of a similar age understand this. Collecting images has been linked to performative masculinity for boys (Ringrose et al., 2013). The performative aspect of masculinity has been linked to peer pressure (Duckworth & Trautner, 2019), susceptibility to which is thought to peak at around 14 (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Selecting participants in this age range allows for an exploration of the sense that they make of their own experiences and those of girls.

Eighteen boys with parental consent were recruited; one was absent on the day of data collection, resulting in 17 participants. Four focus groups were conducted, each with three to five boys in each. All participants were aged 14 or 15 and identified as heterosexual. Seventy-one percent identified as White British, while 29% came from minoritised ethnic backgrounds (Asian, Asian British, Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups). This reflected the school's demographic overall, though pupils of Black, Mixed Black, or Chinese heritage - who make up 10% of the school population - were not represented.

### **Researcher Positioning**

I am a White British, middle-class woman, and this research formed part of my Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology. My background as a secondary school teacher helped me build rapport with participants and understand how schools address peer-on-peer abuse. I was aware that my gender might influence boys' willingness to speak openly (Bagihole & Cross, 2006), though Allen (2005) suggests that genuine interest and sensitivity can be more impactful than gender in creating a safe space. I aimed to foster an inclusive environment where all views were respected and valued within the focus groups.

Throughout the analysis, I reflected on my subjectivity and role in shaping the research by keeping a reflective journal and discussing insights with my supervisory team. As a feminist and mother of three, my social constructionist epistemology gave me a desire to understand participants' perspectives within both their personal and wider sociocultural contexts. Having recently completed a systematic literature review exploring boys' views about violence against women and girls, the

theories of masculinity that I engaged with during this research inevitably influenced my interpretations and analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In this research I sought to understand participant experiences of, and meaning making around, safety in schools and peer-on-peer abuse. A qualitative methodology is thought to be appropriate for research that seeks to understand views and perspectives (Flick, 2007). I analysed the data according to the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022) as this approach allowed me to consider the ways that meaning is shaped by social interactions and is context dependent, fitting with a relativist ontology (Braun & Clark, 2022). I was interested in considering how participants constructed meaning within their discourse, and the wider social context within which this meaning making was taking place, in keeping with a social constructionist epistemology (Willig, 2013).

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. Phase one involved familiarising myself with the data by repeatedly listening to focus group recordings while transcribing. I logged analytical ideas related to individual items and the dataset as a whole (see Appendix C for an extract from my research journal). In phase two, I identified and coded data relevant to the research questions. Coding began at a semantic level, then shifted to considering more latent, conceptual meanings as my familiarity deepened. Initially inductive, my coding was also shaped by my previous research on masculinity, introducing a deductive element. Phases three to five involved generating, developing, and naming themes. I grouped codes into shared patterns of meaning, then reviewed each theme to assess whether it told "a convincing and compelling story about shared patterns of meanings related to the dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35). Themes were refined and named accordingly. The final phase focused on writing up the analysis, where I aimed to construct an exploratory narrative of participants' experiences.

### **Analysis**

During the analysis, I generated five themes: i) girls are accountable too, ii) teachers protect by being present and responsive, iii) peers offer safety – and risks, iv) boys face risks in school too, and v) boys interpret – and sometimes downplay – impact (see Figure 1: thematic map).

#### **Girls are Accountable Too**

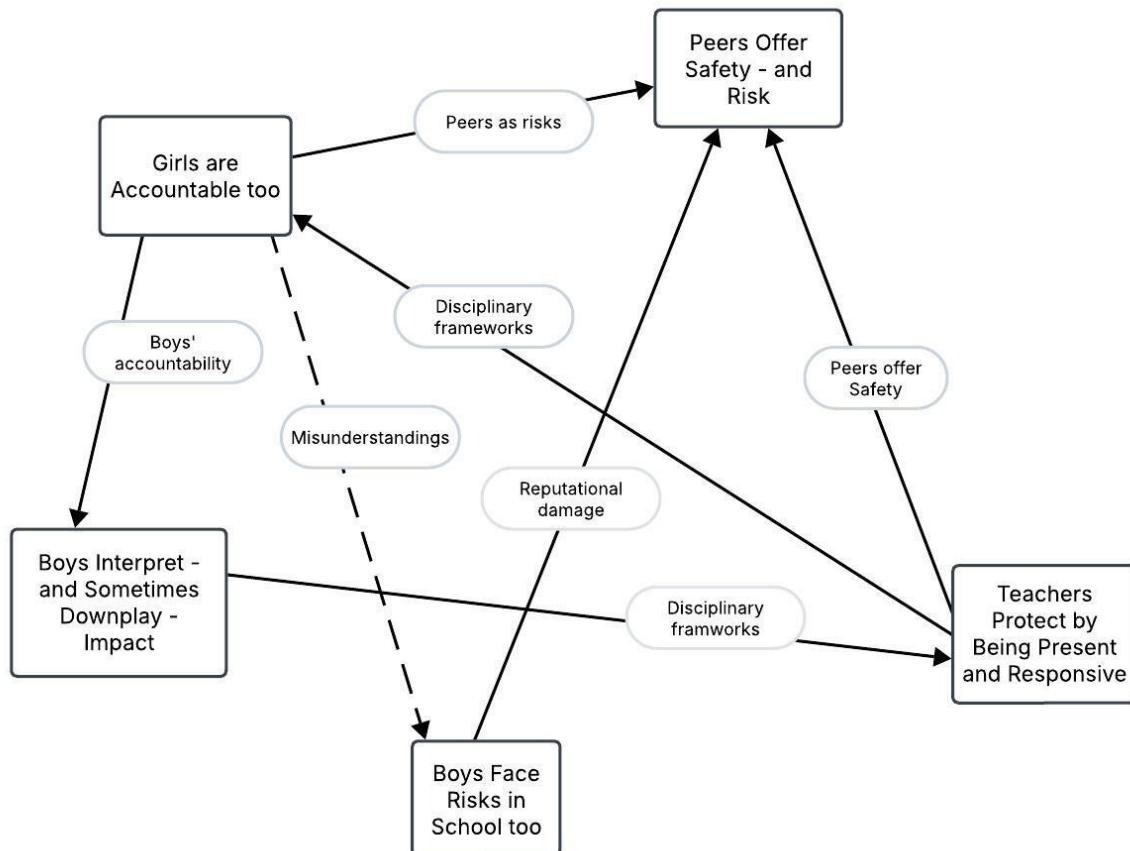
In nearly all of the vignettes, participants felt the girls were partly responsible for what happened, based on their behaviour, even while acknowledging boys' accountability.

#### ***Girls' Accountability***

In their discussions about each of the vignettes, participants called for girls to recognise and accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. This was felt particularly strongly with

regard to the length of girls' skirts, where there was near universal agreement that choosing to wear a short skirt inherently invited attention: *"if you're dressing in a certain way, you've got to be prepared for the comments that come with that"* (Steve, Transcript (T) 4).

**Figure 3: Thematic Map**



Girls' agency was recognised in other vignettes too, often to highlight their culpability. For example, Zane and Charlie discussed vignette three:

*Zane: So, I think they [the girls who sent the images originally] would be a bit embarrassed but I think at some point, like they, they sent them themselves, they have to just come to a ... I can't think what the phrase is, but they have to get to grips with it.*

*Charlie: They have to realise that they're making their own downfall. (T3)*

Similarly, when, in vignette four, Aneeka receives an unsolicited naked image, it is often conceptualised by participants as her fault: *"like obviously she had to add him back [on Snapchat] as well"* (Leo, T1). In keeping with other participants, Leo attributes blame to Aneeka for adding someone she did not know to her contacts list, even though the vignette states that the image was from a friend of her best friend, whom she might reasonably be expected to at least know of, prior to

adding them. Similarly, in vignette two, which depicts sexist name calling, there was a feeling, from some participants, that the acceptability of using the term "slut" may depend on perceptions of the girl's behaviour, as this exchange between Steve and Trevor demonstrates:

*Steve: I think context is ... it sounds stupid, but context is necessary, cause ... if it's a girl who's consistently rude to a certain group of boys, and is being passed around a lot, and that type of stuff, it's not valid, but it's an easy thing to just say to someone who is rude to you.*

*Trevor: Some girls kind of ask for it. (T4)*

The boys here suggest that if the girl is perceived by boys around her to be acting in a promiscuous way, then she may deserve the label of "slut." In insisting that girls accept accountability for their actions, and more specifically, for the way that their actions are perceived by the boys around them, participants could also be interpreted as, to an extent, excusing the boys in each of the scenarios for some of the responsibility for their actions. Interestingly, the only scenario where none of the participants attributed any accountability to the girl for what happened was scenario five. It may be that the physical nature of the incident in this case enables it to be more readily identified as abuse by the boys.

Nonetheless, some participants problematised the consequences of these actions. For example, some recognised that girls should be able to dress how they want: "*Because there's also, like freedom of, you wanna dress how you wanna dress*" (Graeme, T4). Similarly, there was a recognition by some that image sharing might be legitimate within a relationship: "*I think if the girl sent them to the boy, and they're in, like, a relationship, then it's fine and it's only him with it*" (Reid, T3). However, the majority of participants called on girls to accept that certain actions have inevitable consequences: "*if you're sending that to a boy, a teenage boy, then you are, within minutes of them opening it, it's already around the whole school, realistically*" (Steve, T4).

### ***Boys' Accountability***

Whilst participants identified ways in which girls should accept accountability for their actions, they also frequently expressed their shock and outrage at the actions of the boys in the vignettes. Often, their initial response on first hearing a vignette would be to deny that such a thing would happen at their school, for example, Owen's response to vignette four: "*That has never happened in our year at school*" (T2). Often, in the discussions that then followed the initial shock and outright denial, references would be made to examples of times when similar incidents *had* occurred in their year at school or when they had heard of similar incidents in other local schools. It is possible that participants initially wanted to distance themselves from the boys who are portrayed in the vignettes by denying any recognition of these scenarios.

Most participants viewed some male actions in the vignettes as unacceptable and showed awareness of their impact on the girls involved. This exchange, about vignette two, is illustrative:

*Owen: Well, they're being dehumanised.*

*Ben: Objectified in a way.*

*Owen: They're being reduced to terms rather than just their name,*

*Sam: It's like they're just getting based off of what they look like. (T2)*

The dehumanising impact of sexist name calling is recognised here by Owen, with other participants also problematising the behaviour. Linked to this was the way that most participants expressed the view that boys had a responsibility to moderate their actions, by either inhibiting their behaviour to ensure safety, or by proactively taking action to resolve situations. With regards to vignette one, Toby suggests: “[Raheem] could just keep his thoughts to himself” (T3), meeting with broad agreement from the rest of the group. There is an acknowledgement here that moderation may be required, perhaps suggesting that boys are also accountable for their behaviour. There is an inherent recognition of the discomfort that this gesture has induced for Amy and of her right to be free from harassment, which depends on boys being accountable for their actions. The assertion that some actions were clearly unacceptable was particularly unambiguous when it came to vignette five. Skirt flipping was considered to be equivalent to physical violence: “It's like, that's like physically punching someone and then and saying it's a joke, but that's just not a joke” (Stuart, T4).

### **Teachers Protect by being Present and Responsive**

Participants viewed teachers as a key protective factor in school, noting both their direct interactions with pupils and their role in creating and maintaining a safety-supportive school system.

#### ***Interactional Role of Teachers***

When discussing the vignettes focused on situations that happen in public spaces in schools (vignettes one, two and five), participants referred to the role that teachers have in securing safety for pupils. In part, teachers are conceptualised as having a protective role in the way that they respond to incidents, as evidenced by Leo in his reflections on the teacher in vignette one, who tells Amy that she might want to cover up to avoid sexual gestures being made by other pupils in future:

*Leo: I feel like the teacher was just a bit harsh, so just like, the point he was getting to, like, I get what he was saying but it was a bit harsh.*

*Interviewer: What do you mean harsh?*

*Leo: Just a bit like, inappropriate of them to say something like that. (T1)*

Leo appears to feel that the teacher has not fulfilled their duty, since by judging Amy's behaviour, they have behaved in an inappropriate manner. This could be interpreted as suggesting that the teacher should, at the very least, be impartial. Leo's attribution of the teacher's behaviour as "harsh" perhaps suggests a belief that the teacher should have gone further and provided emotional support to a pupil who was clearly aggrieved. For Zane, it is the teacher's lack of restorative intervention in this situation that is problematised: "*because if you've just said cover up, that's not really fixing the issue*" (T3).

The role of teachers in intervening and resolving disputes between pupils is further highlighted by their expected investigative role, whereby participants expected that they would actively uncover the truth behind events. There was widespread condemnation amongst participants for the behaviour of the teacher in vignette five, who accepts James' characterisation of the skirt flipping incident as "just playing around." Participants universally felt that a stronger response was called for, with Max summing this up:

*Max: And with the teacher, even if it, like let's say it wasn't a joke, James is obviously going to cover himself, so he shouldn't have took [sic]...like if you saw some guy robbing a bank and you said 'yo, are you robbing a bank?' They're probably not going to just say 'yeah.' So, she probably should have talked to everyone else in the group and not just James. (T1)*

Max positions the teacher as similar to a police officer in their protective function, suggesting that sometimes this will require them to adopt a proactive approach.

The educative role of teachers was also conceptualised as a component of their protective function. The impact of this educative role was evident in the boys' knowledge of the legal framework around situations presented in the vignettes. This was particularly clear in relation to vignette three, which led to discussions around girls sending nudes. In each focus group, participants were clear that sending or receiving nudes was illegal as Year 10 girls are under the legal age of consent. The role of teachers in disciplining pupils is considered below, but participants also suggested that education should come before punishment. For example, a pupil who had used the word "slut" should first be educated on its meaning before receiving a punishment if they used it again. However, a danger inherent in the role of teachers here was highlighted by Owen:

*Because now we're bombarded with information about like, gay rights and feminism, that kind of thing. So, people immediately go 'OK, well, if that's what the school are telling me is OK, I'm going to do the opposite.' (T2)*

Owen suggests that, sometimes, teachers' attempts to create a safer environment through education can backfire and can actually lead to discriminatory behaviour in rebellion against what is perceived to be the viewpoint of the school.

### Systemic Framework

Participants repeatedly referred to the systemic framework within school that ensures pupil safety, with teachers seen as both its architects and guardians. Included within this were school uniform and disciplinary policies that support all pupils to understand what is expected of them and allow teachers to hold pupils who infringe them to account. When I asked participants in one focus group how they thought that sexist name calling could be prevented in schools, they suggested that harsher sanctions would make the behaviour less likely to occur:

*Steve: I think harder sanctions if you want it to stop this.*

*Stuart: Yeah, stricken [sic] up on things like that, I think. And then people won't do it.*

*Steve: Make it clear that it's not acceptable.*

*Trevor: Yeah, yeah. Make it clear that you're not gonna tolerate that behaviour in school. Like give them, I mean, if they were to say something that bad, say like maybe two days suspension, or something? (T4)*

Their faith in the power of sanctions to act as a deterrent could be viewed as indicative of their own adherence to the rules. Additionally, some participants felt that these sanctions were not always applied fairly. Several participants suggested that uniform policies were applied less strictly to girls than to boys, with Trevor going further and suggesting that boys generally received less favourable treatment from teachers:

*some girls think that they can get away with absolutely everything because they know that the school are like tough on boys and not as tough on girls and they use that as a chance to, well, an opportunity to do what they want really. (T2)*

Interestingly, participants rarely conceptualised a role for teachers in either of the vignettes that involved naked image sharing. These actions are more private in nature, taking place in a sphere that boys perhaps considered to be beyond the influence of teachers. Instead, image sharing was viewed as being governed by legal frameworks. There was a recognition that reporting such incidents to teachers could bring shame and embarrassment. Indeed, the limits to teachers' ability to protect pupils in the online space was considered by Owen with regards to sexist language, when he noted that:

*Take Andrew Tate, he's the kind of person to use that kind of like language. And obviously he was popular. His demographic was like men between 13 and 25 or whatever. And we fall bang in the middle of that. So if one boy in the school watches that kind of thing, then thirty to forty more are watching that kind of thing. Yeah, you're justified by people online. That's really hard for the school to actually control because they don't control your phone. They don't have control over what you see online. (T2)*

### **Peers Offer Safety – and Risk**

Participants often described peers as both protective, through their presence and actions, and potentially problematic, through their ability to negatively influence behaviour.

#### ***Peers Offer Safety***

Peers were seen as protective, with participants noting that their interpretations were often shaped by the social status or popularity of those involved:

*It depends who the boy is, because if it's a really popular boy, they'll be like, 'Oh, that's so gross.' And then everyone will move on with life. But if it's some random kid, it's actually quite likely that people will blow it right out of proportion like, "oh, you're so weird." (Owen, T2)*

Popularity here is seen as a protective force against reputational damage, demonstrating the power of peers in shaping the narrative around situations within school.

Intervention on behalf of friends was another way in which peers might offer a protective function in certain circumstances. Generally, participants appeared to feel that intervening was not advisable: *"It's probably best not to get myself involved because I could get into trouble"* (Theo, T2). However, intervention might be considered where friends were involved, with Sam summing this up: *"It all depends how close they are"* (T2). However, it was notable that in discussions around vignette four, intervention was almost considered to be a social responsibility, with the majority of participants suggesting that Bob should talk to his friend and make clear that it was not acceptable to send a naked image to Aneeka. Perhaps it is Bob's role as the unintended intermediary between his two friends that makes his role so salient here, demonstrating the strength of the protective function ascribed to friends.

