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## Interviewer: 'Are women and girls ever responsible for the domestic violence they encounter?' Student: 'No, well, unless they did something really, really bad ...'

Deborah Lee<sup>a</sup>, Rachel Allwood<sup>a</sup>, Mark Weinstein<sup>a</sup> and Kerry Sullivan<sup>b</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Research shows the 'gendered nature' of domestic violence, with Women's Aid (a UK-based charity) estimating that 1 in 4 women are affected (2014). This paper reports on a project – funded by Comic Relief, completed by Nottinghamshire Domestic Violence Forum (now known as Equation) and evaluated by Nottingham Trent University. The project adopts a Whole School Approach in seeking to prevent domestic violence. Students at three secondary schools attended between one and five blocks of work, and special events. There is evidence of positive developments – with young people showing understanding of domestic violence as well as the margins between healthy and unhealthy relationships. However, not all students could reply 'never' to the question of 'are women and girls to blame for the domestic violence they experience?'; remarking that if the woman had done something 'really, really bad' then violence might be justified. We argue that young people's uncertainties need to be situated within the gender-unequal socio-contexts of contemporary society, and further call for a WSA to domestic violence prevention to be a compulsory part of the UK national curriculum.

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### Introduction

This paper offers a feminist sociological analysis of a Whole School Approach (WSA) to the prevention of domestic violence. This is defined by the Home Office<sup>1</sup> as – 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse' (2013) and this can be 'psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional' (ibid.). The project upon which this paper draws explored aspects of domestic violence in Geography, Physical Education, Media and Personal, Health, Social and Economic Education classes as well as in special events as part of the curriculum. The project was funded by Comic Relief and conducted in three Nottinghamshire secondary schools during 2010–2012 by Nottinghamshire Domestic Violence Forum (NDVF) (now known as Equation). Questionnaires and interviews resulting from the project were administered by NDTV and evaluated by a team from Nottingham Trent University (NTU). Six other projects were also funded by Comic Relief across the UK, but this was the only one to apply a WSA, seeking to work across schools with a wide range of students and staff, and to also engage with parents in such a way as to embed violence prevention measures across the school community. Other funded projects focused on more specific interventions such as drama for children with learning disabilities or work to prevent forced marriage and honour-based violence.

We begin with a brief introduction to domestic violence, illustrating that while domestic violence behaviours have always existed, feminist research and activism in the area has flourished since the 1970s (Hague & Wilson, 2000). As a result, the problem of domestic violence is no longer completely invisible in UK society (Groves & Thomas, 2014). We explain, however, that violence in *young people's* intimate relationships has only been the subject of meaningful investigation in the UK since the late 1990s (see Barter, McCarry, Berridge, & Evans, 2009; Fox, Corr, Gadd, & Butler, 2013; Hird, 2000). Some practical interventions against it – drawing upon such research – are now being made (see Home Office, 2013). Nonetheless, we note that these interventions are occurring in the context of what is still a highly gender-unequal society (see Banyard, 2011) where simply campaigning for images of women on bank notes can prompt unknown men to tweet women rape threats (Creasy, 2013). In addition, violence against women and girls discourses are rarely prioritised in high-profile policy discussions of the sexualisation of society (see Coy & Garner, 2012) and anti-feminist discourses of individualism (see Baker, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011) seek to prevent girls from embracing collective, feminist positions. Never-the-less grassroots feminist campaigning organisations such as UK Feminista (2014), Object (2014), Everyday Sexism (2014), and Lose the Lads' Mags (2014) are emerging and more established organisations and campaigns – such as the Fawcett Society and, world-wide, One Billion Rising – persist. The context, while deeply troubling, is not, therefore, a bleak one.

This article introduces, and subsequently evaluates both qualitative and quantitative data which has been produced through interviews and questionnaires with young people who took part in the WSA in Nottinghamshire, and material from one particular intervention where young people voted for an organisation they would like to support. While the WSA covered violence in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, the primary focus here is on men's violence to women. For as Wilcox (2006, p. 7) says: 'domestic violence is rooted in a history of structural male dominance'.

Our evaluation demonstrates that the young people involved in NDVF's WSA project benefited greatly from it: in particular, as we will show, they learnt what a healthy relationship might and might not look like. We argue that this is a very powerful message indeed to receive and recall in one's teenage years. However, we also show that, despite the WSA, all young people were not always able to say that women and girls (the 'vast majority' of those affected by domestic violence [Groves & Thomas, 2014, p. 19]) are 'never' to blame for the domestic violence they encounter. Interestingly, they were always able to imply that pets are never to blame for encountering a violent situation. Importantly, though, the young people's responses are not as troubling as those encountered by McCarry (2009) in her focus groups with young people after a domestic abuse prevention programme in Scotland; we argue that this is a step forward.

We contend that we have reached a point in the UK where there is a strong case to be advanced that it should be possible for all children and young people to be educated in schools that start from a position that all victims/survivors are 'never' to blame for the domestic violence they have encountered. Domestic violence, particularly violence against women and girls, is still so prevalent in UK society that we concur with the point made by Coy and Garner (2012, p. 289) that 'pragmatically, one obvious means' to disrupt 'male entitlement' is for '... Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) to be made a national curriculum subject'. The UK Government voted against this proposal in June 2013 (see Barbieri, 2013) but we argue that campaigning for it must continue.

