# An exploration of masculinity as a barrier to help-seeking behaviours for adolescent boys.

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## Abstract

Male psychological wellbeing has become a growing concern due to the higher rates of suicide in males compared to females. One potential reason for this is due to the socialised norms of masculinity, which often encourage suppression of emotion and stoic independence in managing emotional wellbeing (EW) difficulties. This study explores the discourses used by adolescent males which uphold and progress these masculine norms, and how these act as a barrier to emotional expression and help-seeking. One semi-structured focus group was conducted with four male participants and a critical discourse analysis was undertaken to aid understanding of four key themes. The analysis found that masculine discourses are used by adolescent males to vie for position within their peer social hierarchy, idealise masculine norms in emotion-related behaviour, shape boys' help-seeking behaviours, and enable avoidance and prevention of emotion-related talk. Findings were considered in relation to existing literature and implications for Educational Psychologists have been highlighted. Considerations have been made to limitations and potential further research.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

The psychological wellbeing of males has generated significant coverage and discussion over recent years, and deservedly so. A plethora of charity and NHS campaigns consistently advertise the statistics, that men take their own lives at a rate over triple that of women in the UK, with suicide the most frequent cause of death in men under 45 (ONS, 2022). The matter's complexity comes in the finer details, however, particularly that despite their suicide rate being three times higher, males are diagnosed with common mental health (MH) conditions 1.7 times less than females (NHS, 2016a). For school-aged people (5 to 19), the picture is similar, as males are diagnosed with depressive disorders 2.5 times less frequently than females (NHS, 2018), yet are 2.2 times more likely to die by suicide (ONS, 2022). Though depression and diagnosed mental illnesses are not always present in those who take their own life, they are a factor in most (Bachman, 2018; Bradvik, 2018), raising questions around whether it is masculinity causing what the BPS have named "the silent epidemic" (Baffour, 2018).

Many of these issues are believed to be related to males' help-seeking behaviours, with masculinities socially constructed since childhood thought to play a major role in attitudes towards support-seeking (Staiger et al., 2020). Theories suggest (e.g., Hill & Lynch, 1983) that gender socialisation intensifies during the onset of puberty, as secondary school aged children develop beliefs and behaviours related to cultural gender norms (Pollack, 2006). By adolescence, boys begin enacting stereotypes

based on understandings of what it is to be male (Kagesten et al., 2016), and as depictions of manliness often relate to toughness, independence, and being emotionally stoic, often fear help-seeking risks contradicting their masculine self-concept (Lynch et al., 2018). With schools being so key to young people's constructions of gender norms and cultures, and the impact of these cultures upon young males' MH, this issue is of significant importance to educators and Educational Psychologists (EPs).

### 1.2. National Context

To discuss national and local context of male MH (MH) is a complex task. Due to males' constructions of their experiences of emotional distress (Green et al., 2010); their emotional literacy (EL) differences (Goleman, 2009); and difficulties recognising a need for, or seeking, help (Lynch et al., 2018); there are likely numerous additional cases beyond those seen in statistics. Education professionals may affect this, as presentations of male MH difficulties are often constructed by teachers as aggression (Pearson, 2016), whilst depressive and anxious states are usually understood through female presentations of them (Rice et al., 2013). Many emotional wellbeing assessments are also skewed in this fashion (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000), and though some assessments now use separate sex-normed data (e.g., Beck et al., 2001), many used by doctors do not (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2003). In any case, describing people thinking differently to the status quo as mentally ill risks adopting narratives of the individualist and disablist culture norms that EPs are often looking to deconstruct (Mills, 2017). The below presents the statistics but these points should be kept in mind.

Data from the most recent NHS (2022) survey shows a 5.9% and 14.6% increase in the proportion of 7- to 16-year-olds and 17-to-19-year-olds with a probable MH disorder. There have also been national increases in eating problems, sleep difficulties, and MH-related school absences between 2017 and 2021, and a majority of individuals interviewed in both 2017 and 2021 reported wellbeing decline (NHS, 2021). Over the past decade, Child and Adolescent MH Services (CAMHS) have seen a significant rise in referrals across the UK, including a 134% increase between 2020 and 2021 (Local Government Association, 2022). Despite this, funding for CAMHS has stagnated, with local Care Commissioning Groups (CCGs), on average, spending under 1% of their annual budget on children's MH, a number not reflective of need based on levels of psychopathology (Rocks et al., 2019).