#### ***Peers as Risks***

Whilst the positive aspects of peer relations were emphasised by participants, there was also an awareness of the potential impact that wanting to fit in with peers might have on behaviour. For example, during a discussion about the length of girls' skirts, one participant, perceptively, noted that girls may shorten the length of their skirts: *"not to stand out but to fit in"* (Sam, T2). He goes onto explain that this is more likely amongst less popular girls: *"who are kind of pushed to the side by a popular group and they do it to fit in"* (Sam, T2). In his explanation here, Sam recognises both the strength of the desire to fit in and also the way that this might impact on how young people behave around each other. If, as suggested above, having peers provides protection from challenge and potential support when challenges arise, it is perhaps not surprising that being part of a group is perceived as being so important to the teenagers in this study.

However, participants also recognised that there is a vulnerability that comes with this. This was demonstrated particularly clearly in participants' responses to vignette five, when they discussed the way that the girl in this situation, Helen, responded to the skirt flipping. In the vignette, she "laughs it off," and participants across all focus groups wondered about the veracity of this response:

*Steve: It says she laughs it off, but she might have been like...*

*Stuart: She might have not felt comfortable.*

*Steve: She might have felt pressured into laughing. (T4)*

The suggestion here appears to be that it would be difficult for Helen to express her true feelings about what had happened when her peers were laughing. In discussing peer responses, participants repeatedly emphasised the difficulty of challenging the peer group, even when discussing situations where an individual might legitimately feel that their personal safety had been compromised.

In addition, there were examples within the discussions of peers influencing each other in what might be considered both positive and negative ways. During a discussion about vignette three, the participants in one of the focus groups discussed the moral implications of the boy in the vignette sharing naked images of girls from school with his friends. Participants discussed whether the blame should lie with the girl who sent the image or the boy who shared them:

*Stuart: [The girl] shouldn't be sending them [naked images]*

*Graeme: [The boy] shouldn't be showing them either, that's got to be clear.*

*Trevor: Even if the boy was to send it round [to his friends], if you [the girl] didn't send them in the first place, it wouldn't have happened.*

*Steve: Yeah, but sending it around is a lot.*

*Graeme: Yeah.*

*Trevor: I know, but still, that wouldn't happen if they didn't send it.*

*Graeme: Yeah, you're right, you're right, but I still think there's things ... (T4)*

Prior to this part of the exchange, Graeme had argued particularly strongly that the boy was in the wrong for sharing the images. It is interesting that in the face of Trevor's insistence that the girl should not have sent the image initially, Graeme appears to concede this point to Trevor. Graeme does not finish his sentence here and does not re-join the conversation until the discussion of the next vignette. As the discussion continued, Steve joined Trevor in insisting that the girl take responsibility for her part in sending the pictures in the first place. It appeared that the momentum of the conversation has swung in Trevor's favour and Graeme's silence may suggest he began to conform to the majority view.

A similar dynamic is evident during a different focus group discussion, whilst discussing vignette four. During the discussion, Sam appeared to be certain Aneeka should block the image and put the incident behind her. Furthermore, he expresses uncertainty about whether Bob should tell an adult about what has happened:

*Sam: ... Bob could be, like, stuck in the middle of it. Like he knows it's, wrong from [his friend] but he also knows it's wrong for him to backstab [his friend] in a way.*

*Owen: I still think there's a line, though. I think if I were Bob, I would still, if this was you, for example, who did it, not saying you'd do that, but I don't think I could live with myself if I didn't report that, because that's so... [uncomfortable laugh] odd.*

*Researcher: Or maybe, is there anything that Bob could do other than just reporting it?*

*Sam: Probably just stay out of the way. (T2)*

Sam maintains that Bob should not get involved in the situation. However, when Owen goes onto say, *"But you're ignoring a sex crime then and that makes you a criminal,"* the other participants in the group, except Sam, agree with him, taking turns to explain why. On hearing their arguments, Sam eventually concedes: *"Yeah, you want to keep it private, but you can't keep it private."* Both this exchange and the one above illustrate how discussions with peers can shape and influence opinions, or at the very least, how individuals may moderate the views that they will express in the presence of their peers.

The perceived role of peers in influencing behaviour and shaping narratives also hints at the potential power of peer relationships within the school setting. When discussing the difficulties associated with peer intervention, Ben references the power of peer influence:

*Ben: You just got to make sure the majority is doing the right thing because everybody's going to follow the majority.*

*Researcher: So, it's kind of trying to somehow get everyone on side?*

*Ben: If you like flip a few people at a time eventually there will be a majority. (T2)*

Whilst Ben offers social conformity as a potential force for good, the inherent counterpoint to his argument here is that if everyone is doing the wrong thing, that may also engender social conformity amongst peers. This view is also inherent in the reluctance expressed by participants about involving themselves in situations that do not directly impact on them, suggesting that peer influence can inhibit intervention and action as well as promote it.

### **Boys Face Risks in School Too**

Participants identified risks for boys in the vignettes, including misconceptions, false accusations, and reputational damage.

### ***Misconceptions***

When considering the situations presented in the vignettes, participants frequently worried that the boys' intentions in the scenarios might have been misconstrued. For example, whilst discussing vignette one, Toby wondered about Raheem's intent:

*Toby: Yeah. If maybe they [Raheem] weren't doing it like, as in, they were doing it to someone else and then the girl thought that they were doing it at her, and then the teacher told someone else, and then it escalated. (T3)*

Toby questions whether the gesture has been misunderstood as being malicious where in fact it may have been a joke between friends. He also demonstrates awareness of how quickly such incidents can gain momentum, highlighting a further risk for boys. Toby goes on to explain that the more times Amy's understanding of what happened is repeated by teachers, the harder it becomes for Raheem to correct the narrative: "*there's nothing he can do, because the girl explained her story so many times already*" (Toby, T3). There is, perhaps, a suggestion inherent here of girls' narratives being believed more readily than those of boys.

### ***Reputational Damage***

The speed with which incidents can gain momentum links to the potential risk of reputational damage identified by participants across each of the scenarios. This was viewed as having potential to manifest at both a personal level and more broadly at a community level, damaging the reputation of all boys. At a personal level, participants felt that one action could have far reaching consequences. In their discussion about vignette three, Owen and Sam considered the potential wider reputational implications for the boy:

*Owen: Also rumours will spread, like, if someone heard that after, "oh, I heard he has a whole terabyte of it [naked images of girls] on his computer at home."*

*Sam: It will turn into, it will be like, something really small and it'll be massive in a week's time, it'd be like, OK, people will be taking this tiny little, in a way like, an ant, and turned it into like, a giant. (T2)*

Both Owen and Sam suggest that this scenario could result in the boy in question getting a reputation beyond what the incident might reasonably warrant. However, it is interesting that Sam also appears to minimise the impact of the initial image sharing, by describing it as "really small" and equivalent to an "ant." He appears to be foregrounding a narrative whereby the boy is the victim in this scenario, suffering from reputational damage that is akin to a "giant" for a minor indiscretion. In doing so, he inherently minimises the impact of the scenario on the girls whose images are shared.

Some participants also worried about contagion to the reputation of all boys. Theo sums this up when discussing the use of sexist language in vignette two: "*It's back, to like, the stereotype for*

*the rest of the boys as well, because it says 'other boys', which means that there are other boys that don't [use sexist language], and so [other people] might think that they are doing it as well" (Theo, T2).* Additionally, participants demonstrated worries about the permanent digital record that would be created in situations that had an online component and the impact that this might have on the future reputation of both the girls and boys in these scenarios.

### ***False Accusations***

There appeared to be an awareness amongst many participants about the risk of false accusations, with this referenced both directly and indirectly. Whilst discussing each of the scenarios, participants across the focus groups emphasised the importance of fact checking and verifying events to ensure that blame was not unfairly attributed. Ryan explains the danger for boys here: *"if he didn't do it, then you know it's just a problem, 'cause then, like, people can say they did that and there's no proof"* (T1). There was also a strong feeling from some participants in particular that girls were more likely to be treated with leniency than boys within the situations described in the scenarios. Trevor demonstrates this as he explains his belief that girls are not held to account in the same way, which others in his group readily agree with, as seen in the Peers As Risks section. In a different focus group, Sam appears to express a frustration with girls who amplify situations by repeatedly revisiting boys' actions:

*Yeah, but she can't also drag it out. It's like she's told everyone once. It's like if someone says anything, she can then bring it up again. But it's not like she can bring it up like every thirty seconds, if that makes sense." (T2)*

Whilst Sam recognises that the girl's initial comments may be based in truth, he also advocates for the right of boys to be able to move on from indiscretions and for them to be forgotten.

### ***Boys Interpret - and Sometimes Downplay - Impact***

Participants considered the impact of the vignettes on the girls, with some minimising the impact of the situations presented and others linking them to girls' sense of self-worth.

#### ***Minimising Impact***

Sometimes, in participants' discussions, there appeared to be something of a disconnect between their recognition of actions as being wrong and their understanding of the impact of those actions. Two vignettes in particular seemed to highlight this dichotomy, vignette four and vignette two. For example, in vignette four, whilst participants generally recognised that the boy who sent the message should not have done so, they also seemed keen to minimise the impact on Aneeka. The suggestion that she should block the sender and move on was made across the focus groups, with Leo's comment summing this up: *"So just delete him. You know, I mean, what else can you really do*

*about it? Like, sure it's, weird, like I mean, I doubt it'd be traumatising*” (Leo, T1). The potential emotional impact of receiving unwanted sexualised images does not appear to be recognised by participants in comments like this. Participants’ casual attitude to the receipt of an unwanted image by Aneeka is particularly striking when contrasted with their attitudes to the receipt of naked images by the boy in vignette three. When discussing vignette three, participants speculated about how the images initially came to be on the boy’s phone, broadly condemning the girls who sent them, appealing to both the illegality of sending such images and also the morality: “*At this age, I just don't think we should be sending this kind of stuff*” (Stuart, T3). However, in vignette four, where the naked image is sent by a boy, only one participant mentions that it might be illegal and participants were less likely to express concerns about morality. This may be linked to their understanding of impact. Participants appear to understand what the implications of having a naked image of a girl their age on their phone might be as this is prescribed by law and, one assumes, instilled in them through their social interactions at school and home. They do not appear to apply the same logic to receipt of naked images by girls.

As explored under the accountability theme, some participants recognised the impact of sexist language in vignette two, calling for boys to moderate their actions. However, at other points in the discussion around this vignette, participants appeared to minimise the impact of sexist name calling: “*I mean it's a word like, it makes them feel upset, but when it comes down to it, it's just a word*” (Max, T1). The emotional impact of sexist name calling is partially recognised here by Max but then dismissed as unfounded due to the limited impact of words. In the vignette, the boys who are using sexist language tell their teacher that it is ‘just a joke’ and participants readily accepted this: “*I mean, if the girls think it's a joke as well, then it's just a joke. They shouldn't deep it*” (Ryan, T1). Whilst participants readily identified the potential impact of peer pressure on preventing Helen in vignette five from revealing her true feelings, none of the participants considered that a similar mechanism could prevent the girls experiencing sexist name calling from speaking out.

When asked whether sexist name calling would impact on girls’ sense of safety in school, only one participant, Jude, felt that it might have an impact on this:

*Jude: [Sexist name calling might make girls feel] uncomfortable or something, like, to not feel safe.*

*Charlie: I don't think they would be, feel unsafe, but they probably wouldn't have the most enjoyable time.*

*Jude: They might not have any self-respect for them because if they're hearing that all the time, then they're gonna, not think good of themselves. They might not do well in school.*

*Toby: Yeah, they're gonna think they're not worth anything.*

*Researcher: OK. So you think it's going to impact on their self-esteem, but it's not necessarily, does everyone agree, that it's not going to be really a safety thing?*

*Charlie: Yeah.*

*Jude: Yeah, more of like a mental health thing.*

*Toby: Mental well-being. (T3)*

Whilst Jude initially suggests that girls' sense of safety may be impacted by name calling, this is dismissed by other participants who feel that this is more likely to impact girls' self-esteem and mental health than their feelings of safety. They do not appear to consider a mental health impact to be related to safety.

### ***Interpreting Impact***

Jude and Toby's comments, in the extract above, highlight another interesting aspect of some participants' responses to the vignettes. When participants acknowledged that the situations depicted in the vignettes could have an internal impact on girls, they sometimes framed this in terms of the negative impact that this might have on their self-image. Jude suggests, for example, that girls who hear sexist language all the time are "*gonna, not think good of themselves*," with Toby agreeing that "*they're gonna think they're not worth anything*" (T3). Similar attitudes were expressed by these participants in relation to female nudes being leaked: "*[when everyone sees the images] girls might think low of themselves*" (Jude, T3). In another focus group, while they were discussing how Helen might respond to having her skirt flipped up, Steve suggested that the situation was so serious that Helen might need support to understand the impact of it: "*[If I was the teacher in this vignette] I would just tell her, really try and drill it into that it's not alright, that it's not alright and to be honest about it, cause if like any sign of her not liking it, even if it's, 'I don't mind it', that's still not a sign*" (Steve, T4). Whilst this response is clearly motivated by a desire to ensure that Helen is supported by the teacher, it could also be interpreted as being rooted in a concern that she may have internalised a negative sense of her own worth to the point where she needs support to recognise the severity of James' actions.

### **Discussion**

This research set out to answer three research questions:

1. How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on a sense of safety?
2. How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on the safety landscape for girls?
3. What do secondary school boys believe about their ability to promote a safer environment for girls?

It explored boys' views on their own and girls' safety with a focus on peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools. Participants saw teachers and peers as key to safety, while also believing girls should take

responsibility for their actions. They expressed concerns about false accusations and misunderstandings, demonstrating awareness of their potential impact on boys' reputations.

### **How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on a sense of safety?**

Participants' views of the role for teachers in school align with previous findings indicating that strong, positive relationships between school staff and students play a crucial role in promoting student wellbeing (Danby & Hamilton, 2016; Murray-Harvey, 2010). This also underscores how influential staff can be in creating and sustaining the overall ethos of a school. Although teachers may, often unintentionally, contribute to environments where VAWG becomes normalised (Firmin, 2019), this research suggests that they also have the potential to act as key agents of change in reshaping school culture.

Participants also identified an important educative role for teachers, which they linked to the disciplinary framework within schools. This was demonstrated in the differing perceptions towards sending naked images, whereby greater blame was attributed to girls who sent naked images than to boys. School curricula and messaging within schools currently focus on the legality of sending naked images under 18 years old and on the loss of control of images after they are sent (Firmin, 2019; Woodley et al., 2024) - messages clearly absorbed by participants. Government and school policy has focused on the assumption that girls are primarily responsible for the taking and sharing of naked images, while boys' role in the creation and sending of often unwanted images is ignored (Ringrose et al., 2021). Similarly, little attention is paid to the onwards sharing of images (Setty, 2019). The sexual double standard that this creates was reflected in the victim blaming attitudes of some participants who attributed blame to the girls who sent images, whilst minimising the role of the boy who shared them. This is also reflected in their minimisation of blame for the boy who sent an unsolicited penis image. The influence participants attributed to teachers in shaping a systemic framework for safety suggests teachers could play a role in influencing pupil behaviour.

However, Owen's caution about potential rebellion against teacher-led messaging on rights and equality is important. Messaging around image sharing often centres on prohibition (Firmin, 2019; Woodley et al., 2024), which may trigger psychological reactance in some boys. Psychological reactance theory (PRT: Brehm, 1966) suggests that reactance is activated when individuals feel that their free behaviours or autonomy are threatened or eliminated. Reactance is the motivational pull to restore one's freedom, which can be done by engaging in the restricted behaviour (direct restoration) or seeing others engage in the behaviour (indirect restoration: Brehm, 1966). Cognitively, reactance can lead individuals to dismiss or devalue the source of the threat, place greater importance on the freedom that has been limited, or reduce the appeal of the alternative

being imposed (Steindl et al., 2015). The desire of some participants to minimise the harm caused by boys in the scenarios, or to distance themselves from the boys in the scenarios, may be informed by a similar mechanism. Feelings of disenfranchisement that may arise for boys during discussion around rights and equality can be exploited by influencers in the manosphere to create narratives of male loss of power and victimhood (Haslop et al., 2024).

Here it may be useful to consider participants' narratives around the role of peers. The focus groups demonstrated the power of discussions amongst peers in providing a forum for differing views to be aired and potentially for shifts in understanding to occur (Horeck et al., 2023). It may be that discussions amongst peers are less likely to be perceived as impacting on autonomy, particularly as these discussions are less likely to focus on prohibitions and other absolutes so are less likely to trigger reactance (Rains & Turner, 2007).