It might be said that now is a good time to seek to disrupt the largely taken-for-granted nature of domestic violence in society: in *Fifty Shades of Feminism*, Kelly (2013) talks of how the Jimmy Savile enquiry (Operation Yew-tree) (see Grey & Watt, 2012) is said to have 'given [some] victims a voice'. Indeed, we have seen many cases of historical abuse also becoming public – such as the prosecution of the former British television and radio broadcaster Stuart Hall<sup>2</sup> (Bunyan, 2014). Likewise, photographs in 2013 of well-known art-dealer, Charles Saatchi, gripping the throat of his then-partner the UK television chef Nigella Lawson have again brought the issue of domestic violence into the public eye in the UK (see, e.g. Freeman, 2013). However, now is also the time when we have been shown – through the trial and subsequent conviction of abused wife Mairead Philpott for the manslaughter of her six children

(with her partner, Mick Philpott, and their friend, Paul Mosley) – that women victims of domestic violence are not always conceptualised as such, with alternative discourses – such as, in this case, entitlement to welfare – taking centre-stage<sup>3</sup> (Neate, 2013). Compelling victims/survivors to speak can be traumatic for them (see Tweedie, Britten & Shute, 2013, for one discussion of the case of Frances Andrade, who committed suicide after giving evidence at the trial of her abuser) and can expose them to being conceptualised as, for example, ‘scroungers’ because of their entitlement to welfare, or as objects of prurient interest because they were supposed to be a ‘domestic goddess’.

### ***A brief overview of domestic violence in adult relationships***

We begin our overview of domestic violence (Home Office, 2013) in adult relationships with an important contribution by Hague and Wilson (2000). They sought women interviewees who had been abused by their male partners in the UK prior to the 1970s. Hague and Wilson chose this group because, as they very powerfully explain:

... during the 1940s and 1950s, women suffering domestic violence in Britain had no one to turn to, except perhaps themselves, nowhere to go, no agencies to help them. There were no refuges, no safe havens, few housing, medical and social services, no counselling centres. There was no publicity or media coverage, not much in the way of legal remedies and very little help from the police. The abuse of wives within families was invisible. (Hague & Wilson, 2000, p. 157)

Feminist research and activism since the 1970s – from the work of Pizzey (1974) to that of Groves and Thomas (2014) – has accomplished much to support victims/survivors of domestic violence (see Hague & Sardinha, 2010). Practical interventions have been made, such as the opening of the first women’s refuge in London in 1971 (Refuge, 2009), the establishment of Women’s Aid in 1974 (Women’s Aid, 2014), and the passing of new legislation, including the removal of the ‘marital rape exclusion’ (the assumption that wives could not be raped by their husbands) in the 1990s (Lees, 2000). Legal change is important, for as Wilcox (2006, p. 7) remarks: ‘male dominance has been enshrined in our legal systems’. Supported by organisations such as Southall Black Sisters – an organisation for ‘Asian and African-Caribbean and minority ethnic women’ (2014) – we have seen high-profile cases – with feminist victories – such as those of Kiranjit Aluwahlia, Emma Humphreys and Sara Thornton. These women were jailed for killing violent partners, but later released.

Zero Tolerance campaigns began in the 1990s, firstly in Scotland and then across the UK (Gillan & Samson, 2000). Building upon early feminist research interventions, such as Kelly’s (1988) groundbreaking exploration of ‘surviving sexual violence’, new areas for academic research have been developed, for instance those recognising that abuse is not only or just physical and teasing out the dynamics of different types of abuse (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2011, for instance, explore economic abuse). Seeing commonalities and differences in women’s experiences of abuse; Mama (2000), discusses black women’s experiences, while Hague, Thiara, and Mullender (2011) explore the character of domestic violence when the woman has a disability; and Allen (2012), highlights domestic violence in the Irish travelling community. Work in the area of same-sex domestic violence has drawn attention to the processes of homophobia and misogyny in the experiences of LGBT victims/survivors (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Mira Goldberg & White, 2011). Donovan and Hester (2011, p. 81) have also broadened the discussion, arguing that ‘those who are willing to do the emotion work in a relationship – regardless of gender and sexuality – can be vulnerable to domestic violence’.

UK surveys of adults’ attitudes to gendered violence have been dispiriting, however. The Amnesty International UK (2005) survey of 1000 people, revealed that ‘a third ... believe a woman is partially or completely responsible for being raped if she has behaved flirtatiously’ (BBC News, 2005). A survey for the BBC’s *Hitting Home* (domestic violence) programmes found that only 60% of 1020 respondents (57% men and 63% women) were able to declare that ‘domestic violence is not acceptable under any circumstances’ (BBC News, 2003). Such surveys demonstrate the tenacity of ‘policing of [women] in everyday life’ (Lees, 1997) and the persistence of the notion that male dominance is ‘legitimate’ (Wilcox, 2006, p. 21).