UK Secretaries of State for Education and Health wrote in their 2017 green paper (DoH & DfE, 2017) on transforming children and young people's (CYP) MH provision, that support is not available consistently and young people sometimes wait too long for treatment. Data suggests first appointment waiting times fell from an average 57 days in 2017/18 to 40 in 2021/22 (Children's Commissioner, 2023) but are described as a 'postcode lottery' (The Guardian, 2022) due to significant variance between best and worst performing areas. The same green paper has, however, set out plans and given funding to ensure young people have better universal MH support in schools, alongside dedicated MH workers jointly managed by schools and the NHS (DoH & DfE, 2017).

Though teachers have voiced concerns about their role regarding children's MH difficulties (Rothi et al. 2008a), the 'trailblazer' MH support teams project aims to put them in close contact with MH professionals, with 287 teams now operational (NHS, 2020). An MH support team and trained senior MH lead is expected to be available

to every school by 2025 (DfE, 2021). The service has received mixed reviews from schools, who feel urgent needs still go unmet and intervention time is not sufficient, though it's coproduction-based approach and collaboration between services has been greatly beneficial (Ellins et al., 2021). COVID-19-related school closures also significantly affected the services' impact.

In the most recent NHS (2022) survey statistics, boys aged 7-10 had almost double the probable mental disorders as girls (19.7% to 10.5%). This is almost equal at ages 11-16 (18.8% to 22%), but by ages 17-24, boys have almost a 3rd of the amount of probable MH conditions of girls (13.3% to 31.2%). This, however, is not a complete picture, as male suicides are over double that of females at ages 15-19, growing to over treble that between age 20 and 24 (ONS, 2022).

It is suggested that this gender difference is due to male attitudes towards help-seeking, as traditional and respected versions of masculinity socialise males towards seeing toughness, aggression, independence, and emotional mutism as valuable character traits (Lomas, 2014). This may also acculturate males to adopt anger as the most acceptable display of emotion, meaning they often choose more violent methods of suicide more likely to cause death (Freeman et al., 2017; Samaritans, 2021).

This does not mean all typical masculine character traits are negative, even to MH, for it would be obtuse to suggest a historically dominant social group in most societies only holds undesirable qualities. In a meta-analysis by Wong et al., (2017) some masculinity-related traits, such as work primacy, were unassociated with poor MH outcomes. They therefore suggest it would benefit researchers to disaggregate masculinity to reduce suggestions that all typical masculine behaviours cause MH

difficulties. Seidler et al. (2017) also suggest a model separating and focusing on healthy masculine traits, such as in Kiselica and Englar-Carlson's (2010) Positive Psychology of Masculinity, could counteract the negative stereotypes surrounding masculinity that disengage males from MH support.

Cuts to many areas of MH services, such as the £1 billion reduction in Early Intervention Grants and a £700 million real terms cut to public health spending since 2014/15, have not helped CYP MH (LGA, 2022). CAMHS funding not being able to meet need is one issue (Lennon, 2021), but given males present less frequently to MH services, reductions in universal and community-based interventions cause great concern. Support that doesn't necessarily feel like MH support to boys, such as youth services, have received their own significant cuts, as 4500 youth work jobs and 760 youth centres have closed since 2010 (UNISON, 2019).

Unlike many other countries, such as Australia (Australian DoH, 2019; 2021), USA (US Congress, 2021), Ireland (Health Service Executive, 2016), Brazil (Spindler, 2015), and Iran (Esmailzade et al., 2016), the UK do not have male-specific health policies, despite recent discussions in parliament (UK Parliament, 2022). Though policies recognise differences in suicide numbers and some other gender differences, their discussion of how to address male MH issues is non-existent. Policies often mention equality of service delivery regardless of gender, but over decades offer no specifics regarding the improvement of men's MH in any alternative way to other genders (DfE, 2017; DoH, 2011; 2014; DoH & DoE, 2017; DoH&SC, 2022; House of Commons, 2023; HM Government, 2011; 2019; NHS, 1999). Given the multifarious differences of male MH presentation, help-seeking, EL, and suicide rates, to not offer guidance beyond recognition that gender statistically affects MH seems a misjudgement. One explanation for this may be health's devolution to

localised services in the UK (NHS, 2016b), meaning there may be expectation for each service to address gender health differences in their local strategy.