The majority of the themes provided meaningful insight into how boys conceptualise safety in school. In the theme "Girls Are Accountable Too", and particularly the sub-theme, "Boys' Accountability," participants recognised that accountability lies not only with girls but also with boys, particularly in behaviours that may undermine girls' sense of safety. The theme "Teachers Protect by Being Present and Responsive" highlighted the importance of teachers' presence and responsiveness, as well as the consistency and fairness with which school rules are applied. At the same time, under the theme "Peers Offer Safety – and Risk," peers emerged as both a potential source of protection and a risk, underscoring the complexity of navigating social dynamics. Finally, under the theme "Boys Face Risks in School Too," participants' reflections also pointed to boys' own concerns about safety, including the reputational risks associated with accusations or misunderstandings. Taken together, these insights illustrate the nuanced ways in which boys perceive both threats to safety and the mechanisms through which safety might be maintained.

### **How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on the safety landscape for girls?**

Participants called on girls to take responsibility for their actions, for example, by being aware of the consequences of wearing revealing clothing. The dehumanising consequences of the sexual objectification of women on the basis of their clothing is well documented (Awasthi, 2017), with Bernard et al.'s (2015) research suggesting that it increases victim blaming in rape cases. Participants' apparent conformity to this widely held social view feels particularly troubling with current celebrity trends for 'naked dresses' (Thomson, 2025) and its inevitable influence on high street fashion, particularly in light of research that demonstrates that women entirely reject the idea that they are aiming at seduction in their fashion choices (Moor, 2013).

However, the call for girls to be held accountable for their actions was not limited to their choice of clothing. In all of the vignettes, except vignette five, participants identified ways in which girls could be seen as having done something to deserve the abuse inflicted on them. It may be that this results from a form of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) whereby participants recognise that the boys in the scenarios are acting in a way that is inconsistent with their beliefs. Nonetheless, because they identify with them as fellow adolescent boys, they feel compelled to find ways minimise the dissonance they experience when being asked about their actions by justifying their behaviour. This may also go some way to explaining some participants' focus on the impact of the scenarios on girls' self-worth rather than recognising the full extent of the psychological impact.

Alternatively, it may be that participants did not fully recognise the abusive nature of the boys' actions in the vignette. Vignette five, skirt flipping, was most clearly recognised as abusive. Meanwhile, in vignettes depicting abuse of a more psychological nature, some participants struggled to recognise this as abusive. This is in keeping with research that suggests that physical violence is more readily recognised by adolescents than psychological abuse (Lombard, 2016; McCarry, 2010b). In addition, it has been suggested that boys generally have less awareness and understanding of the scale and scope of sexual abuse (Horeck et al., 2023; Ofsted, 2021). This research question is addressed in the analysis across most of the themes. The theme "Girls are Accountable Too" contributes to an understanding of how participants placed considerable responsibility on girls for managing their own safety. This links to the theme "Boys Interpret – and Sometimes Downplay – Risks," which suggests that participants sometimes downplay the role of boys' behaviour. While participants acknowledged the influence of both teachers and peers in shaping the safety landscape, in the themes "Teachers Protect by Being Present and Responsive" and "Peers Offer Safety – and Risk", their accounts suggest a more limited recognition of the emotional and psychological impacts of abuse compared to physical acts. Overall, participants appeared to hold a partial and sometimes contradictory understanding of girls' safety, shaped by prevailing social norms and their own positioning as adolescent boys.

### **What do secondary school boys believe about their ability to promote a safer environment for girls?**

Participants saw a role for boys in making schools safer for girls by moderating their behaviour and intervening to protecting peers. However, some worried about false accusations and unfair blame, echoing male victimhood narratives espoused in the manosphere, where men attempt to reclaim hegemonic gender stability by adopting the mantle of victimhood (Banet-Weiser, 2021). While this study did not reveal extreme examples of such attitudes, the findings lend support to concerns about manosphere discourses permeating school environments (Haslop et al., 2024; Over

et al., 2025), highlighting the need for further research in this area. The data also suggest boys may feel a broader sense of nervousness or uncertainty when navigating these topics.

This research question is answered most fully by the theme "Girls Are Accountable Too", particularly through the sub-theme "Boys' Accountability". In this sub-theme, participants outlined their understanding of how boys can promote a safer environment for girls by moderating their behaviour. The theme "Teachers Protect by Being Present and Responsive" illustrates how participants viewed teachers as central to securing safety for both boys and girls, reflecting the importance they placed on teachers' presence, consistency, and responsiveness. Finally, the theme "Peers Offer Safety – and Risk" points to the dual role of peers, both as a source of protection and as a potential barrier to girls expressing when they feel unsafe. This question is addressed with less depth across the analysis, which may be a reflection of participants' less comprehensive understanding of the impact of certain actions, such as sexist name-calling, meaning that they do not associate this with safety. Their inclination to assign responsibility to girls for their actions may lead them to overlook boys' role in these actions, which could explain why they do not identify this as an area where boys might enhance girls' safety.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

The use of focus groups and vignettes in this study led to rich discussions amongst participants and appeared to minimise power differences between myself as the researcher and my participants. Situational and contextual factors are important to perceptions of violence against women and girls (Edwards et al., 2024) and the use of vignettes enabled me to explore this in a way that allowed my participants to feel comfortable. The vignettes also allowed me to explore participants' understanding of situations that girls have identified in research as making them feel unsafe in schools. However, the use of vignettes may also have placed a constraint on my ability to develop a more detailed understanding of how the boys in this study conceptualised a sense of their own safety in schools by encouraging responses that related solely to a potentially narrower conception of peer-on-peer abuse. Research by Ofsted (2021) suggests that boys may consider other aspects of school life, such as racism or homophobic abuse, to be more salient to them when they consider peer-on-peer abuse. This limitation could perhaps be addressed in future through a more participatory approach to the research design. Participatory approaches seek to involve individuals by valuing their voices and knowledge in identifying and addressing the challenges and opportunities that affect them and their communities (Levac et al., 2019). As such, involving them in the design of the vignettes and the prompt questions used to promote discussion after the vignettes is suggested as a potential avenue to explore in future research on this topic.

The difficulty of recruiting adolescent boys to qualitative research studies is well documented (Claussen, 2018). To address this, I visited Year 10 tutor groups and spoke directly to pupils. In tutor

groups where one or two boys expressed an interest in participating, others would inevitably follow, which made it easy to facilitate friendship groups within focus groups. Given the significance that participants ascribed to peer relationships, this was a greater strength of the study than anticipated. However, in some tutor groups, no boys volunteered, highlighting the need for further research to explore factors that encourage participation. Similarly, in one focus group, there was a participant who chose to stay silent throughout the course of the discussion about the vignettes. There may have been a number of reasons for this, including potentially an awareness that their views may not have been socially acceptable to express openly. Research suggests all-male groups can be spaces to perform masculinity (Allen, 2005), raising the question of whether responses would differ in mixed-gender settings. Similarly, whilst the use of focus groups was felt to be beneficial in this study because it promoted more open discussion and a reduction in the power differential between myself and the participants, it would be interesting to explore whether boys' responses would differ in individual interviews. Both are suggested as areas for future study.

Participants came from a school in the South of England, in a relatively affluent area. While they were ethnically representative of the school's overall population, I did not collect socio-economic data, and the potential impact of intersecting identity factors on the data was not explored in detail. Future research should include boys from diverse racial, ethnic, socio-economic, gender, and sexuality backgrounds to capture a wider range of perspectives. Similarly, it was beyond the remit of this research to consider the experiences of pupils with diverse gender and sexuality identities, which would also be interesting for future research.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

The influence that participants ascribe to teachers in creating an environment that enables safety within schools, suggests an important role for school staff in increasing boys' understanding of the scope and impact of peer-on-peer abuse, particularly where actions may have a more psychological impact. This research suggests that schools should develop age-appropriate Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curricula which recognise that adolescents are making sense of gender and cultural norms and that these influence and impact on their views (Setty, 2024). As such, adolescents should be supported to critically engage with these in a way that allows them to question and deconstruct assumptions that promote shaming (Albury, 2017). My research suggests that this should include creating opportunities for discussions amongst adolescent boys that recognise their legitimate concerns (Horeck et al., 2023), whilst allowing them to explore their views in a non-threatening way. It is important that teachers feel competent in facilitating these discussions, which may be complex and sensitive. There may be a need for improved teacher training in this area (Setty, 2024).

Educational Psychologists (EPs) play a key role in supporting young people's emotional and social wellbeing (Cline et al., 2015). Peer-on-peer sexual abuse significantly impacts girls' wellbeing in

schools (Mendes et al., 2022; Ringrose et al., 2013), and EPs are well positioned to advise schools on systemic changes that foster safer environments. They can help schools develop non-shaming strategies to address abuse and advise on the development of RSE curricula. Delivery of curricula such as this can be difficult and discomforting work for teachers (Keddie, 2022) and EPs could offer reflective supervision for teachers (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013) to support them in managing these feelings. They can also support schools in reviewing child protection policies and school policy frameworks to ensure that school environments are openly hostile to HSB (Firmin, 2019), acting as a critical friend to school staff, helping them to reflect on how their actions may shape social norms influencing student behaviour.

**Policy Implications**

*The Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding children, Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2025a), sets out how they should respond to child-on-child sexual violence and harassment, including those that have happened outside of the school's premises. In this guidance, the term "peer-on-peer abuse", which is used in Ofsted's (2021) report, has been replaced with "child-on-child abuse". Part Five of this guidance identifies both sexual violence and sexual harassment as aspects of child-on-child abuse that schools should be aware of whilst "making clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment, that it is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated" (DfE, 2025a, p. 112). For the participants in my study, the message around a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence appears to have been received more clearly than messages around a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment. A key vehicle for conveying these messages to young people is likely to be through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons, so it is instructive to consider current statutory guidance on Relationship and Sex Education (DfE, 2025c). Section 78 of this guidance sets out that young people should be taught "key aspects of the law relating to sex [including]...the definitions and recognition of...sexual assault and harassment" (DfE, 2025c, p. 26). The guidance suggests that by the end of secondary school pupils should understand, the following topics which are of relevance to this study: i) what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable, ii) that sharing and viewing indecent images of children is a criminal offence, and iii) that they should not provide information to others that they would not want shared further, nor should they share such material. My research suggests that schools should be attentive to where prejudices and biases might exist within adolescent boys' understandings of these topics, such as where they may more readily identify the sharing of naked images by girls as illegal than by boys. An updated version of this guidance, to be taught from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026, suggests that teaching of RSE should be interactive and participatory, providing opportunities for critical discussion of "complex relationship scenarios" (DfE, 2025b). Whilst explicitly proposing this style of teaching for these topics can be considered to be a positive step forward, my research suggests that it may be equally important to provide opportunities for critical*

***discussion of the broader social and cultural context in which sexual violence and sexual harassment occur. Conclusion***

A key priority for all stakeholders in education should be ensuring that schools are safe spaces, free from VAWG, so that all students can concentrate on learning. The views of the adolescent boys in this study were clearly shaped and influenced by a range of different social and cultural factors. These influences could be seen, for example, as participants wrestled with their contrasting views about girls wearing short skirts. Most participants expressed the belief that girls should be free to wear whatever clothes they want without fear of consequences, demonstrating their awareness of feminist messaging around women's freedom of choice in dress (Hillman, 2013). At the same time, they recognised the complexity in how boys their age interpret girls' clothing choices. Similarly, the awareness that they demonstrated of prohibition against physical acts of peer-on-peer abuse suggests the success of public messaging campaigns against violence against women and girls. These topics that I asked them to discuss are difficult and contentious issues, which society as a whole is grappling with. This highlights the importance of supporting adolescent boys to make sense of gender and cultural norms, supporting them to critically engage with these in a non-shaming manner (Albury, 2017).

The extent to which my participants demonstrated an awareness of positive social messaging left me with a feeling of hope. Similarly, my participants' willingness to engage so openly in discussion about difficult topics and to listen to, and potentially learn from each other, suggests that understandings can shift and new meanings can be created. Whilst it is important to recognise the potential impact of the manosphere on adolescent boys' views, it is also important to move beyond it, recognising the broader systemic conditions that enable such ideologies to flourish. This study suggests that equipping adolescent boys with the tools to critically engage with these narratives, and building networks of positive relationships around them, will be essential in fostering the informed and resilient perspectives that will support the promotion of safer schools for all.

## **Appendix A Extract from Research Diary**

### **Early Reflections on Researcher Positioning**

My Systematic Literature Review topic relates to my empirical research in that both consider gender norms. Reflecting on it now, it occurs to me that I have been interested in how gender norms are constructed in society and the values ascribed to different genders from a young age. I remember being taken to a 'take your daughter to work' day, at the corporate giants who my dad worked for, during primary school. I remember wondering to myself why such a thing was necessary

and feeling a simmering sense of injustice about this early awakening to the suggestion that my options in life may be constrained by my gender.

Initially, I was worried about deciding on a research project that focuses solely on boys. I felt that anger bubbling up again - haven't men and boys benefitted enough from being the 'norm' of scientific research for centuries? Shouldn't a researcher with such a strong feminist core be researching women's issues and foregrounding the perspectives and experiences of women in a way that is so often overlooked? I think initially the thing that persuaded me was thinking about how boys need to change in order for girls to be safe. However, as I have thought and read more, I have reflected on gender norms and how violence against women and girls sits within this. I've found myself reflecting on how society defines masculinity, relating this to my experiences of raising my own children, a girl and two boys. I thought back to my experiences in playgroups with my children, where girls are automatically offered dolls to play with, whilst boys are offered cars and thought about how gender norms are shaped and reinforced by all in society. I noticed the disparity in clothing, where girls wore slogans like, 'smile and be kind,' whilst boys were emblazoned with, 'strong and bold.' This unquestioning acceptance of gender stereotypes has always irked me and ultimately, I see exploring boys' views about violence against women and girls as part of questioning and understanding gender norms and how they shape and impact behaviour.

It didn't feel surprising then, to read adolescents in the literature talking about how boys are naturally stronger than girls or to notice underlying beliefs amongst adolescents of both genders about boys' role, prescribed by society, as the protectors of girls. Whilst it didn't surprise me, it still ignites that anger within me and made me think about how I will need to be aware of those emotions as I analyse the papers, ensuring that it doesn't limit my analytical insights. In keeping a reflective log as I code, I hope to be able to reflect on those emotions as they arise and reflect on other ways that the data can be viewed. I will also use meetings with my research team as opportunities to reflect on the assumptions that I have brought to papers. As I am analysing secondary sources in the SLR, it will also be important to reflect on the assumptions that the original researchers may have had and how that may have impacted their understanding of the data they analysed. Similarly, as I move to analysing data for my empirical paper, I hope to be able to explore the assumptions that my male adolescent participants bring to their discussions, remaining aware of my own biases and the impact that these might have on my interpretations.

## Appendix B Extract from Research Diary

### Reflections Whilst Coding SLR Paper Haglund et al. (2019)

The first paper I am coding is the Haglund paper "The Influence of Masculinity on Male Latino Adolescents' Perceptions Regarding Dating Relationships and Dating Violence." My first step was to check back to my QA of this paper to see what my reflections were ...

I have noticed rising feelings of anger whilst re-reading this paper, particularly in noting the ambiguity around the assumption that psychological abuse and coercive control are somehow less serious than physical abuse. However, this paper also situates the boys' views very firmly within the culture that the boys are being brought up in. This has made me reflect on the tension between a desire to accept that cultural norms may lead to different conceptualisations of healthy relationships and a recognition that those norms may need to be challenged where they encourage attitudes that might lead to violence.

Whilst coding, I reflected on some of the codes that I was assigning to text and how they reflected my own views, for example, where a participant talks about rejecting jealous behaviour within relationships, having seen the hurt is caused to his mum, I initially coded this as 'recognition of emotional abuse.' In doing so, I was aware that the word 'abuse' here may be somewhat pejorative and may not fit within the participants' own understanding of this behaviour. As such, I decided to change the code name to 'emotional harm' as this seemed more neutral and less assumptive.

Whilst coding the first paragraph about parental influence on boys' views about dating, I reflected on the way that families are central to passing on culture. This also made me think about identity formation in adolescence and how adolescents are both guided by their families and also how they reflect on and critique the behaviour of their families.

Following the coding process, several key reflections emerged regarding this paper. Cultural and familial influences appeared particularly significant for this group of participants. It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, notably the exclusion of certain voices, as all participants were English-speaking. The emphasis placed on the man as provider was closely linked to traditional Mexican social values. While there was some evidence of this belief beginning to shift within American culture, it remained deeply ingrained in the boys' thinking.

A further tension became apparent in the participants' accounts: although there was an awareness that some of their behaviours within relationships were hurtful to their female partners, the pressure to perform masculinity often took precedence. This tension resonates with broader discussions around toxic masculinity and the potential mental health difficulties inherent within these gendered expectations. It will be interesting to see whether this pattern will be repeated in other papers.

### Appendix C Extract from Research Diary

#### Reflections Whilst Coding Empirical Data: First Coding of Transcript 4

I am starting my coding with the last focus group that I ran as this was the last transcript that I typed up, so it feels like it makes sense to start with one that is fresh in my mind. As I was checking the transcript to ensure it was accurate, I remembered the difficulty that I experienced whilst running this focus group. They spent some time at the beginning of the group talking about their views about 'naughty kids' in school. They explained that they feel that kids who misbehave are given a disproportionate amount of attention from teachers and are given special treatment even though they least deserve it. Part of me wanted to explore these views with them as they said them, but I knew that doing so might jeopardise our rapport. I didn't want them to think that I was judging what they were saying as that may have impacted on how open they felt they could be with me about their views in subsequent discussions. Whilst I refrained from exploring these views at the time, I did return to this topic at the end of the discussion, exploring whether they could think of a reason why those teachers might give those children more attention. This led to an interesting discussion around whether all children should be treated equally or according to their needs. However, I was careful, during this discussion, to acknowledge and validate their views, as we discussed the difficulty of achieving this in practice.