Even now, in the UK, seven women (and two men) are killed by their partner or ex-partner every month (Morrison, 2014). Viner (2010, p. 277) asks, ‘... how many of [these] stories do we know? Few are

reported in the national press ...'. Further, Devries et al. (2011) reviewing a WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women point to a strong correlation between suicide ideation and suicide attempts among women who have encountered domestic violence. As Banyard (2011, p. 106) reports: 'domestic violence causes more death and disability amongst women aged between sixteen and forty-four than cancer or traffic accidents'.

Domestic violence in adult relationships also affects young people. Hague, Mullender, Kelly, Imam, and Malos (2002) conducted research with children aged between eight and 15, to explore their experiences of domestic violence between adults in their households. They report that: 'the majority of the children who were interviewed stated unequivocally that they had known about the violence, even when their mothers thought that they had not' (Hague et al. 2002, p. 20). Faced with traumatic experiences in what should have been a place of safety, the young people interviewed had developed a range of survival strategies, leading Hague et al. (2002, p. 24) to comment that their 'tenacity and resilience are key resources for social work agencies to work with'. Recognition of young people's strength is important as we move now to consider violence in young people's own relationships.

### **Partner violence in young people's relationships**

In common with many manifestations of interpersonal violence, what was referred to as 'adolescent dating aggression', was first named and studied in the USA, from the 1980s onwards. Indeed, as Barter et al. (2009) has noted, much of the empirical evidence on teenage partner violence is derived from American studies (see Hird, 2000; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001) so we do need to be aware of the potential for this to be culturally sensitive and that many are based on 'at risk' populations. US studies also tend to favour the generation of quantitative survey data and lack the potential to explore deeper meanings<sup>4</sup>. While there are obvious risks in assuming that American data can be simply transferred and applied to the UK, what we know about the prevalence of 'dating violence' is not just of concern in the US. Silverman et al. (2001) report that somewhere in the region of one in five teenage girls in the USA have experienced it. As Hird (2000, p. 69) has suggested, it would appear as though, in the USA, 'aggression in late adolescence is at least as prevalent as wife assault'.

Hird's own UK study – a questionnaire completed by over 400 students, and 25 focus groups – gave an early demonstration of the importance of 'meaning and context' in understanding violence in young people's intimate relationships. In the quantitative study, 'girls and boys reported an approximately equal number of experiences of psychological and physical aggression. Only sexual aggression revealed a gender asymmetry in that girls were more likely to report having experienced sexual aggression from their boyfriends' (Hird, 2000, p. 75). However, the qualitative data suggested 'that much of girls' reported aggression was actually self-defence' (ibid.) and that 'male aggression was interpreted as more threatening and much more likely to cause harm than female aggression' (Hird, 2000, p. 77). The interpersonal violence experiences of girls and boys are – like those of men and women – not the same.

Building upon this earlier work, a more extensive piece of research in the UK was completed by Barter et al. (2009), for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). The report provides a wealth of valuable data about 'partner abuse' in teenage relationships in the UK (as the authors point out, 'dating' is more of a concept for the USA than in the UK). The research of Barter et al. (2009) involved over 1000 questionnaire responses and nearly 100 interviews with interviewees commenting on violence in heterosexual and same-sex relationships. The research findings from Barter et al. (2009) concur with those of Hird (2000) on the importance of interpreting the differing meanings of violence for girls and boys and of seeing it in the context of a gender-unequal society ('only 6% of boys, compared with a third of girls, claimed that they were negatively affected by the emotional violence they experienced... thus, although girls had used emotional violence, without it being underpinned by other forms of inequality and power, their attempts were largely ineffectual' [Hird, 2000, p. 60]). Barter et al. show that partner violence is a widespread experience; and suggest that it is not simply a problem for teenagers – young people who took part in the research were 13+, but they reported violence happening before their teenage years, leading Barter et al. (2009, p. 95) to observe: 'we may have overestimated the age at which partner violence begins in young people's lives'.

Recognition of violence in young people's intimate relationships has led to governmental campaigns aimed at young people, such as, in the UK: *This is Abuse* (in 2011/2012 – the campaign includes a television advert in which it is remarked that 'sex with someone who doesn't want to is rape'). A recent change in the UK Government's definition of domestic violence (March 2013) now makes explicit that this includes 16 and 17 year olds (excluded from the previous definition).<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds and recognition of 'coercive control' (Stark, 2009), are positive developments. When this change was announced in 2012, the CEO of the NSPCC commented that: 'Teenage years are difficult at the best of times but a lack of experience in relationships and issues with self-confidence can mean young people [who encounter domestic violence] feel they have nowhere to turn ....' (Home Office, 2013).

Women's Aid (2014), drawing upon Walby and Allen's research (2004), state that: '45% women and 26% men had experienced at least one incident of inter-personal violence in their lifetimes. However when there were more than four incidents (i.e. on-going domestic or sexual abuse) 89% of victims were women'. An avoidance of the relationship between gender inequality and violence is consistent with developments outlined by Coy and Garner (2012), with regard to government responses to sexualisation. Coy and Garner (2012) point to how the 'sexualisation of culture' provides information and guidance about what is expected of girls/women and boys/men and that, unsurprisingly, these expectations reflect much earlier conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity (see Lees, 1993); effectively that women/girls are sexual prey and men/boys are sexual predators. Gill (2009) suggests a worsening in the situation as girls/women are expected to collude in their oppression, by declaring their sexualisation by boys/men to be pleasurable and empowering. Coy and Garner (2012) discuss two reports commissioned by the Home Office – one in 2010 and one in 2011. They show how both, to differing extents, fail to make connections between the sexualisation of culture and violence against women and girls. Coy and Garner (2012), following Kelly (2007), argue that the sexualisation of culture provides a conducive context for violence.