### 1.3. Local Context

This study is based in a South-East England county which was an early adopter of the MH trailblazer programme, growing from two MH support teams in 2018/19 to eighteen in 2022/23 (NHS, 2020). The county is, however, considered one of the worst performing CCGS for CAMHS in England, based on expenditure per child, percent of budget, waiting time, and percent of referrals closed before treatment (Children's Commissioner, 2023). Similar to the national picture, there has been a 65% increase in children presenting in crisis to the local CAMHS team between 2018 and 2022, with subsequent waiting times acknowledged as having a significant impact on local systems. The service states they aim to see patients within 18 weeks (126 days), considerably longer than the national average and double that of government targets, though referrals are triaged, and this waiting time is dependent upon severity of need (NELFT, 2018).

Explanations for these delays include suggestions of a lack of community resources, such as aforementioned closed youth centres, that could help prevent CYP reaching crisis point and tier four intervention (KHOSC, 2022). The county's SEN team has received notice from Ofsted (2019) about eight areas of 'significant weakness', including timeliness and quality of the EHCP process, and unacceptable CAMHS waiting times. Their 2022 follow-up also suggested there had not been significant progress in these areas.  The county's children's services, such as Early Help and

Children's Social Work Services, have, however, recently been graded 'outstanding' (Ofsted, 2022).

Barring the outstanding social services grading, this information suggests the county is performing poorly in supporting CYP with MH needs through CAMHS, children with SEN through its SEND team, and has too few community resources to help CYP at a universal level. Key stakeholders in the area state that local CAMHS has poor capacity, excessive thresholds, and support pathways that are poorly demarcated and require clarification (Kent Public Health Observatory, 2017). Given these issues, and that boys often struggle to seek formal treatment for wellbeing difficulties (Clark et al., 2020a), universal access to help in spaces they already attend may be particularly important for their MH.

This amplifies necessity for school staff to be key figures in improving MH for CYP, with numerous government publications stating teachers' responsibility for student wellbeing. This includes Public Health England (2015) advising teachers to educate about MH as part of PSHE curricula, the Department for Education (2018) outlining schools' responsibilities in identification and prevention of MH needs, and the HCEHC (2017) explaining teachers' roles in offering low-level MH interventions.

There are complications to this plan, however, as teachers have voiced concern about their efficacy in identifying and assisting children with MH difficulties (Rothi et al., 2008a; Mazzer & Rickwood, 2014), often suggesting help from EPs would be beneficial (Rothi et al., 2008b; Alisic, 2012). In support of this, governmental education policies emphasise multi-agency professional collaboration. This is where EPs, who are often the bridging mechanism between child psychology and education, can play a significant role (Greig et al., 2019). The SEN Code of Practice

(DfE, 2015), for example, states the importance of professionals, such as EPs, training professionals, such as teachers, to identify and support children with SEMH difficulties. Therefore, EPs' psychological expertise, alongside their skills enabling systems collaboration and organisational change, makes for a unique position to offer preventative change for the MH of CYP.

## 1.4. Overview of Literature

### 1.4.1. Defining Masculinity

Masculinity is both simple to describe but almost impossible to define. Though most could propose behaviours they believe to be 'of men', scholars have long debated how sex and gender can be biological, social, individually constructed, socially constructed, natural, performed, attached to bodies, separate from bodies, and more in between. As such, this section discusses definitions of masculinity, with the aim of stating how this study will define gender in relation to its findings.

In psychology's infancy, sex was most-prominently known as a biological phenomenon, with related behaviour believed to be naturally driven. Prominent theorists of the time, Terman and Miles (1936), considered males naturally more lust-driven, violent, and avoidant of infant care, creating a positivistic test for masculinity-femininity based on typically sexed behaviours. Both, however, somewhat recognised the fallacy of labelling male and female as dichotomous constructs, acknowledging the overlapping of sex types through varying gradations of behaviour, right through to reversal and rejection of assigned sexual and role patterns.

Throughout the 1960s to 1980s, feminist movements challenged naturalistic, essentialist definitions, with Anne Oakley (1972) appropriating the term ‘gender’ from linguistics for sociological purposes. This enabled gender discussions from a socially learned and social constructionist perspective, adopting the viewpoint that socialised narratives, norms, and expectations are more governing of sex/gender identification than biological phenomena.

Continuation of this stance led through the 1980s and 2000s as Raewynn Connell (1995; 2005) published her work on masculinities, pluralising the term in recognition of men’s multitude of gender performances. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggested masculine behaviour is independent of a person’s sex and is institutionally backed by ongoing and historical power differentials. This suggests society is the constructor of gender, something agreed by Kimmel’s (2004, pg. 503) definition of masculinity as “the social roles, behaviours, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time.”