When transcribing I also reflected on the different ways that the boys respond to scenario 3 and 4. Both involve the sending of a naked image, but in one the image is sent by a boy and in the other the image is sent by a girl. It is interesting to hear their outrage at the image that is sent from the girl, which they quickly denounce as 'child porn' compared to their response to the boy sending an image. With the boy, they are also all sure that he should not have sent the image, but in this case the focus is more on the low likelihood of receiving an image back and also the impact that sending the image might have on their future careers. Similarly, there is an immediate certainty that sending a female image is illegal and child porn, whilst for the male image, one participant mentions that 'it might be illegal' but generally the conversation turns towards viewing it more as a foolish mistake that can be easily rectified, rather than an illegal act. This is a pattern that I've noticed in other focus groups too and to be honest, it makes me feel quite angry. But it reminds me why it's important to be doing this research. I imagine that the boys' responses to the female image are shaped by the teaching that they have had in school, which likely occurs when female images are 'leaked' and widely shared. When I was a teacher, I remember telling pupils that the best way to avoid this was to not share the images in the first place. I didn't realise at the time that this was feeding into a victim blaming narrative, blaming the girls for sending the pictures, rather than the boys for sharing them. This is widely in evidence in the way that the boys discuss these images. I taught PSHE and never once discussed male's sharing naked images. It is likely that the prevalence of victim blaming narratives stops girls from reporting receipt of these images (and, indeed, these participants are split

on whether it would be necessary for the girl to report it) meaning that the topic does not get discussed in the same way.

This again compares to the indignation at the skirt flipping in Scenario 5, which is immediately recognised as sexual assault. The physical nature of it means that it is far more readily identified than the sending of a naked image by a man as assault.

## Appendix D Expression of Interest Form

**EXPRESSION OF INTEREST:  
BOYS ONLY**

If you are a boy and you are interested in participating in my research, please read the following information, filling in the information at the bottom of this form. You do not have to express interest in participating.

**What is the research about?**

This research aims to get boys' views about their own and girls' safety in school. I hope to develop a better understanding of boys' perspectives on their own and girls' safety in schools. The data collected will help me to understand this issue, which, in turn, will support schools to better support all pupils to feel safe in school.

**Why have I been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to take part because you are a Year 10 boy. I am hoping to recruit 20-25 Year 10 boys to participate in this research. Year 9 boys may also be invited to participate.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will take part in a focus group with 5-6 other Year 10/9 boys. You will be offered biscuits and juice at the start of the focus group discussion. During the discussion, you will be asked to comment on a series of short made-up stories based on situations that girls have identified as making them feel unsafe in school, discussing aspects of safety within each of the stories and reflecting on how a typical Year 10/9 boy might respond to each. At the end, you will be given the opportunity to cast a vote for your choice of one of three charities. I will make a donation of £50 to the charity that receives the most votes on behalf of participants.

Please read and initial the following statements if you would like to express an interest in participating in this research:

I understand that I will not be able to participate in the research if my parents don't give consent for me to participate.	
I have read the information provided and am interested in participating in this research.	
I understand that completing this form does not guarantee that I will be selected to participate in the research. <b>If I have not heard from Mr Tichband by 18.10.24 I will assume I have not been selected.</b>	

Please use the following boxes to nominate up to three other Year 10 boys who you would feel comfortable joining a focus group with (you may not be able to be in a group with the people you have nominated for any of the following reasons:

1. I was unable to fit you all in the same group, 2. Your friend did not want to take part, 3. Your friend's family did not want them to take part):

Full Name:

Full Name:

Full Name:

Your Full Name:

Tutor Group:

Date:

**Appendix E Healthy Relationships Presentation**

The recorded presentation on Healthy Relationships that I developed, which also provides information about the project, was shown to all Year 10 pupils during their tutor time. Boys were then asked if they would like to express interest in participating in the project. The presentation can be accessed via this link:

<https://youtu.be/VeqdzKrGBz8>

## Appendix F Quality Assurance Example

Paper for appraisal and reference: Haglund et al, 2019

### Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes*	
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- what was the goal of the research
  - why it was thought important
  - its relevance

Comments: Sets out aspects of Latino culture that impact on conceptions of masculinity for this community, considering the research around whether these are protective or risk factors. Discusses how adolescence generally interacts with masculinity & how it is also a good time to promote healthy behaviours. Also highlights the need for prevention programmes that focus specifically on this community. In order to do so, this study seeks to understand perceptions & attitudes of Latino young men to inform this. To understand how social & cultural contexts influence masc identify & expectations of gender roles to inform prevention.

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes*	
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
- Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: Yes because to do with perceptions and understandings.

### Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes*	
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: Talks about qualitative descriptive design & justifies why this is appropriate - although a reference for this method or further explanation of what it is would have been helpful.



4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes	
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments: Somewhat. Participants recruited with the support of a church or a school, with contact people in the school assisting with recruitment. Not clear if they were representative of the community in each case (recognised as a potential limitation). Only english-speaking boys could take part which presumably meant that some were not able to take part, which is recognised as a limitation.

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes	
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
  - If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
  - If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
  - If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments: YES. Focus groups used & justification given that seems appropriate. Socio-demographic survey described in detail but the actual content of the focus group guide, less so. Groups conducted in a conversational manner which likely put the boys at ease. Reward for participation is transparent.

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: Somewhat. Gives info about research team & backgrounds. Discusses the way that themes were reviewed with research team & discusses saturation.

#### Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments:

It would have been good to see more detail here.

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes	*
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider

- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: YES. Described process of 'categorical analysis' which is clearly described. Researcher's role not obviously considered.

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes	*
Can't Tell	
No	

HINT: Consider whether

- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: Launches into findings with no intro which feels a bit abrupt. Could maybe have more data to back up findings at times - some statements in the analysis feel like overgeneralisations.  
 However, findings are well summarised in discussion and related to previous research.

Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature)
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments: Offers suggestions for further exploration. It would be nice to have seen more detail on what the implications of this research are for prevention efforts, as that was mentioned in the intro and did not appear to be picked up in the discussion.

### Appendix G Study Descriptions and Characteristics

	<b>Author(s) (year), title, setting</b>	<b>Research Aims</b>	<b>Participant Characteristics</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Themes/Concepts developed</b>
1.	<i>Haglund, K. et al. (2019)</i> The Influence of Masculinity on Male Latino Adolescents' Perceptions Regarding Dating Relationships and Dating Violence  <u>Setting:</u> USA	To explore Latino male adolescents' perceptions and attitudes about dating and dating violence (DV). To understand the impact of culture on masculine identity and impact of gender roles on DV.	English-speaking Latino Males (n = 23)  <b>Age range:</b> 13-18 ( $M = 13.5$ , $SD = 1.3$ )  <b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> Mexican American  <b>Socio-economic Status:</b> Participants self-identified as follows – compared to peers, 56% felt their status was similar, 13% somewhat worse, and 26% better.	<u>Data collection:</u> Focus groups  <u>Analysis:</u> Categorical analysis	Context of participants' lives (Role of Parents and Focus on Education). Definitions and nature of dating relationships. Definitions and nature of DV (Emotional Abuse, Physical and Sexual Abuse and Perceptions of Women as perpetrators of DV).
2.	<i>Reeves and Orpinas (2012)</i> Dating Norms and Dating Violence Among Ninth Graders in Northeast Georgia: Reports From Student Surveys and Focus Groups  <u>Setting:</u> Northeast Georgia, USA	To examine the role of norms and their association with physical aggression in dating relationships. To explore participants' views of dating aggression, particularly their support for male initiated or female initiated aggression within dating relationships.	Ninth grade students <u>Survey</u> : (n = 624, 331 boys, 293 girls)  <u>Focus groups</u> : (n = 90, 51 F/29 M)  <b>Age:</b> Grades 6 – 9 (approximately 11-15)  <b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> <u>Survey</u> : 47% White, 38% African American, 11% Latino and 5% other ethnicities. <u>Focus Group</u> : 60 White, 24 African American, 6 other ethnicities	<u>Data Collection:</u> Survey and Focus Groups  <u>Analysis:</u> Statistical analysis of survey results and focus groups analysed using the constant comparative method.	<u>Survey</u> : The connection between norms and behaviours was weak or non-existent for girls, but relatively strong for boys.  <u>Focus Groups</u> : Dating aggression was defined broadly and viewed negatively. Male to female physical aggression was particularly unacceptable. Perceived female to male physical aggression was seen as less offensive.
3.	<i>Adams and Williams (2014)</i> "It's Not Just You Two": A Grounded Theory of Peer-Influenced Jealousy as a	To develop a deeper understanding of how jealousy escalates to physical dating violence	Self-identified Mexican Americans (n = 64, 40 F/24 M)	<u>Data collection:</u> Focus groups	Jealousy that is fostered, legitimised, and sustained by peers, led to anger. That anger then led to violence.

	Pathway to Dating Violence Among Acculturating Mexican American Adolescents  <u>Setting:</u> USA	within Mexican American adolescent romantic relationships.	<b>Age:</b> 15-17  <b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> Low acculturated: 16 Bicultural: 24 High acculturated: 24	<u>Analysis:</u> analysed using grounded theory according to levels of acculturation and gender.	Jealousy was the most prominent problem in teen relationships, and all were prone to it.
4.	<i>Aghaie et al. (2018)</i> Interpersonal violence and abuse in young people's relationships in five European countries: online and offline normalisation of heteronormativity.  <u>Setting:</u> Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy and Norway	To explore young people's understanding and experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPVA).	Adolescents with experience of IPVA in their own relationships. (n= 91, 67 F/24 M)  <b>Age:</b> 13-18  <b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> White European (78), Dual Heritage (5) Black Minority Ethnic (2) Roma (6)	<u>Data collection:</u> Focus groups  <u>Analysis:</u> Framework analysis.	Online and offline control and surveillance was normalised by many young people. This was justified as a form of love in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Italy. IPVA was normalised by young men in Bulgaria and Cyprus in particular. Verbal abuse was extensive and tolerated by both young men and women, whilst physical abuse was normalised.
5.	<i>Bowen et al. (2013)</i> Northern European Adolescent Attitudes Toward Dating Violence  <u>Setting:</u> England, Sweden, Germany, and Belgium.	To explore adolescent Northern Europeans attitudes to dating violence.	Adolescents from four Northern European countries. (n = 86, 50 F/36 M)  <b>Age:</b> 12 - 17	<u>Data collection:</u> Focus groups  <u>Analysis:</u> Thematic analysis	Four superordinate themes were identified from thematic analysis: gender identities, television as the educator, perceived acceptability of dating violence, and the decision to seek help/tell someone.
6.	<i>Love and Richards (2013)</i> An Exploratory Investigation of Adolescent Intimate Partner Violence Among African American Youth: A Gendered Analysis  <u>Setting:</u> USA	To explore African American youth's perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and the dynamics of their health seeking behaviours.	Adolescents from America whose race was primarily African American. (n=25, 13F/12M)  <b>Age:</b> 15-19  <b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> Primarily African American	<u>Data collection:</u> Focus Groups that used a semi-structured 22 question interview protocol.  <u>Analysis:</u> Content analysis	Only physical aggression was recognised as IPV by most participants: hesitation expressed about disclosing violence to adults, particularly non-family adults. Unaware of and/or unwilling to utilise existing prevention and intervention services which target adults.

7.	<p><i>McCarry (2010)</i> Becoming a 'proper man': young people's attitudes about interpersonal violence and perceptions of gender</p> <p><u>Setting:</u> Glasgow, Scotland</p>	<p>To explore young people's attitudes about gendered interpersonal abuse and violence and young people's perceptions of gender roles and specifically 'masculinity'.</p>	<p>Adolescents from Glasgow in Scotland (n = 77, 43F/34M)</p> <p><b>Ages:</b> 15-18</p> <p><b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> White-Scottish: 67 Scottish-South Asian: 9 Scottish-Chinese: 1</p> <p><b>Socio-economic status:</b> upper middle class (1 school), middle class (4 schools), working class (5 schools) based on Free School Meal and Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation data.</p>	<p><b>Data collection:</b> Focus Groups who were asked to reflect on statistics about domestic violence and to discuss a vignette.</p> <p><b>Analysis:</b> Computer facilitated thematic analysis using NUD.IST software.</p>	<p><b>Gender:</b> males viewed as breadwinners, violence amongst and by men naturalised;</p> <p><b>Gender non/conformity:</b> non-conformity to traditional gender roles viewed as problematic particularly for men;</p> <p><b>Interpersonal violence and gender:</b> beliefs about the dominance of men made it difficult for young people to problematise men's use of violence against women, particularly when women had transgressed their normative positions i.e. by challenging male authority.</p>
8.	<p><i>McCarry and Lombard (2016)</i> Same Old Story? Children and Young People's Continued Normalisation of Men's Violence Against Women</p> <p><u>Setting:</u> Glasgow, Scotland</p>	<p>To reflect on the similarities in the children's and young people's views and understandings of men's violence against women, using data from two studies nearly ten years apart: one study with 11-12-year-olds in primary school and another with 15-18-year-olds in secondary schools.</p>	<p>Results are drawn from two studies (one of which is McCarry 2010 – see above) but all participants are from Glasgow, Scotland.</p> <p>Total number of participants: 166</p> <p>Of which 77 were in McCarry's study (see above) and 89 were in Lombard's study (49F/40M)</p> <p><b>Ages:</b> 15-18 (McCarry) 11-12 (Lombard)</p>	<p><b>Data Collection:</b> Qualitative methods across two different studies (focus groups and interviews)</p> <p><b>Analysis:</b> Unspecified qualitative methods.</p>	<p>Three key themes are identified across the two studies: the construction of men's violence; gender roles and the naturalisation of difference; and the normalisation of men's violence.</p> <p>The authors note that in both studies the techniques of normalisation were employed by the participants to minimise both the seriousness of the violence and the significance of it to the victims</p>
9.	<p><i>McDermott Thompson (2016)</i> Understanding young people's experiences and views of partner violence in</p>	<p>To explore how young people identify, define and contextualise teenage intimate partner violence.</p>	<p>Adolescents in vocational training colleges, sixth form colleges or on entry to employment programmes. (n = 62, 36F/26M)</p>	<p><b>Data Collection:</b> Focus Groups guided by a discussion guide. Participants were also shown visual clips of violent behaviours and asked to discuss them.</p>	<p>A gender double standard was identified which was perceived as condoning female violence, reinforcing a female-as-victim gender identity whilst condemning male violence and constraining male victimhood.</p>

	teenage intimate relationships  <u>Setting:</u> England		<b>Ages:</b> 16-19 year olds (2 participants were outside of this age range at 29 & 44 respectively)	<u>Analysis:</u> Thematic analysis	
10.	<i>Storer et al. (2019)</i> Context Matters: Factors that Influence African American Teen's Perceptions and Definitions of Dating Violence  <u>Setting:</u> USA	To explore African American teens' conceptualisations of dating violence and to consider the factors that influence their perceptions.	Adolescents across two high schools.  (n = 38, 20F/M18)  <b>Ages:</b> 13-18 years old	<u>Data Collection:</u> Interviews  <u>Analysis:</u> Exploratory thematic analysis	Contextual factors, such as perpetrator gender, type of violence, victim impact, escalation risk, victim culpability, and perceived normality, shaped African American teens' perceptions of dating violence severity.
11.	<i>Taylor et al. (2017)</i> Adolescent Perceptions of Dating Violence: A Qualitative Study  <u>Setting:</u> USA	To explore adolescents' perceptions of dating violence, specifically gender differences in perceptions.	Adolescents from a Midwest public high school.  (n = 30, 18F/12M)  <b>Ages:</b> 14-19 years old  <b>Race/Heritage/Ethnicity:</b> 76% White, 3% Black, 10% Hispanic, 3% Native American, 7% Other	Focus groups: 24 questions were used to guide focus group discussions  <b>Analysis:</b> MAXQDA software analysed the data. Repeated words and patterns were identified across three predetermined categories, with themes emerging inductively through the clustering of similar <i>in vivo</i> codes.	<b>Defining Dating Violence:</b> Males focused on perpetrators' actions, females emphasised victims' emotions and experiences.  <b>Risk Factors:</b> Adolescents of both genders explained that the girl is more often the aggressor in adolescent relationships.  <b>Protective Factors:</b> Adolescents called for deeper, more comprehensive education on adolescent dating violence (ADV) in schools.

## Appendix H Focus Group Guide & Prompts

### Warm Up Activity

1. On post-it notes, write down 3 things that describe their school and three things that describe being a Year 10 boy. Stick post-its on board/table when finished.
2. I will facilitate discussion about and grouping of answers thematically with input from participants.
3. On post-it notes, write down 3 things that contribute to the safety of Year 10 boys in school and three things that do not.
4. I will facilitate discussion about and grouping of answers thematically with input from participants.

### Vignettes

Before starting discussion around the vignettes, boys will be reminded not to name any other pupils in their discussions or whilst reflecting on personal experiences.