The side-lining of gender inequality by UK Government bodies needs to be located in the context of a dominant discourse of individualisation. Baker (2010), writing about Australia, and Pomerantz and Raby (2011), writing about Canada, reveal similar findings; that schoolgirls (and women) are increasingly asked to believe that they now have equality with boys (and men) and that feminism is no longer needed. They both accept and reject this narrative, revealing the difficulty of being a girl (and a woman) in contemporary society and push themselves to succeed, conceptualising any failures as individual – but, importantly, they also recognise the gender-unequal nature of society.

### **Contemporary feminist activism**

Feminist activism (see, e.g. Banyard, 2011) has always sought to encourage girls and women (and boys and men) to recognise, and then challenge, gender inequalities, individually and collectively. Present-day UK society is fertile in this regard. Joining well-established organisations such as the Fawcett Society (the 'UK's leading charity for women's equality and rights' – Fawcett Society, 2014) and drawing inspiration from decades of successful feminist activism in the UK and across the globe, new organisations such as UK Feminista (2014) have established themselves, with the intention of engaging young men as well as young women, on a variety of topics ranging from cosmetic surgery to sexism in schools. UK Feminista also offers a yearly summer school promoting grassroots activism – as their website (2014) states: '... progress doesn't just "happen". It takes ordinary women and men to stand up and be counted and create the world they want to live in.' Object (2014), meanwhile, campaigns on a wide variety of contemporary issues, such as the unacceptability of lap-dancing. Lose the Lads' Mags (2014), (which is led by UK Feminista and Object) seeks to remove sexually-degrading magazines from Britain's shops. The Everyday Sexism Project (2014) encourages women and girls to contribute their experiences of sexism (such as sexual harassment in the street) to an online blog and by February 2013 it had secured 20,000 contributions (Barnett, 2013). One Billion Rising (a title which refers to the fact that: 'One in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime. That is one billion women' [One Billion Rising, 2014]) entered its 16th year in 2014.

Individual acts of personal bravery/creativity prompting rethinking of everyday responses to sexism also persist. Caroline Criado-Perez started a petition to keep the image of a woman on a UK bank-note: 'because I couldn't let another decision that airbrushed women out of history pass without challenge' (2013). 36,000 people agreed and signed her petition and an image of Jane Austen will now appear on the UK £10 note from 2017. And in the US, Patricia Lockwood published her poem *Rape Joke* (2013) on an internet site (see <http://www.theawl.com/2013/07/rape-joke-patricia-lockwood>); this went 'viral' (Groskop, 2013) and through it, the rapist, not the victim/survivor becomes the joke, and what was expected to be a private shame becomes public power.

The project evaluated in this paper is part of this individual and collective feminist challenge to women's inequality and oppression; it is a project which seeks to empower young women and men, so that if, or when, they choose to have an intimate relationship (either same-sex or opposite sex) it can be a healthy one. We now outline the WSA project developed by NDVF.

### The WSA to preventing domestic violence

Fox et al.'s (2013) quote a study by Ellis (2004), which reports that 'one-half of UK local authorities had commissioned domestic abuse prevention education programmes at some point recently ... typically to support PSHE lessons'. Fox et al. (2013) own evaluation is of a 'Relationships without Fear' programme comprising of young people in six hours of PSHE lessons. The NDVF project, however, is at the cutting-edge of domestic violence prevention in schools. The campaign group End Violence Against Women (EVAW) (2014) argues that schools should take a 'Whole School Approach' to domestic violence (and that it should be compulsory). They observe that: 'whilst there are pockets of good practice at local level, many schools are [currently] on the back foot on these issues, often responding after an incident or because of an individual champion' (EVAW, 2014).

NDVF has been delivering work in schools since 2001, both at primary and secondary level, and it became clear to them that to produce a sustained and substantial impact, the work needed to be intensive and inclusive of as many different areas of the school as possible. It needed to include direct delivery in lessons right through to influencing school policies to be gender-proofed to ensure that they were inclusive of those issues that disproportionately affected girls (NDVF/Equation, 2014). In 2010, NDVF successfully applied for funding from the Comic Relief Grassroots experts fund<sup>6</sup> to pilot a WSA to domestic violence prevention for two years. The intervention set out to: deliver domestic violence prevention messages to as many students as possible, in as many different ways as possible; integrate domestic violence and sexual violence prevention work into as much of each school's curriculum and delivery as they would allow; ensure domestic violence and sexual violence prevention messages were part of the school wallpaper (i.e. on notice-boards, on posters around the schools, on computers); and ensure that all the components of the school were involved, not just the students (to include also teachers, governors, and parents).