Connell’s masculinity hierarchy, topped by hegemonic masculinity, is a prominent theory for how masculinity is understood across societies globally.

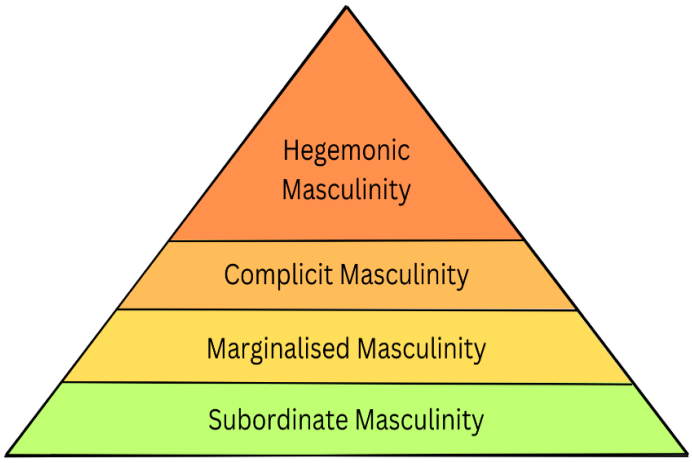


*Figure 1 - Hierarchy of masculinities*

Hegemonic masculinity is described as the social actions enabling continued dominance of men over women (Reddy et al., 2018). Actions pertaining to hegemonic masculinity are considered “the most honoured way of being a man” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pg. 832) and include directing subordinating language to groups considered lesser, such as women, more feminine men, and homosexual males. Despite few men displaying hegemonic masculinity, its legitimacy in maintaining societal power structures means its associated behaviours are seen as desirable and normative in many cultures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Complicit masculinity is directly below, described as males who benefit from the gender inequality created by hegemonic masculinity, and thus allow other men to perform behaviours which enable sustainability of hegemony (Reddy et al., 2018). Below this, is subordinate masculinity, described as masculinities deemed deviant or abnormal from hegemonic masculinity, such as more feminine or homosexual men (Messerschmidt, 2018). Lastly, is marginalised masculinity, relating to masculinities discriminated against or trivialised due to characteristics unrelated to gender relations, such as class, age, ethnicity, race, education, or wealth (Holland & Scourfield, 2000; Anderson, 2009). Though Connell recognises gender as a significant factor in power structures, discussion of marginalised masculinities gives recognition to intersections of other social factors within the model.

One significant critique of Connell’s work is its failure to examine newer feminist viewpoints surrounding gender, sexuality, and power, as it oversimplifies the dynamic and ever-developing phenomena of gender. As Bridges and Pascoe (2014) discuss, there is a growing quantity of young men promoting feminism and anti-sexist practices, with their rising numbers a protective factor against their potential

subordination. This is known as a hybrid masculinity which falls outside the hierarchy, with these males serving as a potential proponent of the positive allyship which can encourage growth of gender equality across male social circles (Elliott, 2018). Through insight into these groups, psychologists could recognise their value and impact in helping change the landscape for gender equality (without overemphasising males as the protagonists of feminist change, of course).

In the late 1990s and 2000s, hegemonic masculinity came under scrutiny. The theory, which consistently discusses masculinity as a social construction that requires its definition and surrounding power structures to be dismantled, is suggested to actually evoke typologies and reify essentialist definitions of gender (Francis, 2002). Francis (2008) also proposes that in implying a hegemonic masculinity, with femininity only existing in opposition and subordination to it, we do not challenge gender power structures, but solidify them.

This is further complicated by homosexual males being considered part of a subordinated masculinity, rather than part of any other model based on femininities, encouraging MacInnes' (1998, pg. 63) oft-quoted observation that perhaps the only thing that plural masculinities "have in common is possession of a penis". This is not to suggest all homosexual males always show typically feminine behaviour, but it is somewhat of an incongruity in suggesting gender is pure social construction, then calling behaviours typically constructed as feminine a form of masculinity because they come from a male-assigned body. Connell (2005, pg. 78) herself explains that from the view of the hegemonically masculine, "gayness is easily assimilated to femininity", but lack of specific definitions of masculinity or femininity leaves many questions. As proposed by Francis (2008), when it is challenging to assign behaviours to masculinity or femininity, people rely upon sexed bodies as sources of

information to explain their judgments. MacInnes (1998) therefore suggests gender has no value without sex, meaning there is little point of discussing gender at all.