I will read out each vignette in turn to participants. After reading each, I will encourage discussion using the following questions as prompts:

- How would a typical Year 10 boy respond to this situation?
- How could this situation make girls/boys feel unsafe in school?
- What action could be taken to make this situation safer for boys/girls? Who would take that action?
- What might the outcome of these actions be?

### Challenging views judged to be harmful or prejudicial

- Can you think of any situations where someone might think differently to that?
- Might there be a situation where someone might be bothered by that sort of response?
- That's an interesting perspective. Why do you think it's seen as a joke? How might it feel for the person on the receiving end?
- What do you think about the idea that everyone deserves to feel safe, no matter how they dress? Why might it be unfair to put the responsibility on her rather than on the person who's making her feel unsafe?
- If it were your sister or a close friend in that situation, how would you feel? Would you see it differently?
- Most people would agree that everyone has the right to feel safe and respected. How do you think that idea applies to this situation?

**Appendix I Letter to Year 10 Parents**

**RE: Invitation to Participate in Important Research about Safe Schools.**

Dear Parents and Carers of Year 10 Pupils,

My name is Anna Burnett, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton, completing a Doctorate in Educational Psychology. Educational Psychologists are interested in children's learning, behaviour and emotional wellbeing, and work with children, young people, adults who work in schools and parents/carers.

I am carrying out a research project which is part of my thesis and aims to explore boys' views about their own and girls' safety in schools. The Department for Education's Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance (2023) indicates that abuse from peers has become normalised and frequent in schools. Based on these findings, this research aims to understand boys' perspectives on safety, so that we can develop a greater understanding of their views around their own and girls' safety in schools. The data collected will help me to understand this issue, which, in turn, will support schools to better support all pupils to feel safe in school. Your child's school has agreed to help collect data for this research.

**If you are the parent or carer of a Year 10 boy, I am inviting your child to participate in this research.**

To help you decide whether you would like them to take part or not, I have created a Participant Information Sheet, which is attached with this letter. It is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide if you would like your child to take part in this research.

**If you do wish your child to participate, please complete the consent form which you can find here: [INSERT LINK TO MICROSOFT FORMS VERSION OF CONSENT FORM].**

The deadline for receipt of completed consent forms is: [insert date 2 weeks from date this letter is sent].

If, after reading through this information, you have any questions about the study, please contact me via email: [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk)

Yours Sincerely,



Anna Burnett

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
University of Southampton

### **Appendix J Parental Consent Form**

**Study Title:** Safety in Schools: Exploring boys' views about their own and girls' safety.

**Ethics/ERGO number:** 90843

**Version and date:** Version 3 05/06/24

Thank you for your interest in this study. It is very important to us to conduct our studies in line with ethics principles, and this Consent Form asks you to confirm if you agree for your child to take part in the above study. Please carefully consider the statements below and add your initials and signature only if you agree to your child's participation in this research.

**Please add your initials to the boxes below if you agree with the statements and would like to opt-in to the study:**

<b>Mandatory Consent Statements</b>	<b>Parent Initials</b>
I confirm that I read the Parent Information Sheet Year 10 version 3, dated 05.06.24 explaining the study above and I understand what would be expected of my child.	
I was given the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions about the study, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I agree to my child taking part in this study and understand that data collected during this research project will be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw from this study at any time up to the point of transcription without giving a reason.	
I understand that my child's confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed in focus groups but that any information collected by the researcher will be kept confidential (unless it needs to be disclosed by law), and that participants will be asked to keep the discussions confidential.	
I understand that my child will be asked to anonymously provide information on their ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender but that they do not have to if they do not want to.	

I understand that the focus group discussion will be recorded. A transcript will be made of the recording, but all names will be changed to protect my personal data and that of other participants. The audio file will be destroyed after the transcript is made.	
I understand that anonymous data from this study may be used in future research.	
I understand that if my child withdraws from the study, it may not be possible to remove my data once their personal information is no longer linked to the study data.	
I understand that my child can withdraw their data from the use in this study within a month following my participation.	

**Name of Child****Signature****Date****Name of Person Taking Consent****Signature****Date**

## Appendix K Parent Information Sheet

**Study Title:** Safety in Schools: Exploring boys' views about their own and girls' safety.

**Researcher:** Anna Burnett

**ERGO number:** 90843

If you are the parent of a Year 10 boy, your child is being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like them to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide if you would like your child to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others, but it is up to you to decide whether or not your child takes part. If you wish your child to take part in this study, you will need to complete the Opt-In Consent form which can be accessed here [insert link to Microsoft forms version of consent form].

### What is the research about?

My name is Anna Burnett, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton, completing a Doctorate in Educational Psychology. I am carrying out a research project which is part of my thesis and aims to explore boys' views about their own and girls' safety in schools. I am inviting your child to participate in this research.

The Department for Education's Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance (2023) indicates that abuse from peers has become normalised and frequent in schools. Based on these findings, this research aims to understand boys' perspectives on safety, so that we can develop a greater understanding of their views around their own and girls' safety in schools. The data collected will help me to understand this issue, which, in turn, will support schools to better support both all pupils to feel safe in school.

### Why has my child been asked to participate?

Your child's school has agreed to help collect data for this research. Therefore, the parent or carer of every Year 10 boy has been given a link to an opt-in consent form asking consent for their child to take part. I am hoping to recruit 20-25 Year 10 boys to participate in this research. Year 9 boys may also be invited to participate in this research.

### What will happen to my child if they take part?

Firstly, **your child will not be able to take part unless you complete the consent form**. However, if they do take part, then, after watching a short presentation explaining more about the research, your child will be invited to participate in a focus group with 5-6 other Year 10, and possibly Year 9, boys. They will be able to choose whether or not they wish to participate. If they choose to participate, they will be given the opportunity to indicate friends who they would like to be in the focus group with. I will try to allocate them to groups with friends, although this may not be possible.

During the focus groups, your child will be asked to read a series of short made-up stories based on situations that girls have identified as making them feel unsafe in school. Your child's group will be asked to discuss aspects of safety within each of the stories, reflecting on how a typical Year 10, or Year 9, boy might respond to each. This research will allow a deeper understanding about what boys find safe about school and what improvements can be suggested to make school safer for all pupils.

### Are there any benefits in my child taking part?

Taking part will allow your child to have their say about what a safe school means to them and will allow me to understand more about what secondary school boys find safe about schools, along with what improvements can be suggested to make school safer for all pupils. A summary of the findings will be sent to both your child's school and to the Local Authority, who may use it to suggest changes that could be made across schools locally to make them

safer for all pupils. In addition, the research may be published in an academic journal or other publication that would allow other educational staff to reflect on the findings and consider changes in their own settings. All information about your child will remain confidential and anonymous.

Upon completion of the discussion group, your child will also have the opportunity to vote for a charity. Whichever charity has the most votes by the end of the research will receive a donation of £50 from the researcher on behalf of all the participants. This is optional and your child's choice will not be recorded as part of the study.

The charities your child will be able to vote for are:

White Ribbon <i>A charity which engages men and boys to end violence against women and girls</i>	Friends of the Earth <i>A charity dedicated to sustainability</i>	RSPCA <i>Protecting pets and wildlife</i>	Cancer Research <i>Funding research into beating cancer</i>
---	--	--	--

Your child's school is also receiving a collection of books relating to healthy relationships as compensation for their participation.

#### **Are there any risks involved?**

Considering safety within school for themselves and girls could bring up topics of a sensitive nature that could lead to some upset. If this happens, I will ensure that your child is supported at school. I will also provide them and key school staff with details of organisations outside school that can support them if needed. It is your and your child's choice to take part; your child is free to change their mind before or during the group discussion.

#### **What data will be collected?**

Your child will be invited to answer questions about their ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. In each case, they will have the opportunity to choose not to respond. This information will be collected anonymously. It will not be traceable to your child and is being collected in order to contextualise the analysis of the data.

#### **Will my child's participation be confidential?**

Your child's participation and the information I collect about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All personal information collected will be stored securely at school until it can be uploaded onto the university's secure servers. The focus groups will be audio recorded and the recording will be kept on the university's secure server. However, at the point of transcription, all focus group responses will be anonymised and will not be able to be traced back to the individual pupils. Upon completion of transcription, the audio data will be destroyed. The transcriptions will be stored on the University's secure server for 10 years after completion of the study.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to this data for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to the data. All of these people have a duty to keep your child's information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

#### **Does your child have to take part?**

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you want your child to take part.

If you decide you want your child to take part, you will need to sign the opt-in consent form to show you have agreed for them to take part.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You and your child have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. Your child's data can be withdrawn from the project any time until data analysis begins, after which time they will not be able to withdraw their data from the research. In the analysis phase, the information will be completely anonymised and will not be able to be traced back to your child. If your child decides to withdraw from the study having already taken part either you, they or a member of school staff can email: [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk)

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

All information collected for this study will be stored securely on a secure server.

Anonymous data will be kept on the University data repository (ePrints Soton) for use in future research and for people to check the validity of this research.

The information collected will be analysed and written up as part of my thesis. It may be published in a journal. Your child's personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify your child without your specific consent.

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of ethics and research integrity. In accordance with our Research Data Management Policy, data will be held for 10 years after the study has finished, when it will be securely destroyed.

**Where can I get more information?**

If, after reading through this information, you have any questions about the study, please contact Anna Burnett: [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk)

**What happens if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researcher who will do her best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Head of Research Ethics and Clinical Governance (023 8059 5058, [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)).

**Contact Details of the Research Team**

Research Supervisor: Dr Tim Cooke ([t.cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:t.cooke@soton.ac.uk))

Researcher: Anna Burnett ([a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk))

**Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at

<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 10 years after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer ([data.protection@soton.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@soton.ac.uk)).

**Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet and considering taking part in the research.**

## Appendix L Participant Information Sheet: Year 10

**Study Title:** Safety in Schools: Exploring boys' views about their own and girls' safety.

**Researcher:** Anna Burnett

**ERGO number:** 90843

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide if you would like to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others, but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do wish to take part in this study, you will need to complete the Assent form.

### **What is the research about?**

My name is Anna Burnett, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton, completing a Doctorate in Educational Psychology. As part of my thesis, I am carrying out a research project that aims to explore boys' views about their own and girls' safety in schools. I am inviting you to participate in this research.

The Department for Education Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance (2023) indicates that abuse from peers has become normalised and frequent in schools. Based on these findings, this research aims to understand boys' perspectives on safety. I hope to develop a greater understanding of their view on their own and girls' safety in schools. The data collected will help me to understand this issue, which, in turn, will support schools to better support all pupils to feel safe in school.

### **Why have I been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to take part because you are a Year 10 boy. I am hoping to recruit 20-25 Year 10 boys to participate in this research. Year 9 boys may also be invited to participate in this research.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will take part in a focus group with 5-6 other Year 10, and possibly Year 9, boys. During the focus groups, you will be asked to listen to a series of short made-up stories based on situations that girls have identified as likely to make them feel unsafe in school. You will be asked to discuss aspects of safety within each of the stories, reflecting on how a typical Year 10 or Year 9 boy might respond to each.

### **Are there any benefits in my taking part?**

Taking part will allow you to have your say about what a safe school means to you and will allow me to understand more about what secondary school pupils find safe about schools, along with what improvements can be suggested to make school safer for all pupils. A summary of the findings will be sent to both your school and to the Local Authority, who may use it to suggest changes that could be made across schools locally to make them safer for all pupils. In addition, the research may be published in an academic journal or other publication that would allow educational staff to reflect on the findings and consider changes in their own settings. All information about you will remain confidential and anonymous.

Upon completion of the discussion group, you will also have the opportunity to vote for a charity. Whichever charity has the most votes by the end of the research will receive a donation of £50 from the researcher on behalf of all the participants. This is optional and your choice will not be recorded as part of the study.

The charities you will be able to vote for are:

**White Ribbon**  
*A charity which engages men and boys to end violence against women and girls*

**Friends of the Earth**  
*A charity dedicated to sustainability*

**RSPCA**  
*Protecting pets and wildlife*

**Cancer Research**  
*Funding research into beating cancer*

Your school is also receiving a collection of books relating to healthy relationships as compensation for their participation.

#### **Are there any risks involved?**

Considering safety within school for yourself and girls could bring up topics of a sensitive nature that could lead to some upset. If this happens, I will ensure that you are supported at school. I will also provide you with details of organisations outside school that can support you if needed. It is your choice to take part and you are free to change your mind before or during the focus group.

#### **What data will be collected?**

You will be invited to answer questions about your ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity. In each case you will be able to choose not to respond. This information will be collected anonymously. It will not be traceable to you and is being collected in order to contextualise the analysis of the data.

#### **Will my participation be confidential?**

Your participation and the information I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All personal information collected will be stored securely at school until it can be uploaded onto the university's secure servers. The focus groups will be audio recorded and the recording will be kept on the university's secure server. However, at the point of transcription, all focus group responses will be anonymised and will not be able to be traced back to you. Upon completion of transcription, the audio data will be destroyed. The transcriptions will be stored on the University's secure server for 10 years after completion of the study.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your data. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No, it is entirely up to you and your parents to decide whether or not you want to take part. Firstly, your parents need to agree to you taking part, by completing an opt-in consent form, which they have been sent by school. And then you can choose whether or not you want to take part.

#### **What happens if I change my mind?**

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. Your data can be withdrawn from the project any time until data analysis begins, after which time you will not be able to withdraw your data from the research. In the analysis phase, the information will be completely anonymised and not be able to be traced back to you. If you decide to withdraw from the study having already taken part either you or a member of school staff can email: [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk)

#### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

All information collected for this study will be stored securely on a secure server. Anonymous data will be kept on the University data repository (ePrints Soton) for use in future research and for people to check the validity of this research.

The information collected will be analysed and written up as part of my thesis. It may be published in a journal or other publication. A summary of the findings will be sent to both your school and to the Local Authority. Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent.

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of ethics and research integrity. In accordance with our Research Data Management Policy, data will be held for 10 years after the study has finished, when it will be securely destroyed.

### **Where can I get more information?**

If, after reading through this information, you have any questions about the study, please contact Anna Burnett: [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk)

### **What happens if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researcher who will do her best to answer your questions.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Head of Research Ethics and Clinical Governance (023 8059 5058, [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk)).

### **Contact Details of the Research Team**

Research Supervisor: Dr Tim Cooke ([t.cooke@soton.ac.uk](mailto:t.cooke@soton.ac.uk))

Researcher: Anna Burnett ([a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk))

### **Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at

<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/Is/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf>

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 10 years after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal data necessary to achieve our research study objectives. Your data protection rights – such as to access, change, or transfer such information - may be limited, however, in order for the research output to be reliable and accurate. The University will not do anything with your personal data that you would not reasonably expect.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page>) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer ([data.protection@soton.ac.uk](mailto:data.protection@soton.ac.uk)).

**Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet and considering taking part in the research.**

### **Appendix M Pupil Assent Form**

**Study Title:** Safety in Schools: Exploring boys' views about their own and girls' safety.

**Ethics/ERGO number:** 90843

**Version and date:** Version 3 05/06/24

Thank you for your interest in this study. It is very important to us to conduct our studies in line with ethics principles, and this Assent Form asks you to confirm if you agree to take part in the above study. Please carefully consider the statements below and add your initials and signature only if you agree to participate in this research and understand what this will mean for you.

**Please add your initials to the boxes below if you agree with the statements:**

<b>Mandatory Consent Statements</b>	<b>Participant Initials</b>
I confirm that I have read the Participant Information Sheet Year 10 Version 3 05/06/24 explaining the study above and I understand what is expected of me.	
I was given the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions about the study, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I agree to take part in this study and understand that data collected during this research project will be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time up to the point of transcription without giving a reason.	
I understand that my confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed in focus groups but that any information collected by the researcher will be kept confidential (unless it needs to be disclosed by law), and that participants will be asked to keep the discussions confidential.	
I understand that I must keep the information discussed during the focus groups confidential and that I should not name other pupils during the discussion.	
I understand that I will be asked to anonymously provide information on my ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender but that I do not have to if I do not want to.	

I understand that the focus group discussion will be recorded. A transcript will be made of the recording, but all names will be changed to protect my personal data and that of other participants. The audio file will be destroyed after the transcript is made.	
I understand that anonymous data from this study may be used in future research.	
I understand that if I withdraw from the study, it may not be possible to remove my data once my personal information is no longer linked to the study data. I understand that I can withdraw my data from the use in this study within a month following my participation.	

**Name of Child****Signature****Date****Name of Person Taking Consent****Signature****Date**

## Appendix N Participant Debrief Form

**Study Title:** Safety in Schools: Exploring boys' views about their own and girls' safety.

**Ethics/ERGO number:** 90843

**Researcher(s):** Anna Burnett

**University email(s):** [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk)

**Version and date:** Version 2, 03/05/24

Thank you for taking part in our research project. Your contribution is very valuable and greatly appreciated.

### Purpose of the study

The aim of this research was to explore boys' views about their own and girls' safety in schools. Your data will help our understanding of what secondary school pupils find safe about schools, along with what improvements can be suggested to make school safer for all pupils.

### Confidentiality

Results of this study will not include your name or any other identifying characteristics.

As this study involved a focus group your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Please respect the privacy of other participants and do not disclose what was said and who said it during the discussion.

### Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to transcription. Should you wish to withdraw, please contact me at the email address provided below, quoting the following participant number: [insert participant ID number].