The overarching aim of the WSA project was to create a negative stigma towards domestic violence and sexual violence within schools, which would eventually be self-perpetuating by the students themselves. In order to do this, a list of core domestic violence messages were drawn up as follows: What is domestic violence?; What causes domestic violence?; What are the indicators of an abusive relationship?; Domestic violence is never the fault of the child or the victim; What are the support services for people experiencing domestic violence?; What is a healthy relationship?; What is abusive behaviour? In addition, their core prevention messages included: Promoting the benefits of healthy relationships; Promoting the value of relationships with people of the same gender; Promoting the value of friendships with people of a different gender; Promoting self-esteem; Promoting gender equality and gender respect; Exploring and challenging gender stereotypes; Promoting safe spaces for all – free from bullying and harassment; Promoting female role models; Promoting male role models; Promoting sexual responsibility – understanding consent and consequences.

The WSA is not just concerned with heterosexual relationships, although it is men's/boys' violence to women/girls which is the primary focus of this paper. Donovan and Hester (2008) observe that when domestic violence prevention work is undertaken, it frequently focuses on heterosexual



relationships – particularly disadvantaging LGBT young people who, as a consequence of living in a society where heterosexuality is presumed, do not have easy access to knowledge about their relationships. Many of Donovan and Hester's (2008) interviewees who experienced abuse in their first same-sex relationship referred to their ignorance of 'what to expect' (Donovan & Hester, 2008, p. 282). This paper observes its own limitations in restricting this research to heterosexual contexts and the importance of future research in picking up other aspects of this field that need our urgent attention.

Over the course of the pilot, a series of sessions and programmes were developed that could be used within schools, these included curriculum based sessions: Global Inequalities in Geography and Personal Space in P.E; PSHE sessions – such as the Media Campaign, Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships, Domestic Violence and Awareness, and Sexting. As well as lesson-based delivery, the approach also delivered a series of events involving large numbers of the students. These included International Women's Day events and White Ribbon Day<sup>7</sup> events – including the building of a human white ribbon. As important was the training of teachers, on how to respond to domestic violence disclosures and also to co-deliver some of the elements of the approach. A film of the WSA project (2013), including evaluation material, can be found via the Equation website home page.

### **Methodology**

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data was collected by staff at NDVF from within three schools in the county of Nottinghamshire, UK. These schools were recruited to the research based, in part, on their existing connection and working relationship with NDVF and also because of the good mix of student populations they enjoyed. Employees of NDVF went into the schools to conduct the research – in partnership with a variety of school staff – and the data that was generated was then made available to the academic research team for the purposes of analysis.

Each school developed their own strategy for gaining informed consent for the project to proceed (British Sociological Association, 2002) involving both children and parents. Letters were sent to parents, informing them of nature of the research, what would be expected of their children, questions concerning confidentiality, anonymity and security of data, their rights to opt out of the research and who to contact at NDVF and the school should they wish to discuss the project. The NDVF/NTU research team were not made aware of any objection on the part of parents or children and are satisfied that informed consent was achieved. As the research was not conducted by NTU, full ethical clearance by NTU was not required. NDVF communicated with all parents through a series of newsletters throughout the life of the research project and encouraged dialogue and feedback at all stages. During the two years that the project ran, just one parent contacted NDVF to raise issues of a critical nature and these were discussed appropriately.

On average, completion of the full five blocks of the WSA took somewhere between one and two years within each school. Different blocks were aimed at different year groups and the length of block would vary with some taking up to a whole term to complete. Questionnaires were administered immediately before and after each block of activity and also at other discrete interventions. The questionnaires were administered primarily by the NDVF employee who was leading the project. Occasionally teachers would assist in this process if assistance would facilitate smooth data collection. In total 762 school students completed questionnaires across the three participating schools, with a split of 61% male and 39% female. The majority of questions in the questionnaires were closed, utilising Likert Scales<sup>8</sup> or asking respondents to select an appropriate response from a relatively short selection of response categories measuring attitudes towards relationships and aspects of individual behaviour (De Vaus, 2013). A small number of open questions were used to give the students a completely free choice when expressing which aspects of the lessons/activity they had enjoyed the most and least and what one thing, if any, they would remember from that particular intervention (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Ninety-six teachers also completed questionnaires at similar points in the WSA. As with the students, this sample was split 61% male and 39% with just over half (53%) of participants being school teachers, just over one fifth being teaching assistants (22%) and the remaining participants being either head

teachers, assistant heads or other school staff. Neither NDVF staff nor NTU academics were involved in the recruitment of teachers to participate in the research. This was done directly by the Principal or Vice Principal within each school, with individual teachers being designated a responsibility as part of their contract of employment.

A series of qualitative interviews were conducted by the member of NDVF staff, beginning towards the end of the first year of the research project. These interviews were designed to enable the students to talk more extensively about their understanding of violence and the nature of healthy relationships, using their own frames of reference (Mason, 2002). In-depth interviews were considered to be an appropriate method with this age group, providing for access to more complex contextual data concerning perceptions, motivations and experiences (Silverman, 2013). Where the quantitative surveys provided for an accurate 'snapshot', the qualitative interviews facilitated the generation of data that is more contextualised and holistic (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Thirteen girls and two boys took part in these interviews (six girls and one boy were in year 8; six girls were in year 9; and one girl and one boy were in year 10<sup>9</sup>), with recruitment of these students being undertaken by the participating schools and being based on their reading of the suitability of particular form/year group and the disposition of individual children. Once again, informed consent was obtained from the individual student and in writing from parents. Furthermore, the research team undertook an analysis of voting slips from an event ('Dragons' Den') in which 107 students of one particular school participated. In this discrete exercise students were asked to select an organisation to support.<sup>10</sup>