Halberstam (1998), alternatively suggests masculinity can be performed by bodies in any form, and gender's relation to bodies only relates to one's ability to construct power. In his book, Female Masculinities, Halberstam notes masculinity only becomes such when it leaves the white middle class male body. Black and working-class bodies are suggested to offer too much, Asian and upper-class bodies too little, and Halberstam questions how queer, butch, and females in general can perform their own masculinities without being subjected to their own subordination beneath 'heroic masculinities'.

Butler's (2004) essays in 'Undoing Gender' consider both sex and gender to be constructed and performed; something that people 'do' in concert with others. She suggests individual personalities entirely depend upon social norms set by others, and whether we work alongside or against those norms, there is little individual authorship of gender expression. In suggesting gender is performed and 'done', Butler indicates existing structures around gender can also be undone.

Such discussion sits well with critical psychology's ideals of deconstructing patriarchal models of power but is thoroughly challenged by both MacInnes' (1998) ideology of there being no gender without bodies, and Halberstam's (1998) suggestion of complete gender disembodiment. Furthermore, placing sex as pure construction can easily be considered a disownment of material realities placed upon women due to their bodies. A female body is more likely to be victim of sexual crimes, domestic abuse, sexist verbal abuse, and many forms of institutional and structural oppression (McFeely et al., 2013). Butler's work often focuses upon power

structures based upon constructions of gender, but many feminists could validly argue that pregnancy and other biological factors make the idea of sex as pure construction a harmful ideology.

This is far from a thorough explanation of every theorist's account of masculinity or gender, but goes some way to explaining the complexity of taking a definitive stance on masculinity in this study. The current political landscape surrounding transgenderism evidences the fervour over what bodies can display what gender, how socially constructed a gender is, and how people can perform their sex/gender. More recent theoretical developments enable recognition of both the material and the constructed, however.

Francis (2012) has adopted Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia to reconceptualise how gender is discussed and understood. Bakhtin (1981) discusses how a nation might believe its language to be monoglossic, in that it is total, unchanging, and unitary but considers this a façade. He suggests language monoglossia is believed to be stable and peaceful, but is actually steeped in myth, for all language is relative to context, time, and others' reading of its performance. For example, though there may always be a prevailing, dominant, and supposedly monoglossic English language, it will forever be changing through individual dialogic interactions, localised dialects, socio-historical contexts, and time's aging and renewing of said language. This diversification is known as heteroglossia, described as the decentralising tendency of the new; the artistic freedom which frees consciousness from the antiquities, stratification, and tyranny of dominant narrative. The monoglossic is the macro language which the majority 'know to be true', whilst the heteroglossic happens in the micro, in the smaller dialogic interactions that allow a broader range of expression.

How one can adapt this to gender is to recognise the monoglossic, typified definitions of masculine behaviour which overarch the belief of the majority; behaviours which society typically understands to be ‘of men’. Francis (2012) discusses binary explanations of gender as an overruling certainty amongst the masses, with its naturalised and inevitable accounts of strong, stoic, and dominant males over feeble, emotional, and submissive females, serving to keep the status quo of gendered power structures steady.

As mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, the word masculinity immediately conjures a description in one’s head. This is the monoglossia of gender, the language of the people and thus the lens through which many understand man’s identity. What happens in the micro is the new heteroglossia which may adapt to contexts and give individual performances, but on the wider scale do little to resist the instilled, enshrined, and saturated monoglossic account.

Though heteroglossia gives the illusion there is freedom to express outside of the monoglossic norm, its plasticity is bounded by broader cultural practices which partially assimilate fresh ideas around gender and partially reject them. In this sense, the monoglossic façade can hold some of masculinity’s disruptive heteroglossic aspects without any realistic disordering of the hegemony, as political forces strive for ideological mutuality, aiming to centralise the philological amongst all in a society. One must only look to the UK government’s recent prime ministerial contest for Truss’s assurance that “a woman is a woman” (Daily Mail, 2022), Sunak’s focus on “clumsy, gender-neutral language” (Diver, 2022), and Badenoch’s statement surrounding the abolition of gender-neutral toilets (Beckford, 2022) for evidence of political recentralisation and the need to bounce back to what is ‘known’.