### Study results

If you would like to receive a copy of a summary of the research findings when it is completed, please let me know by using the contact details provided on this form.

### Further support

If taking part in this study has caused you discomfort or distress, you can contact the following organisations for support:

The Designated Safeguarding Lead at your school: \_\_\_\_\_

ChildLine: *A free counselling service for children up to their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday*

Tel: 0800 1111

Web: [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

### Further reading

If you would like to learn more about this area of research, you can refer to the following resources:

**Young Minds:** A UK based charity for young people's mental health <https://tinyurl.com/ye26x72y>

**ChildLine:** Information about healthy relationships <https://tinyurl.com/ys4w6975>

#### **Further information**

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please contact Anna Burnett at [a.burnett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:a.burnett@soton.ac.uk) who will do their best to help.

If you remain unhappy or would like to make a formal complaint, please contact the Head of Research Ethics and Clinical Governance, University of Southampton, by emailing: [rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk), or calling: + 44 23 8059 5058. Please quote the Ethics/ERGO number which can be found at the top of this form. Please note that if you participated in an anonymous survey, by making a complaint, you might be no longer anonymous.

Thank you again for your participation in this research.

### Appendix O Ethics Application Form

<b>1.1 Applicant name</b>	Anna Burnett
<b>1.2 Supervisor</b>	Dr Tim Cooke
<b>1.3 Other researchers / collaborators (if applicable): Name, address, email</b>	<p>Dr Ffion Davies          Dr Davies is collaborating on the project in a supervisory role, in a personal capacity. Dr Davies has visitor status at the university. We have been advised by Victoria Dew, contracts officer with Research and Innovation Services that because she has visitor status, a data sharing agreement is not necessary. She will have access to anonymised research data but not to personal data.</p> <p>Her address is as follows:</p> <p>11 Dummer Way          Chippenham          SN15 3UX</p> <p>Fhdavies5@gmail.com</p>

#### 1. Study Details

<b>2.1 Title of study</b>	Doctorate in Educational Psychology
<b>2.2 Type of project</b> (e.g. undergraduate, Masters, Doctorate, staff)	Doctoral Thesis

#### **2.3 Briefly describe the rationale for carrying out this project and its specific aims and objectives.**

Feeling safe is a basic human right for children and young people (United Nations, 1989) and can also be considered to be an essential pre-requisite to effective learning (Maslow, 1954). Safe school environments have traditionally been conceptualised as environments where students are free from victimisation, violence and bullying (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015) and have focused on protecting students from these threats. However, since the 'Everyone's Invited' (2020) movement revealed thousands of testimonies from women and girls about their experience of sexual violence in schools, there has been a growing realisation that violence against women and girls (VAWG) in UK schools has become so frequent as to be considered normal or even expected (Ofsted, 2021).

A Girl Guides (2021) survey of 400 girls from across the UK, aged 13 to 18, found that 67% reported having experienced VAWG from other pupils at school. Ofsted's (2021) review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges, based on interviews with 900 adolescents aged 14-16, revealed the extent of peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools, including sexual assault, harassment and online sexual abuse, such as receiving unsolicited explicit photographs, known as 'dick pics,' and requests for naked or semi-naked pictures, known as 'nudes.' Nearly 90% of girls and 50% of boys reported that being sent unsolicited images or things they did not want to see

happens a lot or sometimes to them and their peers (Ofsted, 2021). In addition, 92% of girls reported that sexist name calling happened a lot or sometimes to them and their peers and 64% of girls reported that they or their peers experienced unwanted touching in schools a lot or sometimes (Ofsted, 2021).

Ofsted defines a safe school as one where school leaders ensure that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated and where staff intervene early to protect young people (Ofsted, 2021). They identified making schools safe as a key priority in their report (Ofsted, 2021) and the Department for Education's current statutory guidance on safeguarding, Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023), also makes clear that schools should adopt a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and harassment.

Interestingly, there was a consistent disparity in the Ofsted Report (2021) between the perceptions of boys and girls regarding the likelihood of harmful sexual behaviours (HSB), particularly contact forms, occurring, with boys much less likely to think these things happened regularly. Furthermore, the report notes that there was often a difference in the perceptions and concerns around peer on peer abuse between girls and boys, citing an example of a school where girls identified name calling, sexual comments and objectification as their main concerns, whilst boys discussed joking about and complimenting their female peers, but were more concerned about homophobic comments and racism as forms of abuse (Ofsted, 2021). In addition, research suggests that boys are more likely to conceptualise violence as happening between men, being physical in nature and happening outdoors (Lombard, 2016). As such, it is thought that boys may not even recognise HSB as being of concern. There is an increasing recognition that efforts to prevent VAWG must include men (Flood, 2020; Orchowski et al., 2020). As such, this study seeks to obtain boys' views about VAWG, seeking to understand more about what secondary school boys believe makes a safe school, both for themselves and for their female peers. It is hoped that this study will inform future behaviour change in schools or bystander interventions that could have a tangible impact on the safety of girls in school. In addition, it may help to inform curriculum developments, particularly with regard to Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), that could support all students to feel safer in school.

#### **2.4 Provide a brief outline of the basic study design. Outline what approach is being used and why.**

This research aims to explore how male identifying pupils (referred to hereafter as boys) conceptualise their own safety in schools and that of the female identifying peers (hereafter referred to as girls). Participants will be boys in Year 10 and potentially boys in Year 9 if it is not possible to recruit enough Year 10 boys. The study will involve conducting focus groups with the boys in small groups and aims to recruit up to 20 to 25 boys to participate.

This qualitative research will collect data through focus groups. Guest et al.'s (2017) research suggests that disclosures of personal or sensitive information were more likely in a focus group than individual interview context. Vignettes ('short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond,' (Finch, 1987, p. 105)) will be used in the focus groups as a means of facilitating a general discussion, rather than expecting young people to relate their own experiences.

Data will be analysed using inductive reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This will allow for my role in developing an understanding of the topic to be acknowledged (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and fits with my social constructivist epistemology which acknowledges that meaning is developed through subjective experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

**2.5 What are the key research question(s)? Specify hypotheses if applicable.**

- 1) How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on a sense of safety?
- 2) How do secondary school boys describe and elaborate on the safety landscape for girls?
- 3) What do secondary school boys believe about their ability to promote a safer environment for girls?

**2. Sample and setting****3.1 Who are the proposed participants and where are they from (e.g. fellow students, club members)? List inclusion / exclusion criteria if applicable.**

Participants will primarily be secondary school boys in Year 10, aged 14-15. Ringrose's (2021) research, which drew on a sample of female pupils who were mostly under 15, found that 76% had received 'dick pics' and 70% had been asked to send nudes. Given this prevalence and the impact that this has on girls' feelings of safety in school (Girl Guides, 2021), it is instructive to begin to develop a deeper understanding of how boys of a similar age understand this. Collecting images has been linked to performative masculinity for boys (Ringrose et al., 2013). The performative aspect of masculinity has been linked to peer pressure (Duckworth & Trautner, 2019), susceptibility to which is thought to peak at around 14 (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Selecting participants in this age range allows for an exploration of the sense that they make of their own experiences and those of girls. If it is not possible to recruit the required number of participants from Year 10, boys from Year 9, aged 13-14 will be included in the study as they are also at, or close to, the peak age for susceptibility to peer pressure.

They will be from one school in an LA in the South-East of England. Initially, a letter will be sent to the parents of all Year 10 pupils explaining the project. The Parent Information Sheet and consent form will be sent with the letter. Year 10 boys will be invited to participate in the research, subject to their parents' consent. The interviews will be conducted during the school day at a time that the school has agreed to and that will have the least impact on their learning, as judged by the school. If necessary to reach the required participant numbers, the same process will be followed, to include Year 9 boys in the study.

**3.2. How will the participants be identified and approached? Provide an indication of your sample size. If participants are under the responsibility of**

**others (e.g., parents/carers, teachers) state if you have permission or how you will obtain permission from the third party).**

An invitation to participate will be sent out to the Head Teacher of a secondary school in an LA in the South-East of England. The school will be selected on the basis of its working relationship with the local Educational Psychology Service. Should the first school approached not wish to participate, a second school will be selected on the same basis, and so on until a school is identified.

Initially, a letter will be sent to the parents of all Year 10 pupils informing them about the project, with an accompanying Parent Information Sheet and Consent Form for parents of Year 10 boys. Year 10 boys will be invited to participate in the research, subject to their parents giving consent, using the opt-in consent form. However, if it is not possible to recruit the required number of Year 10 boys, Year 9 boys and their parents will be approached following the same procedure as that outlined here.

The consent form will be distributed via the school's usual method for communicating with parents. If electronic communication is the norm, then the consent form can be completed and returned as a Microsoft Form. This will enable the researcher to collect the information directly and for it to be stored on the university's secure server at all times. However, if required by the school, photocopies of the consent form will be made and distributed to parents. In this case, a nominated member of school staff, hereafter referred to as the consent administrator, will be responsible for collecting returned consent forms and will store them securely on the school site and ensure that they are only accessed by the researcher and themselves. A letter outlining the expected storage and access procedures has been prepared for the consent administrator (see attached file).

In the same week as the information sheets and consent forms are circulated to parents, I will visit the school to deliver an information session about healthy and respectful relationships and what respectful behaviour looks like to all Year 10 pupils. (If the recruitment process is extended to include Year 9 pupils, then I will lead parallel information sessions for all Year 9 pupils). It is anticipated that this will be delivered during tutor time sessions or assembly, according to what is convenient to the school. Towards the end of this information session, boys will be invited to participate in further research in this area, with an overview of the project provided. At the end of the session, all pupils will fill in a sheet to give feedback on the session and I will collect the completed forms.

There will be a section on the feedback form for boys only. This will allow them to express their interest in participating in the study and also to nominate up to three male peers who are also in Year 10, who they would like to join them in a focus group. It will be made clear to the boys that, even if they express an interest, they may not be able to take part and might end up in a group with other people because: 1) I was unable to fit all of their friends in the same group, 2) Your friends, or your friends' family, did not want to take part, 3) Your family didn't want you to take part.

It will also be made clear to participants on the form that if they do not hear from the consent administrator by a certain date, they should assume that they have not been selected to participate in the study. It is hoped that the focus groups, then, will be made up of friendship groups. One group may consist of two or more separate friendship groups. Some groups may be made up of participants who did not indicate a preference or whose nominees did not indicate the same preference or have parental consent. The feedback form will also have a leaflet attached to it for

pupils to take home to their parents to inform them about the information session. It is hoped that this will support boys to discuss with their parents whether or not they wish to participate in the research.

In the event that the school is unable to accommodate an in person visit from me, I will record an information video and ask that it is shared during tutor time. In this instance, I will provide the school with the feedback forms, which I will ask tutors to oversee the completion and collection of. Feedback forms will be stored securely on the school site at all times, with access granted to only the consent administrator and researcher, until they are destroyed by the school once data has been transferred to the university's secure server.

Parents will be given a two-week window in which to decide whether they wish to provide consent for their child's participation. After the first week, a reminder will be sent. After the deadline has passed, I will check the list of pupils who have expressed an interest in participating against the list of pupils whose parents provided consent, and I will exclude any pupils whose parents have not consented from any further involvement. From the remaining pupils, I will identify students who have nominated each other so that I am able to identify friendship groups. It is hoped that I will recruit 20-25 participants from one school using this method. However, if it is not possible to recruit the proposed number of participants, I will approach Year 9 pupils in the same school and follow the steps of the process as outlined above in an attempt to recruit more participants.

At the start of the focus groups, participant information sheets and assent forms will be given to participants. These will be verbally explained before they are asked to sign them. It will be made clear that they are still able to withdraw from the study at this stage.

*The Headteachers' letter, Letter to Year 10 Parents, Letter to Year 9 Parents, the opt-in consent form and information sheets for parents of year 9 & 10, the assent forms for year 9 & 10 pupils, a copy of the presentation to be delivered during tutor time and the presentation feedback/expression of interest form, along with the leaflets for pupils to take home, are all attached to this application.*

### **3.3 Describe the relationship between researcher and sample. Describe any relationship e.g., teacher, friend, boss, clinician, etc.**

It is not anticipated that there will be a relationship between the researcher, who holds an enhanced DBS certificate, and sample. However, it is possible that I may be researching in a school where I am also conducting work on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. There is, therefore, a small possibility that one of the Year 10/Year 9 boys who has expressed an interest in participating in the study could be referred to me for casework or for an Education Health Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). I have agreed with the service manager that, in the event of this happening, I will arrange to swap this work with another one of the Trainee Educational Psychologists in the service, such that they would conduct the work with this pupil, to avoid a conflict of interest. In return, I would take on one of their pieces of casework or EHCNA work.

**3.4 How will you obtain the consent of participants? (please upload a copy of the consent form if obtaining written consent) NB A separate consent form is not needed for online surveys where consent can be indicated by ticking/checking a consent box (normally at the end of the PIS). Other online study designs may still require a consent form or alternative procedure (for example, recorded verbal consent for online interviews).**

The Headteacher, the gatekeeper, will initially provide their consent for the research to be conducted in their school. This will be provided through an email addressed to the researcher that confirms their participation. The Headteacher will nominate a member of school staff to be the consent administrator and main point of contact between the researcher and the school.

Initially, a letter will be sent to the parents of all Year 10 pupils informing them about the project, with an accompanying Parent Information Sheet and Consent Form for parents of Year 10 boys. Year 10 boys will be invited to participate in the research, subject to their parents giving consent, using the opt-in consent form. However, if it is not possible to recruit the required number of Year 10 boys, Year 9 boys and their parents will be approached following the same procedure as that outlined here.

The consent form will be distributed via the school's usual method for communicating with parents. If electronic communication is the norm, then the consent form can be completed and returned as a Microsoft Form. This will enable the researcher to collect the information directly and for it to be stored on the university's secure server at all times. However, if required by the school, photocopies of the consent form will be made and distributed to parents. In this case, a nominated member of school staff, hereafter referred to as the consent administrator, will be responsible for collecting returned consent forms and will store them securely on the school site and ensure that they are only accessed by the researcher and themselves. A letter outlining the expected storage and access procedures has been prepared for the consent administrator (see attached file).

I will visually inspect the forms when I visit the site, making a list of pupils whose parents have provided consent. This list will be stored safely on the university's secure server. The forms will remain at school until after the data collection is complete, before being photographed with a university laptop. The images will be stored on the university's secure server and physical copies will be destroyed on the school site.

Participants will be recruited via face-to-face presentation sessions, as described in Section 3.2. The names of pupils who have completed an expression of interest will then be analysed as described in Section 3.2 to finalise the focus group formations. I will negotiate suitable dates, times and school-based locations for the focus groups to take place with the consent administrator. The consent administrator will communicate the date, time and location with each participant separately (to maintain confidentiality). At the start of the focus groups, participant information sheets and assent forms will be given to participants. These will be verbally explained before they are asked to sign them. It will be made clear that they are able to withdraw from the study at this stage should they wish to.

*The Parent/Carer Letters about the project, The Parent Information Sheets, the Parent/Carer Opt-in Consent Forms and the Pupil Information Sheets and Assent Forms are all attached to this application.*

**3.5 Is there any reason to believe participants may not be able to give full informed consent? If yes, what steps do you propose to take to safeguard their interests?**

As the participants will be under the age of 16, I will be gaining consent from parents. However, as the participants will be able to advocate for themselves, I will also be gaining their assent, whilst giving them all the information regarding the study. I will allow them to understand that they can withdraw or stop at any point (up to the point of transcription), and I will provide a debrief information sheet afterwards, with key support websites and numbers attached.

**3. Research procedures, interventions and measurements****4.1 Give a brief account of the procedure as experienced by the participant. Make it clear who does what, how many times and in what order. Make clear the role of all assistants and collaborators. Make clear the total demands made on participants, including time and travel. Upload copies of questionnaires and interview schedules to ERGO.**

Initially, Year 10 pupils and their parents/carers will be approached. However, if it is not possible to recruit enough Year 10 pupils, the same procedure will be followed with Year 9 pupils, so whilst I refer to Year 10 pupils here, Year 9 boys may also be participants.

Year 10 pupils will listen to a presentation that I will deliver in person or via video, depending on the school's preference. After this they will all complete a feedback form, and boys will be given the opportunity to express their interest in joining the research. If they express interest, they will also be given the opportunity to name up to three Year 10 boys that they would like to be in a focus group discussion with. It will be made clear to them that they may not be able to take part in the study, or be with the person they selected, because: 1) I was unable to fit all of their friends in the same group, 2) Your friends, or your friends' family, did not want to take part, 3) Your family didn't want you to take part.

The names of pupils who expressed an interest in participating will be checked against the opt-in consent list, to ensure that they do have parental consent. Any pupil who does not have parental consent for participation will be ineligible for the study. Pupils who have been selected will be notified by the consent administrator of the date, times and location of their focus group.

Participants will take part in focus groups, with 5-6 boys in each. It is anticipated that there will be 4 focus groups in total. At the start of the focus groups, the participant information sheet and assent forms will be verbally explained, and participants will have a chance to ask questions. Participants will also be made aware at this point that, if I have concerns regarding their safety, I will need to contact the relevant member of staff within their school. I will also explain that I will be recording the focus group, explaining how the recording will be anonymised on transcription and stored securely on the university's server, before being deleted once transcription is complete. I will also explain to participants the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of what is discussed, whilst making sure that they understand that I cannot guarantee confidentiality in this regard, given the nature of focus group discussions. Furthermore, I will make it clear to participants that they

should not name any other persons as they recount their personal experiences, in order to avoid breaching other pupils' privacy. Assent forms will then be signed by participants.