Highly skilled and experienced staff from NDVF led each research intervention, ensuring that participating children were assured that data they were about to provide to the project would be treated with due care (Masson, 2004). While anonymity was guaranteed, the children were informed of the limits of confidentiality regarding any potential disclosure and the possible impacts of participating in each session. All participants were made aware of how and where they could access support and where there was disclosure, appropriate support was provided on an individual level at the end of the session. Staff at NDVF maintained close liaison with named individuals within the schools (school counsellor or safeguarding lead, as appropriate) and would follow up with regular contact and meetings as appropriate. While there were relatively few disclosures of current abuse, significantly more disclosures of historical domestic violence were made and these were all dealt with accordingly, depending on whether the abuse was historical or current, and whether there was still risk involved.

### ***Evaluation: undoing and remaking the privileged identity of abusers***

Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that participation in the WSA allowed young people to be able to appreciate the signs of what might constitute an unhealthy – heterosexual or same-sex – relationship. This is the case in eight out of ten statements about general behaviour in relationships (for example 'texting all the time is a sign of an unhealthy relationship'). This increase in knowledge is cemented by the students' response to questions about things that they have noticed since taking part in the WSA. For example, 67% say that they now notice the excuses (such as money problems) that are made for unhealthy relationships (up from 47%).

Qualitative data included the following comments, showing that students had come to understand the nature of unhealthy relationships:

... when I speak to someone like my partner I'm thinking like [after the intervention], is it an unhealthy relationship or not? (Transcript 8; female; year 8)

... checks your text messages without your permission. That's a strange one. I wouldn't like my mum doing that and I wouldn't like it if a partner did it. (Transcript 12; female; year 9)

... because if they check your text or something they obviously don't trust you; makes jokes about you they don't love you. (Transcript 6; female; year 8)

We note, though, that while it is very powerful to have learnt what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships while still at a young age, the discourse of healthy and unhealthy relationships – even

where it is presented to young people in a gendered way, as in the Nottinghamshire work – can be uncoupled in young people's minds from gender awareness, and can be made to be about behaviours such as 'texting all the time'.

We also note that there is still some confusion to be found in some of the other data generated through quantitative means, suggesting that further work is needed to explore these issues in more detail. Nearly two-thirds of students (63%) said that they either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that 'jealousy may be part of a healthy relationship', both before and after participation in the WSA. There is a small increase in subjects stating that they either agree or strongly agree with the statement that 'in a relationship it's normal to spend all of your time together' (up from 18 to 21% after participation in the WSA).

In questionnaires, a series of statements were posed as to why men might be violent. It is striking to see that many of the reasons that are commonly put forward for violent behaviour (triggers such as drugs and alcohol, being stressed, having suffered from abuse, etc.), which are still prevalent in society despite feminist writings identifying them as myths from as far back as the 1970s (see Walker, 1979), are more likely to be seen as excuses after participation in the WSA. Thus while 52% of students said that male violence is due to drugs and alcohol prior to the WSA, this figure drops to just 15% after the WSA. After participation in the WSA, the explanation that is given greatest support is that violence is rooted in a desire of men to control their girlfriends (32%). We argue that this is a very important outcome of the WSA – supported by feminist theory (Wilcox, 2006).

Some attitudinal questions were asked that allow us to estimate people's potential behaviour (rather than their actual behaviour). From this, there are also some encouraging findings after participation in the WSA: almost nine out of ten students (88%) either agree or strongly agree with the statement that 'men and boys should stand up to other men and boys to stop violence against women and girls' (up from 82% prior to the WSA). There is a 7% increase in students strongly disagreeing with the statement that 'housework such as cooking, cleaning and laundry should mainly be done by women'.

However, even though men's power and control was understood as the reason for domestic violence, the data shows that there is still much work to be done in understanding the apportioning of blame for domestic violence. There is only a small change in responses as to whether women and girls may sometimes be to blame for the violence they experience. The shift appears from those who previously said that women and girls may 'sometimes' be to blame (from 76 to 69% after the WSA) to those who now say that this is 'never' the case (from 22 to 29% after the WSA).

The question of blame was explored in qualitative data too. Students often, although not always, remained confused when asked if women and girls are ever to blame for domestic violence – even when their other answers show clear instances of understanding some of the messages of the WSA. In transcript 3, (female; year 9), the interviewee identified several indicators of an unhealthy relationship. However, later the interviewer points out that in her questionnaire:

You say that women and girls are to blame for violence sometimes. In what instance would they be to blame?

Well if they are doing it on purpose to provoke them [the abuser]

What sort of things would they do to provoke them?

Well, like go out with friends when they have planned to meet up with their boyfriends so that makes them angry. It can be both ways.

In transcript 7 (female; year 8), when asked what she thinks was the best part of the project, the interviewee answers: 'Learning like that domestic violence is more than just the physical...'. She also demonstrates earlier on in the interview that she recognizes some of the characteristics of an unhealthy relationship, for example, agreeing that it is not normal to spend all your time together and explaining that 'you deserve your own time'. When asked later in the interview though, whether she thinks women and girls are ever to blame for violence they experience, the student answers: '[...] sometimes, they don't deserve it but it's their fault sometimes'. To which the interviewer replies: 'So you are saying there is a difference? So what instances do you think they can be to blame then?'