It is through the lens of monoglossia and heteroglossia that this study shall be considering its findings. Our understanding of the monoglossic enables the suggestion of what language, when spoken by the study's participants, is likely to constitute an enactment of masculinity. It also enables an understanding of what of their language constitutes femininity or a description of what they believe femininity to be. Given the theory's consideration of dominant narratives, socio-historical context, and recognition of how language stabilises power structures through macro and micro forms of language, this also fits with this study's epistemology and method of analysis.

In addition, Connell's (1995; 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity will be adopted to support the recognition of masculinity's power structures, both societally and within the group of participants. There is considerable evidence that in secondary schools and society in general, certain masculinities garner more respect and admiration than others amongst peer groups (Heasley & Crane, 2012). What is respected is likely based on the monoglossic account, but it is also my view that the hegemonic dominance of certain masculinities is supported by the complicit and requires the subordination of those considered feminine and those unable to construct means of power due to various other intersectionalities. It is only through deconstruction and reconstruction of both the monoglossic account of gender and the power structures that enable hegemony for those enacting dominant masculinities, we can see realistic change for how boys understand themselves and others. Without this change in understanding, the language that refuses acceptability of emotionality amongst boys will continue onwards to the harm of many.

### *1.4.2 Gender Socialisation and Male Psychological Wellbeing*

Gender socialisation theories suggest there are myriad factors which influence gender-based behaviours and attitudes, from whole cultures and societies to personal interactions with friends and relatives (Mansfield et al., 2003). Though acculturation starts during childhood, where boys are socialised by parents to express emotion differently to girls (Thomassin & Seddon, 2019), gender-related attitudes are suggested to be most strongly formed throughout puberty (Lundgren et al., 2013). Goleman (2009) notes that at around age 10, boys and girls show similarity in emotional intelligence and show overt aggression similarly frequently. By 13, girls have learned more covert language strategies to ostracise, whilst boys continue with physical threats and angered confrontation to manage their difficulties.

This may be due to a process during early adolescence called gender intensification (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Priess-Groben & Lindberg, 2018), where boys begin to enact stereotypical behaviour shaped by beliefs around what being a ‘real man’ truly means. These stereotypes include that males are capable of coping alone, have a high tolerance of pain, are emotionally stoic, don’t ‘act like girls’, are overtly heterosexual, do not require support from others, and do not show vulnerabilities (Kagesten et al., 2016). A key question surrounding gender intensification hypothesis, however, is whether this is a natural social development due to development of the teenage brain and its need for social acceptance by peers (Sebastian et al., 2010; Blakemore, 2018). Alternatively, it is possible that secondary schools are structurally approving of hegemonic masculine behaviour, making boys’ movement towards performance of typical masculinities appear entirely natural (Ingram, 2018). This idea considers Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of habitus, the naturalisation of ideologies built through production and reproduction of schemata.

Some theorists suggest that masculinising practices embedded in school environments have made some of boys' more harmful behaviour amongst themselves and others appear perfectly normal.

As such, these behaviours are considered male norms by adolescents, meaning they present in social hierarchies in secondary schools, and where jock culture rules, masculine subordinating behaviours become rife (Miller, 2009). This is due to boys' inclination to monitor gendered behaviours, as displaying typical male and anti-feminine behaviours can give them increased status and power (Casper et al., 1996). Homophobic insults therefore become an everyday occurrence to subordinate other boys (Pascoe, 2019; Swain, 2003) and hierarchising behaviours become almost a necessity to negotiate the complex journey through high school, where it can be a requirement to gain endorsement of hypermasculine peers to avoid bullying and mistreatment (Kupers, 2005; Messerschmidt, 1993; Pascoe, 2011).

This social development creates a range of adverse health-related behaviours, where male norms embedded through school, such as never showing weakness, being capable of coping alone, and being emotionally stoic, contribute to stigma and subconscious beliefs that boys do not require help (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003). This not only decreases their likelihood of seeking help for their schoolwork (Kessels & Steinmayr, 2013), but for their EW too, with stronger beliefs in masculine norms regularly associated with lower emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2009; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000) and higher degrees of psychological dysfunction (Herreen et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2017;). Research has shown that at least somewhat because of gender socialisation, males find it more difficult to express their emotions (Seidler et al., 2016), seldom recognise when they have mental illness (Ogrodniczuk & Oliffe, 2010), rarely pursue support until reaching crisis point (Roy et al., 2014), and only

18% of those that die by suicide had spoken to a medical professional in the past year (Luoma et al., 2002).