The focus groups will be conducted on the school site, will be an hour and a half in length and will take place at a time that is convenient to staff and pupils. It is possible that the school may request that the focus groups take place across two separate sessions, given the length of time required to ensure that the participant information sheet can be fully explained and the assent forms are signed. I will work with the school to ensure that this can be facilitated in a way that is most convenient to their timetable and that will work best for the participants.

I will facilitate the focus groups. Given the sensitive nature of the project topic, I will remind participants that I am an independent researcher who is not associated with their school. In order to emphasise that I am not a member of school staff, and to put pupils at ease, I will dress casually for the focus groups and will bring biscuits and juice to each session, which I hope will act as an ice breaker. I will remind them that the focus groups are a safe space in which to share their views. Ground rules will be established around conduct within the focus groups (being respectful, listening to each other and avoiding naming pupils who are not in the group) and after the groups (maintaining confidentiality for other pupils). Participants will be made aware that they can withdraw from the process at any time prior to transcription and are not required to engage in any part of the conversation that they don't want to. At this point, I will start recording the focus group.

As a warm-up activity, I will ask participants to write down 3 things that describe their school and three things that describe being a Year 10 boy (or Year 9 boy if Year 9 boys are recruited to the study). I will ask them to write these on post-it notes, which they will bring to the front and we will discuss them briefly, arranging them thematically, before moving on. Next, I will ask them to write, on post-it notes, three things that contribute to safety in schools and 3 things that do not. We will follow the same procedure as that outlined above, before moving on to the vignettes.

I will read each vignette out in turn to participants. For each one, I will allow time for individuals to think about the vignette and to think about how a typical Year 10 boy (or Year 9 boy if Year 9 boys are recruited to the study) might respond. They will be able to make notes if they would like to, before I open up a group discussion. I will ask follow-up questions (attached to this application) to clarify points or develop the discussion as required but will aim to allow the participants to talk freely amongst themselves as far as possible.

At the end of the focus group, I will stop the recording and thank participants for their participation. I will check with participants to ascertain how they are feeling about the process, reminding them who they can go to if they need support, and giving each participant the debriefing form. Participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study and provided with a unique participant identification number which they may quote up to the point of transcription in order to remove their data from the study. This ID number will be on the debriefing form.

*The presentation feedback forms, vignettes, prompt questions and debrief forms are attached to this application.*

**4.2 Will the procedure involve deception of any sort? If yes, what is your justification?**

No

**4.3. Detail any possible (psychological or physical) discomfort, inconvenience, or distress that participants may experience, including after the study, and what precautions will be taken to minimise these risks.**

Some psychological discomfort and/or distress may be experienced by participants due to the nature of the topic being discussed. Even though vignettes will be used which will ask them to discuss 'what a typical year 10 (/Year 9 boy) would think,' rather than asking them to directly share their own experiences, discussing safety in school could still potentially lead to participants discussing their own experiences and/or the experiences of others in relation to this topic. This could be potentially distressing and/or uncomfortable for participants to talk and think about.

To minimise potential distress, participants, their parents/carers and their school will be fully informed of the nature of the topic being explored and thus will be able to make a judgement regarding whether they feel comfortable engaging in discussion on this topic. Furthermore, I will ensure that participants are aware of the members of staff they can speak to following the interview if they have any concerns or anything they would like to discuss further. In addition, participants will be provided with resources to signpost them to services that are able to support them if required. Participants will be made aware that they can withdraw from the process at any time prior to transcription and are not required to engage in any part of the conversation that they do not want to.

There is the potential for disclosures due to the nature of the topic being discussed in the focus groups. I will ensure that I am aware of who the Designated Safeguarding Lead is within the school, should I need to contact them with any concerns. Participants will be made aware before the focus groups begin that, if I have concerns regarding their safety, I will need to contact the relevant member of staff within their school.

*The debriefing form is attached to this application.*

**4.4 Detail any possible (psychological or physical) discomfort, inconvenience, or distress that YOU as a researcher may experience, including after the study, and what precautions will be taken to minimise these risks. If the study involves lone working please state the risks and the procedures put in place to minimise these risks ([please refer to the lone working policy](#)).**

In the course of the focus groups, the participants may express views that I find uncomfortable or disagree with. I will keep a reflective log throughout the process of

delivering the focus groups, using meetings with my supervisor and research team to reflect on any difficult experiences. I am also aware of who I can speak to within the university (e.g., personal tutor) and what outside agencies I can contact for support, should the need arise. In addition, I receive weekly supervision which is a further avenue of support if required.

Whilst I want the boys to feel that they can discuss their views as openly as possible, following Burrell et al. (2019), in their toolkit for engaging men and boys in discussions about VAWG, I believe it is important to challenge harmful, prejudiced or oppressive attitudes, should they arise. This is to avoid either dismissing or colluding with such attitudes. My hope is that if any views such as these are raised during the discussions, the boys themselves will challenge them. However, I will work with my research team to plan how to respond in a sensitive and non-shaming manner to any such views if they arise in the course of the discussions and are not challenged by other participants. Examples of such responses are included in the Follow-up Questions and Prompts document, attached to this application.

**4.5 Explain how you will care for any participants in 'special groups' e.g., those in a dependent relationship, are vulnerable or are lacking mental capacity), if applicable:**

Participants will be under the age of 16, therefore are in a vulnerable group. I will take the following measures to care for them:

- Opt-in consent will be taken from parents/carers. Written informed assent will also be taken from participants at the time of data collection.
- To minimise potential distress, participants, their parents/carers and their schools will be fully informed of the nature of the topic being explored and thus will be able to make a judgement regarding whether they feel comfortable engaging in discussion on this topic.
- If participants become distressed during the focus groups, I will ask whether they would like to take a break and stop the recording, or whether they are happy to continue; a break will be given if required.
- Consent will be monitored throughout the process and I will remain alert to the psychological well-being of the participants.

Furthermore, I will ensure that participants are aware of the member of staff they can speak to following the interview if they have any concerns or anything they would like to discuss further. In addition, participants will be provided with resources to signpost them to services that are able to support them if required. Participants will be made aware that they can withdraw from the process at any time prior to transcription and are not required to engage in any part of the conversation that they don't want to.

There is the potential for disclosures due to the nature of the topic being discussed in the interviews. I will be fully aware of who the Designated Safeguarding Lead is within the school, should I need to contact them with any concerns. Participants will be made aware before the focus groups begin that, if I have concerns regarding their safety, I will need to contact the relevant member of staff within their school.

**4.6 Please give details of any payments or incentives being used to recruit participants, if applicable:**

Prior to being given the opportunity to express their interest in taking part, potential participants will be informed that biscuits and juice will be available during the focus groups.

Upon completion of the focus group, participants will have the opportunity to vote for a charity. Whichever charity has the most votes by the end of the research will receive a donation of £50 from the researcher's thesis budget on behalf of all the participants. This is optional and participants' choices will not be recorded as part of the study. The charities participants will be able to vote for are:

White Ribbon	Friends of the Earth	RSPCA	Cancer Research
<i>A charity engaging men &amp; boys to end violence against women</i>	<i>A charity dedicated to sustainability</i>	<i>Protecting pets and wildlife</i>	<i>Funding research into beating cancer</i>

The school will also receive a collection of books relating to healthy relationships as compensation for their participation.

**5. Access and storage of data**

**5.1 How will participant confidentiality be maintained? Confidentiality is defined as non-disclosure of research information except to another authorised person. Confidential information can be shared with those already party to it and may also be disclosed where the person providing the information provides explicit consent. Consider whether it is truly possible to maintain a participant's involvement in the study confidential, e.g. can people observe the participant taking part in the study? How will data be anonymised to ensure participants' confidentiality?**

Participants will be taking part in focus groups whereby they will be sharing ideas in front of other pupils. All participants will be reminded at the start of the focus group that any information shared with the group should not be shared outside of the group and that they should avoid naming other pupils when recounting personal experiences, in order to protect the privacy of others. Whilst confidentiality in regard to this aspect cannot be ensured, the risk here will be carefully explained to participants. Before starting discussion around the vignettes, boys will be reminded not to name any other pupils in their discussions or whilst reflecting on personal experiences. However, at the point of transcription, all focus group responses will be anonymised and will not be able to be traced back to the individual pupils.

Only the researcher team will have access to the collected data, which will be transferred to and stored on the University's secure server as soon as possible. Until data has been uploaded onto the secure server it will remain on a university password protected laptop which will remain in my possession. Upon completion of transcription, the audio data will be destroyed. The transcriptions will be stored on the University's secure server for 10 years after completion of the study.

**5.2 How will personal data and study results be stored securely during and after the study. Who will have access to these data?**

All consent forms collected online via Microsoft Forms will be stored on the university's secure server. If the school prefer that paper copies of consent forms are produced, consent forms will be stored, along with the assent forms, on the school site, in a locked cabinet, which only the researcher and consent administrator will be granted access to, until the researcher has completed the research. After the research has been completed, the researcher will photograph hard copies of consent/assent forms using a University of Southampton laptop. These images will be stored securely on the secure server. Anonymised demographic data will also be stored on the secure server on a university laptop. The physical copies will be destroyed on the school site and will not leave the school site at any time.

The feedback form from the presentation, which will also contain personal data, will be stored in a locked cabinet on the school site, which only the researcher and consent administrator will have access to, until the researcher has completed all of the presentations. At this point, the researcher will photograph them using a University of Southampton laptop. The images will be stored on the university's secure server and the physical copies will be destroyed on the school site.

I will record the audio data using the university's password protected laptop and university dictaphones. Audio files from the dictaphone will be immediately transferred to the university laptop and deleted from the dictaphone. Audio data will be transferred as soon as possible to the University's secure server and will then be deleted from the University's laptop.

I will transcribe the focus group recordings. Audio files will be uploaded to and transcribed initially in Microsoft Word, then edited and finalised by the researcher. Audio recording data will be destroyed once transcription has been completed. The transcripts will also be stored on the University's secure server.

Upon completion of the study, the focus group transcripts will be stored securely on the University's server for 10 years. Audio data will be fully anonymised at point of transcription. Only the researcher team will have access to the study data.

I will share my data with the named supervisors through a shared university file. Explicit detail that details how I plan to make data available, who will be able to access the data and how the data will be accessed will be provided in the consent/assent forms.

Identifiable data (e.g., names; contact details) will be destroyed and fully anonymised at the earliest opportunity. This will occur after the dissemination of findings to participants. Anonymisation keys and consent/assent forms will be stored separately from the data collected. All data will be stored on university servers.

I will follow the University Research Data management policy whilst storing digital data. The university's OneDrive secure storage system allows enough capacity to store the proposed file size of the data set (5GB). I currently use the university's OneDrive system to securely store all information related to the DEdPsych; the thesis will be no different and the full bibliography will be stored here.

The master, working copy of data will be stored on the OneDrive system at the university and backed up regularly to a password protected University Laptop. The underlying data for my thesis will be deposited in the institutional research repository (PURE). A DOI will be requested for the data set. Access will be agreed within the supervisory team and the data management plan will be updated

accordingly; for example, allowing researchers to access the data set at a later opportunity to continue exploration within the research area.

**5.3 How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate? Please note that anonymous data (e.g. anonymous questionnaires) cannot be withdrawn after they have been submitted. If there is a point up to which data can be withdrawn/destroyed e.g., up to interview data being transcribed please state this here.**

Vulnerable participants under the age of 18 and their guardians will be informed of participants' right to withdraw consent/assent forms. I will also remind the participants before and after the group discussion. Participants will be provided with a unique participant identification number on the debrief form which they may quote up to the point of transcription in order to remove their data from the study.

Participants will be informed that beyond the point of transcription, the data will be anonymised and analysed together with other transcripts. Therefore, it will be impossible to remove all data belonging to one participant.

## 6. Additional Ethical considerations

**6.1 Are there any additional ethical considerations or other information you feel may be relevant to this study?**

I will ensure I am aware who the designated safeguarding lead is and that they are made aware of when the interviews are taking place.

## References

Adams, H. L., & Williams, L. R. (2014). 'It's not just you two': A grounded theory of peer-influenced jealousy as a pathway to dating violence among acculturating Mexican American adolescents. *Psychology of Violence, 4*(3), 294–308. APA PsycInfo. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034294>

Addis, M. E., & Schwab, J. R. (2013). Theory and research on gender are always precarious. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 14*(2), 114–116. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030960>

Aghtaie, N., Larkins, C., Barte, C., Stanley, N., Wood, M., & Øverlien, C. (2018). Interpersonal violence and abuse in young people's relationships in five European countries: Online and offline normalisation of heteronormativity. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence, 2*(2), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239868018X15263879270302>

Albury, K. (2017). Just because it's public doesn't mean it's any of your business: Adults' and children's sexual rights in digitally mediated spaces. *New Media and Society, 19*(5), 712–725.

APA. (2012). Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *American Psychologist, 67*(1), 10–42. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024659>

APA. (2025). *APA Style: Gender*. [Https://Apastyle.Apa.Org. https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/gender](https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/gender)

Awasthi, B. (2017). From Attire to Assault: Clothing, Objectification, and De-humanization – A Possible Prelude to Sexual Violence? *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00338>

Banet-Weiser, S. (2021). 'Ruined' lives: Mediated white male victimhood. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 24*(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420985840>

Bareket, O., & Shnabel, N. (2020). Domination and Objectification: Men's Motivation for Dominance Over Women Affects Their Tendency to Sexually Objectify Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 44*(1), 28–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319871913>

Barter, C., & Renold, E. (2000). 'I wanna tell you a story': Exploring the application of vignettes in qualitative research with children and young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(4), 307–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570050178594>

Bernard, P., Loughnan, S., Marchal, C., Godart, A., & Klein, O. (2015). The Exonerating Effect of Sexual Objectification: Sexual Objectification Decreases Rapist Blame in a Stranger Rape Context. *Sex Roles*, 72(11–12), 499–508. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0482-0>

Bosson, J. K., Jurek, P., Vandello, J. A., Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Olech, M., Besta, T., Bender, M., Hoorens, V., Becker, M., Timur Sevincer, A., Best, D. L., Safdar, S., Włodarczyk, A., Zawisza, M., Żadkowska, M., Abuhamdeh, S., Badu Agyemang, C., Akbaş, G., Albayrak-Aydemir, N., ... Žukauskienė, R. (2021). Psychometric Properties and Correlates of Precarious Manhood Beliefs in 62 Nations. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 52(3), 231–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022121997997>

Bosson, J. K., & Vandello, J. A. (2011). Precarious Manhood and Its Links to Action and Aggression. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(2), 82–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411402669>

Bowen, E., Holdsworth, E., Leen, E., Sorbring, E., Helsing, B., Jaans, S., & Awouters, V. (2013). Northern European Adolescent Attitudes Toward Dating Violence. *Violence and Victims*, 28(4), 619–634. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-0009>

Branney, P., & White, A. (2008). Big boys don't cry: Depression and men. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 14(4), 256–262. <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.106.003467>

Braun, V., & Clark, C. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.

Brehm, J. W. (1966). *A theory of psychological reactance* (pp. x, 135). Academic Press.

Burrell, S. R., Ruxton, S., & Westmarland, N. (2019, October). *Changing gender norms: Engaging with men and boys* [Monograph]. Project Report. Government Equalities Office.; Government Equalities Office. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-publications/changes-gender-norms-engaging-men-boys>

Callicott, K., & Leadbetter, J. (2013). An investigation of factors involved when educational psychologists supervise other professionals. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 29(4), 383–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.853649>

Cislaghi, B., & Heise, L. (2020). Gender norms and social norms: Differences, similarities and why they matter in prevention science. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 42(2), 407–422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13008>

Claussen, C. (2018). *Want Chips?: Challenges and Lessons Learned With Recruiting Adolescent Boys and Securing Parent/Guardian Consent for a Study on Masculinity*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526434050>

Cline, T., Gulliford, A., Birch, S., Frederickson, N., & Miller, A. (2015). *Educational Psychology*. Taylor & Francis Group. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2002033>

Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Polity in association with Blackwell.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Growing up Masculine: Rethinking the Significance of Adolescence in the Making of Masculinities. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14(2), 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/079160350501400202>

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

Cooke, E. M., Lewis, R. H., Hayes, B. E., Bouffard, L. A., Boisvert, D. L., Wells, J., Kavish, N., Woeckener, M., & Armstrong, T. A. (2022). Examining the relationship between victimization,

psychopathy, and the acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(9–10), NP6384–NP6404. psyh. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520966669>

Courtain, A., & Glowacz, F. (2021). Exploration of Dating Violence and Related Attitudes Among Adolescents and Emerging Adults. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(5–6), NP2975–NP2998. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518770185>

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. Sage. [https://web-p-ebscohost-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfxzEwOTk0MzlfX0FO0?sid=d6e6304e-8381-4f18-b15b-d14ec91a0b68@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp\\_42&rid=0](https://web-p-ebscohost-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfxzEwOTk0MzlfX0FO0?sid=d6e6304e-8381-4f18-b15b-d14ec91a0b68@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_42&rid=0)

Dahl, J., Vescio, T., & Weaver, K. (2015). How Threats to Masculinity Sequentially Cause Public Discomfort, Anger, and Ideological Dominance Over Women. *Social Psychology*, 46(4), 242–254. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000248>

Department for Education. (2023). *Keeping children safe in education*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

DfE. (2025a). *Keeping children safe in education 2025*. Department for Education. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/686b94eefe1a249e937cbd2d/Keeping\\_children\\_safe\\_in\\_education\\_2025.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/686b94eefe1a249e937cbd2d/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2025.pdf)

DfE. (2025b). *Relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education (for introduction 1 September 2026)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

DfE. (2025c). *Relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education (for teaching until 31 August 2026)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

Duckworth, K. D., & Trautner, M. N. (2019). GENDER GOALS: Defining Masculinity and Navigating Peer Pressure to Engage in Sexual Activity. *Gender and Society*, 33(5), 795–817.