Interviewee: 'When they've cheated [...]'. Interviewer: 'So then at that stage do you think that might be a reason why then they could be abusive towards her if they found out?' Interviewee: 'Yeah, but they don't deserve it.'

In transcript 9 (female; year 8), the interviewee is commenting on aspects of an unhealthy relationship, which she says can include having 'to go where they want to go cause you may be forced to go and forced to do things you don't want to do. You should get your own say'. This demonstrates that the need for space in healthy relationships, a message of the WSA, has been taken on board. However, when the same student is asked: 'are women and girls ever to blame for domestic violence they experience?', she answers: 'No, well unless they did something really, really bad'. The interviewer asks: 'what constitutes really, really bad for you then?' to which the interviewee replies: 'Well, I don't know. I think never.'

In transcript 14 (female; year 9), the interviewee is able to highlight qualities of an unhealthy relationship such as 'texts you all the time'. The interviewer asks: 'why that one?' and the interviewee replies: 'because you don't have your own privacy and time to yourself'. However, when asked if a woman or girl is 'at any point to blame for any violence they may experience?', the interviewee struggles. 'Umm, kind of' is her first response. Once the point that the woman or girl may have hit out first is put aside by the interviewer and examples of 'flirting' or 'having an affair' are given by the interviewer, the student remains unsure. When finally pushed to say: 'is it always, never or sometimes that a woman or girl could be to blame?', she gives the only answer possible in the circumstances: 'Urm, sometimes'.

We note both that 'lapsing periodically' (Corr, Gadd, Butler, & Fox, 2013, p. 2) into unhelpful views has been noted from participants in other domestic violence prevention projects and that in the from boys to men project it was 'quite common' (Corr et al., 2013, p. 1) for young men to 'justify the use of controlling behaviour ... where low levels of trust were identified in a relationship' (Corr et al., 2013, p. 1) – these are clearly areas for further exploration.

More positively, we would point out that, unlike some of the qualitative responses in McCarry's (2009) study, the responses here are not ones which are *explicitly* underpinned by a 'social sanction of male violence' (McCarry, 2009, p. 338) (although that may be the case, but unspoken). One of McCarry's informants – Richard – gave an analysis of a domestic violence situation (in which a man is violent in response to disliking his girlfriend's choice of clothing) 'based fundamentally on the premise that the boyfriend should be able to, and is entitled to, tell his girlfriend what to do and, in return, she should acquiesce to this' (McCarry, 2009, p. 340). McCarry (2009, p. 340) comments that 'in none of the focus groups did any of the participants, male or female, argue that the boyfriend had no right to tell his girlfriend what to wear in the first instance'. Furthermore, the responses in our data are not categorical that women and girls are responsible for the violence they encounter – instead, they contain doubts and uncertainties.

Given these doubts and uncertainties in young people deciding if girls and women are 'ever' to blame for domestic violence, we have also chosen to include here material from an event called 'Dragons' Den'. The clear winner of this competition on the day was Refs for Pets (an organisation that provides safety for pets when their owners flee domestic violence) – 63 votes. Next was Refuge – 35 votes. Work with children and young people secured 9 votes. The helpline received no votes at all on this occasion from this group of students. Analysis of the voting slips completed was organised into themes for the winner, Refs for Pets: (1) the 'I like pets' theme – 8 comments; Example: 'I love my dog'. This theme simply showed that students liked their pets. (2) The 'personal empathy and identification' theme – 29 comments; Example: 'I have a dog and I wouldn't want to lose her in that situation.' In this theme, students showed understanding of the nature of the threats pets face *in situations of domestic violence* (although references to students' own pets did appear in the comments). (3) The 'support for the cause' theme – 23 comments (it was noted that there is some overlap between comments under themes 2 and 3). Example: 'Because people's pets are really important to them, and a reason they stay is so their pets will be safe. So if the pets are safe, the people are safe.' In this theme, while empathy was often displayed, it was not explicitly on the basis of whether the student likes or has pets.

While second-placed Refuge secured 35 votes in relation to 63 for Refs for Pets, the comments made all fit in (to varying degrees) with the 'support for the cause' theme mentioned above. They show understanding of the purpose of refuges and the need to support them financially.

The event clearly captured the imaginations of many students, who displayed empathy in their voting slip responses. It was also an effective event in terms of what it revealed about changes needed to some students' awareness and attitudes. For instance, notable comments included:

I think that the pets are being punished for something they haven't done

Women can leave and get food but pets can't...

... if nobody looks after them they could get killed.

As indicated above, seven women are killed each month by a partner or ex-partner (Morrison, 2014). Women cannot easily leave domestic violence situations, and financial abuse in these situations can prevent them from buying food for their own consumption. Most of all, women and girls – not just pets – are currently 'being punished for something they haven't done'. It is suggested then, that there is still much work to be done here; though it must also be acknowledged that UK citizens have a particular reputation for a passion for animal welfare.