The socialisation of gender-typed behaviours through adolescence is perhaps causal to these issues, and the risk of school bullying should they fail to climb the masculine hierarchy commonly means adolescents grow to pride themselves on never requiring support (Miller, 2009). It is therefore possible that the social world that hypermasculine boys foster through abuse of non-hetero sexualities, domination over those displaying typical femininities, use of physicality, and shame of emotionality may have enabled power and hegemony. It may also, however, cause their reticence to seek help and thus increase their risk of psychological difficulties and suicide. This demonstrates the importance of understanding boys' perception of masculinity and help-seeking as they grow through adolescence, so we can consider the potential impacts of masculinity upon their help-seeking behaviours.

### *1.4.3. Males and help-seeking behaviours*

Real (2001) reports that males tend to mask their emotional difficulties due to socialised beliefs suggesting they should be capable of rising above pain. As such, studies with adolescents and adults have shown males may feel ashamed of their emotions. This is due to believing sadness means they have failed in their ability to be manly, adding to the distress of MH conditions already present (Lindsey et al., 2006; Real, 1998). Additionally, one common reason for males deciding against finding support for wellbeing difficulties are shame and embarrassment (Lin & Parkin, 1999; Yousaf et al., 2015), with embarrassment the strongest predictor for males not seeing a GP due to MH difficulties (Doherty & Kartalova-O'Doherty, 2010).

Embarrassment is not only a common reason for not formally seeking support, but for males to display their emotions publicly at all. Bullying during school from other boys about being ‘soft’ or ‘gay’ when upset (Oransky & Marecek, 2009) and the age-old epithet ‘big boys don’t cry’ (Branney & White, 2008) create cultures where negative outward emotions are considered undesirable (Vogel et al., 2011). This can lead to males rarely showing certain negative emotions, a tendency strongly correlated with deciding against therapeutic treatment (Vogel et al., 2008).

One exception, however, is outward displaying of anger (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003), an emotion frequently found to co-occur in those with depressive symptoms (Kelly et al., 2019). This causes difficulties for boys in school as they are more likely to show externalising behaviours, such as aggression, than girls. This is especially problematic as research suggests boys who have higher levels of depression and anxiety have higher levels of aggression (Alcantara et al., 2017), and those who show high levels of aggression in school also later display progressively more severe levels of psychological distress (Lopez et al., 2018).

This causes further complications because people are more likely to recognise typically female symptomatology of anxiety and depression, such as crying (Martin et al., 2013), which will often draw others closer to offer support (Warner & Shields, 2007). Aggression, conversely, is more likely to be seen as a display of dominance, and in schools, as misconduct rather than evidence of an underlying MH need (Lindsey et al., 2017). This, therefore, can mean boys are punished for their emotions rather than supported, meaning even their cries for help often go unheard.

Many adolescent boys prefer not to talk about emotions, as they find it ‘weird’ to discuss feelings with others (Rose et al., 2013) and that talking about problems

mean they ‘lost’ to their weaknesses (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003). Gender conflict theory suggests these feelings are common amongst males as emotionality and affection amongst other males makes them feel uncomfortable (Mahalik, 2003).

Stigma around mental illness also plays a part in males’ reduced help-seeking, especially as they hold more stigmatic beliefs than females (Chatmon, 2020). This stigma is attributed as a major cause of men’s reluctance to engage with formal treatment (Eisenberg et al., 2009), and for help-seeking in general (Hogan, 2003). Furthermore, it creates an additional barrier for those who do seek formal help, as stigma often causes a refusal of treatments including talking therapy and prescribed medications (Corrigan, 2004; Martinez et al., 2018).

These views and attitudes which may cause males’ adverse help-seeking behaviours can lead to adoption of maladaptive coping mechanisms so they can manage psychological difficulties alone. Timlin-Scalera (2003) found that, even through adolescence, teenage boys will use alcohol and drugs for escapism from their wellbeing difficulties. This is well known to then continue throughout adulthood, where addiction amongst those with mental illness is exceedingly common (Dauber et al., 2018).

# 2. Literature Review

To explore the existing empirical research on adolescent males' help-seeking behaviour, a systematic literature review was undertaken.

## 2.1 Questions & Objectives

The literature review was based on the question: 'What does empirical research say about adolescent boys' help-seeking behaviours?'

The objectives of this literature review were to enable me to gain an understanding of what empirical research has thus far said about adolescent boys' help-seeking behaviours.