Edwards, C., Bolton, R., Salazar, M., Vives-Cases, C., & Daoud, N. (2022). Young people's constructions of gender norms and attitudes towards violence against women: A critical review of qualitative empirical literature. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 0(0), 1–12.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2022.2119374>

Edwards, C., Bolton, R., Salazar, M., Vives-Cases, C., & Daoud, N. (2024). Young people's constructions of gender norms and attitudes towards violence against women: A critical review of qualitative empirical literature. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 33(1), 100–111.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2022.2119374>

Equimundo. (2022). *The State of UK Boys*. <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/the-state-of-uk-boys/>

Erfanian, F., Roudsari, R., Haidari, A., & Bahmani, M. (2020). A Narrative on the Use of Vignette: Its Advantages and Drawbacks. *Journal of Midwifery & Reproductive Health*, 8(2), 2134–2145.

<https://doi.org/10.22038/jmrh.2020.41650.1472>

Everyone's Invited. (2020). *Everyone's Invited*. <https://www.everyonesinvited.uk/>

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance* (pp. xi, 291). Stanford University Press.

Finch, J. (1987). The Vignette Technique in Survey Research. *Sociology*, 21(1), 105–114.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038587021001008>

Firmin, C. (2019). *Full article: School rules of (sexual) engagement: Government, staff and student contributions to the norms of peer sexual-abuse in seven UK schools*. <https://www-tandfonline-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/13552600.2019.1618934>

Flick, U. (2007). *Designing qualitative research* (pp. xiii, 130). Sage Publications Ltd.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208826>

Flood, M. (2020). Engaging men and boys in violence prevention. In *Men, Masculinities and Intimate Partner Violence*. Routledge.

Flood, M., & Pease, B. (2009). Factors Influencing Attitudes to Violence Against Women. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 10(2), 125–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838009334131>

Gallagher, C. (2014). Educational psychologists' conceptualisation of domestic violence. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 31, 55–63. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2014.31.3.55>

Girl Guides. (2021). *It Happens all the Time: Girls experiences of sexual harassment*.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. (1997). Hostile and Benevolent Sexism: Measuring Ambivalent Sexist Attitudes Toward Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(1), 119–135.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00104.x>

Gracia, E., Lila, M., & Santirso, F. A. (2020). Attitudes Toward Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the European Union: A Systematic Review. *European Psychologist*, 25(2), 104–121. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000392>

Grubb, A., & Turner, E. (2012). Attribution of blame in rape cases: A review of the impact of rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity and substance use on victim blaming. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 17(5), 443–452. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.06.002>

Guest, G., Namey, E., Taylor, J., Eley, N., & McKenna, K. (2017). Comparing focus groups and individual interviews: Findings from a randomized study. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(6), 693–708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2017.1281601>

Haglund, K., Belknap, R. A., Edwards, L. M., Tassara, M., Hoven, J. V., & Woda, A. (2019). The influence of masculinity on male Latino adolescents' perceptions regarding dating relationships and dating violence. *Violence Against Women*, 25(9), 1039–1052. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218808395>

Haslop, C., Ringrose, J., Cambazoglu, I., & Milne, B. (2024). Mainstreaming the Manosphere's Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the

Andrew Tate Effect. *Social Media + Society*, 10(1), 20563051241228811.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241228811>

Heleniak, C. (2018). Interpersonal Violence Exposure, Social Cognition, and Aggression in

Adolescence. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.

[https://www.proquest.com/docview/2128012404?accountid=13963&bdid=73867&\\_bd=TQPpnUz99YJrWzXE4MB5EWcipFk%3D](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2128012404?accountid=13963&bdid=73867&_bd=TQPpnUz99YJrWzXE4MB5EWcipFk%3D)

Henrich, J., Heine, S., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and*

*Brain Sciences*, 33(2–3), 61–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>

Herrman, J. W. (2013). How teen mothers describe dating violence. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic,*

*& Neonatal Nursing: Clinical Scholarship for the Care of Women, Childbearing Families, & Newborns*, 42(4), 462–470. psyh. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1552-6909.12228>

Hillman, B. (2013). "The Clothes I Wear Help Me to Know My Own Power": The Politics of Gender

Presentation in the Era of Women's Liberation. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 34(2), 155–185. <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.34.2.0155>

Holmqvist Gattario, K., Frisén, A., Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M., Ricciardelli, L., Diedrichs, P., Yager, Z.,

Franko, D., & Smolak, L. (2015). How Is Men's Conformity to Masculine Norms Related to Their Body Image? Masculinity and Muscularity Across Western Countries. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038494>

Horeck, T., Ringrose, J., Milne, B., & Mendes, K. (2023). #MeToo in British schools: Gendered

differences in teenagers' awareness of sexual violence. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13675494231191490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494231191490>

Jenkins, N., Bloor, M., Fischer, J., Berney, L., & Neale, J. (2010). Putting it in context: The use of

vignettes in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), 175–198.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356737>

Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: A conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580–1589. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61683-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61683-4)

Johnson. (2012). *Men's discourses of help-seeking in the context of depression—Johnson—2012—Sociology of Health & Illness—Wiley Online Library*. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2011.01372.x>

Keddie, A. (2022). Engaging boys in gender transformative pedagogy: Navigating discomfort, vulnerability and empathy. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 30(3), 401–414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1977980>

Krivoshchekov, V., Gulevich, O., & Blagov, I. (2023). Traditional masculinity and male violence against women: A meta-analytic examination. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 24(4), 346–364. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000426>

Kutsyuruba, B., Klinger, D. A., & Hussain, A. (2015). Relationships among school climate, school safety, and student achievement and well-being: A review of the literature. *Review of Education*, 3(2), 103–135. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3043>

Levac, L., Ronis, S., Cowper-Smith, Y., & Vaccarino, O. (2019). A scoping review: The utility of participatory research approaches in psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 47(8), 1865–1892. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22231>

Lombard, N. (2016). 'Because they're a couple she should do what he says': Young People's justifications of violence: heterosexuality, gender and adulthood. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 25(3), 241–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2014.943699>

Lombard, N., & McMillan, L. (2013). *Violence Against Women: Current Theory and Practice in Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, and Exploitation*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Lopez, F. (2023). How can educational psychology inform policy? *Educational Psychologist*, 58(4), 278–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2023.2253297>

Love, S. R., & Richards, T. N. (2013). An exploratory investigation of adolescent intimate partner violence among African American youth: A gendered analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28(17), 3342–3366. psyh. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513496898>

Maeda, Y., Caskurlu, S., Kenney, R. H., Kozan, K., & Richardson, J. C. (2022). Moving qualitative synthesis research forward in education: A methodological systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 35, 100424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100424>

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370–396.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality* (pp. xiv, 411). Harpers.

McCarry, M. (2010a). Becoming a 'proper man': Young people's attitudes about interpersonal violence and perceptions of gender. *Gender and Education*, 22(1), 17–30.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250902749083>

McCarry, M. (2010b). Becoming a 'proper man': Young people's attitudes about interpersonal violence and perceptions of gender. *Gender and Education*, 22(1), 17–30.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250902749083>

McCarry, M., & Lombard, N. (2016). Same Old Story? Children and Young People's Continued Normalisation of Men's Violence against Women. *Feminist Review*, 112(1), 128–143.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2015.50>

McDermott-Thompson, V. (2015). Understanding young people's experiences and views of partner violence in teenage intimate relationships. *PQDT - UK & Ireland*.  
[https://www.proquest.com/docview/1865292704?accountid=13963&bdid=69166&\\_bd=%2Fi0Q5uLvYFcRZRyQilillXy90sE%3D](https://www.proquest.com/docview/1865292704?accountid=13963&bdid=69166&_bd=%2Fi0Q5uLvYFcRZRyQilillXy90sE%3D)

Mendes, K., Horeck ,Tanya, & and Ringrose, J. (2022). Sexual violence in contemporary educational contexts. *Gender and Education*, 34(2), 129–133.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2022.2032537>

metoo movement. (2006). *Get To Know Us / History & Inception*. Me Too. Movement.  
<https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/>

Milne, B., Cambazoglu, I., Haslop, C., & Ringrose, J. (2024). Researching Young Masculinities During the Rise of 'Misogyny Influencers': Exploring Affective and Embodied Discomfort and Dilemmas of Feminist and Queer Researchers. *YOUNG*, 11033088241295844.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088241295844>

Moor, A. (2013). She Dresses to Attract, He Perceives Seduction: A Gender Gap in Attribution of Intent to Women's Revealing Style of Dress and its Relation to Blaming the Victims of Sexual Violence. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(4), 115–127.

Murphy, J., Hughes, J., Read, S., & Ashby, S. (2021). Evidence and practice: A review of vignettes in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher*, 29(3), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.2021.e1787>

Noblit, G. W., & Hare, R. D. (1988). *Meta-ethnography: Synthesizing qualitative studies*. Sage Publications. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0654/87022330-t.html>

Ofsted. (2021). *Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges*. GOV.UK.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

ONS. (2021). *The lasting impact of violence against women and girls—Office for National Statistics*.  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/thelastinimpactofviolenceagainstwomenandgirls/2021-11-24>

ONS. (2023a). *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales—Office for National Statistics*. Census 2021: Domestic Abuse Victim Characteristics, England and Wales: Year Ending March 2023.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

ONS. (2023b). *Partner abuse in detail, England and Wales—Office for National Statistics*. Census

2021: Partner Abuse in Detail, England and Wales: Year Ending March 2023.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/partnerabuseindetailenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2022>

Oppenheim, M. (2021, October 1). *Met Police spark fierce backlash for 'disgraceful' advice issued after Everard murder*. The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/met-police-sarah-everard-advice-criticism-b1930682.html>

Orchowski, L. M., Edwards, K. M., Hollander, J. A., Banyard, V. L., Senn, C. Y., & Gidycz, C. A. (2020).

Integrating Sexual Assault Resistance, Bystander, and Men's Social Norms Strategies to Prevent Sexual Violence on College Campuses: A Call to Action. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(4), 811–827. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018789153>

Over, H., Bunce, C., Baggaley, J., & Zendle, D. (2025). Understanding the influence of online misogyny in schools from the perspective of teachers. *PLOS ONE*, 20(2), e0299339.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0299339>

Rains, S. A., & Turner, M. M. (2007). Psychological Reactance and Persuasive Health Communication: A Test and Extension of the Intertwined Model. *Human Communication Research*, 33(2), 241–269. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2007.00298.x>

Raskin, J. D. (2002). Constructivism in psychology: Personal construct psychology, radical constructivism, and social constructionism. In *Studies in meaning: Exploring constructivist psychology* (pp. 1–25). Pace University Press.

Reeves, P. M., & Orpinas, P. (2012). Dating Norms and Dating Violence among Ninth Graders in Northeast Georgia: Reports from Student Surveys and Focus Groups. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(9), 1677–1698. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511430386>

Renold, E. (2001). Learning the 'Hard' Way: Boys, hegemonic masculinity and the negotiation of learner identities in the primary school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 22(3), 369–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690120067980>

Renold, E. (2007). Primary School "Studs": (De)constructing Young Boys' Heterosexual Masculinities. *Men and Masculinities*, 9(3), 275–297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X05277711>

Revealing Reality. (2022). *Not Just Flirting*. Revealing Reality. [https://revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Revealing-Reality\\_Not-Just-Flirting.pdf](https://revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Revealing-Reality_Not-Just-Flirting.pdf)

Ringrose, J., Harvey, L., Gill, R., & Livingstone, S. (2013). Teen girls, sexual double standards and 'sexting': Gendered value in digital image exchange. *Feminist Theory*, 14(3), 305–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113499853>

Ringrose, J., Regehr, K., & Whitehead, S. (2021). Teen Girls' Experiences Negotiating the Ubiquitous Dick Pic: Sexual Double Standards and the Normalization of Image Based Sexual Harassment. *Sex Roles*, 85(9), 558–576. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01236-3>

River, J., & Flood, M. (2021). Masculinities, emotions and men's suicide. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 43(4), 910–927. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13257>

Salter, M. (2016). 'Real men don't hit women': Constructing masculinity in the prevention of violence against women. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 49(4), 463–479. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865815587031>

Sawyer, S. M., Azzopardi, P. S., Wickremarathne, D., & Patton, G. C. (2018). The age of adolescence. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 2(3), 223–228. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(18\)30022-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(18)30022-1)

Setty, E. (2019). A Rights-Based Approach to Youth Sexting: Challenging Risk, Shame, and the Denial of Rights to Bodily and Sexual Expression Within Youth Digital Sexual Culture. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, 1(4), 298–311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-019-00050-6>

Setty, E. (2024). Co-designing guidance for Relationships and Sex Education to 'transform school cultures' with young people in England. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 42(2), 106–124.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2023.2228804>

Skilling, K., & Stylianides, G. J. (2020). Using vignettes in educational research: A framework for vignette construction. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 43(5), 541–556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2019.1704243>

Smith, R. M., Parrott, D. J., Swartout, K. M., & Tharp, A. T. (2015). Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity: The Roles of Antifemininity, Subordination to Women, and Sexual Dominance in Men's Perpetration of Sexual Aggression. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 16(2), 160–169.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035956>

Steinberg, L., & Monahan, K. C. (2007). Age differences in resistance to peer influence. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(6), 1531–1543. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.43.6.1531>

Steindl, C., Jonas, E., Sittenthaler, S., Traut-Mattausch, E., & Greenberg, J. (2015). Understanding Psychological Reactance. *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie*, 223(4), 205–214.  
<https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000222>

Storer, H., Schultz, K., & Hamby, S. (2020). The role of gender in adolescent dating abuse: An interpretive meta-synthesis of the qualitative literature. *Social Work*, 65(4), 335–348. psyh.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa032>

Storer, Talan, Swiatlo, LeSar, Broussard, Kendall, Seal, & Madkour. (2020). Context matters: Factors that influence African American teens' perceptions and definitions of dating violence. *Psychology of Violence*, 10(1), 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000232>

Taylor, Calkins, C. A., Xia, & Dalla. (2021). Adolescent Perceptions of Dating Violence: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(1–2), 448–468.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517726969>

The Children's Society. (2020). *Missing the Mark*.

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/missing-the-mark-teenage-relationship-abuse-report.pdf>

Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8(1), 45.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>

Thomson, H. (2025, March 3). *Naked dresses made their mark at the Oscars' after-parties*. Harper's BAZAAR. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/fashion-news/a64009480/naked-dresses-oscars-after-parties/>

Tricco, A. C., Tetzlaff, J., & Moher, D. (2011). The art and science of knowledge synthesis. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 64(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2009.11.007>

United Nations. (1989). *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. UNICEF UK.  
<https://www.unicef.org/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

United Nations. (1993). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. OHCHR.  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women>

Vandello, J. A., & Bosson, J. K. (2013). Hard won and easily lost: A review and synthesis of theory and research on precarious manhood. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 14(2), 101–113.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029826>

Vescio, T. K., Schermerhorn, N. E. C., Lewis, K. A., Yamaguchi-Pedroza, K., & Loviscky, A. J. (2025). Masculinity Threats Sequentially Arouse Public Discomfort, Anger, and Positive Attitudes Toward Sexual Violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 51(1), 96–109.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231179431>

Wescott, S., Roberts, S., & Zhao, X. (2024). The problem of anti-feminist 'manfluencer' Andrew Tate in Australian schools: Women teachers' experiences of resurgent male supremacy. *Gender and Education*, 36(2), 167–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2023.2292622>

WHO. (2018). *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018 – Executive summary*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026681>

WHO. (2024). *Gender and health*. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. McGraw-hill education (UK).

Winters, M., & Weir, A. (2017). Grey matters; on the importance of publication bias in systematic reviews. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 51(6), 488–489. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2016-096679>

Women and Equalities Committee. (2023). *Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings* (Fifth Report of Session 2022-23 HC 331). House of Commons. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40740/documents/199263/default>

Woodley, G. N., Green, L., & Jacques, C. (2024). 'Send Nudes?': Teens' perspectives of education around sexting, an argument for a balanced approach. *Sexualities*, 13634607241237675. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607241237675>

World Economic Forum. (2025). *Gender Gap Report 2025*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/>

Yardley, L., Bradbury, K., & Morrison, L. (2021). Using qualitative research for intervention development and evaluation. In *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design.*, 2nd ed. (2021-54192-013; pp. 263–282). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000252-013>