### *Proposals for the future*

Domestic violence prevention programmes are a very important aspect of education for young people in contemporary society (see also Fox et al., 2013). Whole school interventions into preventing domestic violence need now to be a compulsory part of the national curriculum. NDVF feels that there might be resistance to giving class time to discussion of domestic violence in, for instance, English and Maths, but we would encourage schools to consider the efficacy of this. In English, for instance, so many books, classic and contemporary, reveal gender inequalities and violence against women in all its manifestations – sexual, physical, verbal, financial, emotional, and psychological – if we choose to look for it and study it as such.

NDVF notes that while it sought to involve everyone in the WSA activities, parents were not always involved. Seeking their involvement as WSA activities develop is also important. This can be seen from Barter et al.'s (2009) research. They report that: 'from young people's accounts, it is evident that very few parents spoke to them about their relationships even generally, and only a few, mostly mothers with a history of domestic violence, specifically raised the issue of violence in relationships' (Barter et al., 2009, p. 152). We would add, however, that learning about domestic violence is pertinent at any age.

In evaluating future WSA interventions, we would argue for the use of vignettes of what appear to be real-life case studies of individuals to explore further the question of whether victims/survivors are to blame for the domestic violence they encounter – to see if views about blame are changed if the emphasis is upon 'individuals' rather than the more abstract concept of 'all women and girls in all circumstances'. McCarry (2009) and Barter et al. (2009) deployed vignettes; McCarry's (2009) data showed support for male power and it would have been interesting to explore this in the Nottinghamshire study, given that it was not readily apparent in interview material. Furthermore, as Barter (2009) suggests, there is now a reasonable body of evidence that suggests young people see violence and its acceptability as heavily context dependent. The more that this can be actively explored and differentiated by gender, the greater our knowledge will become.

We strongly believe that prevention of domestic violence is ultimately possible and that feminists involved in research and activism into domestic violence should continue to be pushing for a WSA to domestic violence in all schools as part of the national curriculum. Co-ordinated and comprehensive proactive interventions that are integrated into wider educational programmes have been shown to work in the UK (Hague & Bridge, 2008) and it is our contention that the WSA pilot we have evaluated has changed young people's minds in relation to the nature of healthy relationships.

## Conclusion

This paper has evaluated a WSA to preventing domestic violence – a way of seeking to promote change that is supported by organisations such as EAW (2014). There is plenty of evidence from the evaluation of the project to show that participation in the WSA in the three schools in Nottinghamshire has led to changes in knowledge/awareness amongst young people – for instance, young people learning what an unhealthy relationship looks like. Some attitudes though – such as whether men’s violence against women is ever justified – show themselves to be resistant to change, demonstrating yet again the gender-unequal construction of the society in which the intervention took place.

We have argued that while learning about healthy relationships is vital, it matters for young people to be able to agree that girls and women are ‘never’ to blame for domestic violence, as this is an explicitly gendered discourse and one which – when accepted – has potential to transform society. In order to achieve this, we have argued – in the context of the sheer prevalence of violence against women and girls in UK society – that the WSA needs to be part of the national curriculum.

Whether the WSA in Nottinghamshire in 2010–2012 leads to changes in behaviour – changes which are sustained – necessitates more research. It would be interesting, for instance, to interview participants again when they are adults, to ask them to reflect upon their memories of these interventions in their formative years and how they have thought about them and implemented them since.

## Notes

1. The UK Home Office has as its main responsibility law and order. For further details see <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>.
2. Jimmy Savile (who died in 2011) was originally a disc jockey and subsequently a television presenter. The very numbers of the complaints made against him, largely after his death, leave no room for doubt regarding his guilt, but he was not able to defend himself and victims/survivors did not have their day in court. Other presenters have subsequently been brought into a more wide-ranging investigation; Stuart Hall and Rolf Harris have been jailed.
3. In relation to the Philpott case there has been detailed press coverage suggesting the origins of the cause of the trial related to child custody arrangements against Mick Philpott that might have resulted in loss of children, and so loss of welfare benefits.
4. At risk populations are typically those in ‘troubled’ families, perhaps based upon prior violence or substance use, which have become familiar to social services and in many cases the police too. The focus on US sociology has typically been on the production of quantitative data, which arguably at least has failed to give the attention to case studies – with their search for deeper meanings – that may be found in much qualitative research.
5. The definition is now as follows: ‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; [and] emotional’ (Home Office, 2013).
6. Comic Relief is a UK organisation which has sought to raise money to change lives through comedy events.
7. White Ribbon Day is an International Day seeking to EAW.
8. The Likert Scale is a widely used rating scale, named after Rensis Likert, the American Psychologist who first developed it in the 1930s, and is designed to measure the intensity of people’s responses to an attitudinal statement. Respondents are presented with a statement and invited to place their responses on a balanced five (or seven) point scale, from ‘strongly agree’ through to ‘strongly disagree’ with a neutral mid-point.
9. By year 8 in the UK we typically mean children aged 13, in their eighth year of schooling, although this may not be true for all children in the UK and certainly there are international variations based upon the age at which children commence school.
10. The title refers to a currently popular UK television programme where hopeful entrepreneurs seek funding from wealthy investors on the basis of a presentation followed by questions and answers.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest involved in this publication.

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