## 2.2 Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature was conducted on 11th October 2022. Following examination at VIVA, an additional search was conducted to include new search terms. This second search is explained in section 2.2.6 to 2.2.8. Below is an explanation of the sources of information, search terms used, and effect of limiters upon results.

### 2.2.1. Sources

Having good MH and facilitation of help-seeking can require support from many professions, including from psychology, social care, education, and health. A

selection of databases which included papers from each of these areas were therefore included:

APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycExtra, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PEP Archive, Education Source, ERIC, SocINDEX, CINAHL, and MEDLINE.

### 2.2.2. Literature Search

The table below shows the search terms, Boolean operators, and sections of articles applied to identify relevant papers.

*Table 1 - Search terms entered into databases for literature review*

| Literature Search | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Boolean Phrases** | | **AND** | **AND** | **AND** |
| **Search terms used** | Help-seeking OR treatment seeking OR advice seeking | Masculin* OR boy* OR male* | Adolesc* OR youth OR young OR teen OR child* | Mental health or wellbeing or well-being or emotion* |
| **Found in** | Title | Abstract | Abstract | All text |

Using these search terms, the databases provided 42 results. The table below explains which limiters were then used, the rationale for using each limiter, and how many papers were excluded by each limiter.

*Table 2 - Limiters used in literature review*

| Limiter | Set Limits | Rationale | Papers excluded | Papers left |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Published between | 2012-2022 | This date range was decided upon to ensure literature found was current and up to date with recent policy and legislation. As discussed in the introduction, key legislation which related to the topic, including those based on MH, suicidality, and education's role in affecting change in these areas were published in 2012. | 12 | 30 |
| Source types | Academic Journals | Only academic journals were selected to ensure only peer-reviewed empirical research was included in the studies. | 3 | 27 |
| Language | English | To ensure I was able to thoroughly understand the study, its methods, and its findings. | 0 | 27 |

### 2.2.3. Eligibility Criteria

At this stage, 27 papers remained in the search results. Many results, however, were not relevant to the present study. The following table describes inclusion criteria. To ensure literature met criteria, all 27 studies included in the search were screened initially by title, then if still relevant, by abstract, then full text of the article.

*Table 3 - Inclusion criteria for literature review*

| Criteria | Set Limits | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male only | Research only involving males was included to ensure relevance to the literature review question. Research including adolescent boys and girls which had data splits of boys and girls were considered, though they frequently showed little more than the gender split of the frequency of male and female help-seeking. Though valuable and relevant for discussion elsewhere in this thesis, this data was not considered suitable for inclusion in this literature review. |
| Topic | Relates to MH and EW | Only research topics related to emotional MH and wellbeing were included, as this is the focus of this literature review. Other studies related to help-seeking for other difficulties, for example, dating abuse, were considered but were not closely enough related to the topic to be included. |
| Age | 12-18 | Age 12 is considered the onset of adolescence and puberty, whilst age 18 is considered the beginning of adulthood in the UK. As such, these were deemed the most appropriate age groups to include studies on. |
| Location | OECD countries | Only including studies based in the UK was considered due to the location of the present research. This, however, placed a significant limit on the number of studies available for review. Other countries which share similar economic conditions with the UK, such as Australia, have a notably larger research base of applicable studies. To ignore this in favour of the minimal relevant UK literature would have left the review short of a considerable amount of key information. The review therefore included studies from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Further details on the reasoning behind this decision can be found in the ‘state of the research’ section below. |

### 2.2.4. Screening Process

The below table explains selection of papers based on exclusion criteria after screening the title, abstract, and full text. The title of each excluded paper can be found in appendices A to D.

*Table 4 - Papers excluded through screening process*

| Screening | Papers excluded | Papers remaining |
|---|---|---|
| Duplicates | 1 - (Listed in appendix A) | 26 |
| Title | 4 - (Listed in appendix B) | 22 |
| Abstract | 4 - (Listed in appendix C) | 18 |
| Full text | 7 - (Listed in appendix D) | 11 |

Following screening, 11 papers remained. Their titles can be found in appendix E.

### 2.2.5. Additional Papers

Once the final set of papers from the database search had been finalised, a hand search was completed. This involved scanning references of each included paper for potentially relevant studies. Three additional studies were found through this process. Their titles can be found in appendix F.

### 2.2.6. Second literature search

Following VIVA, examiners advised that an additional literature search was necessary to broaden search terms. The previous search did not include some synonyms that would have widened the search, therefore helping me to find additional relevant literature. This new search is explained below.

### 2.2.7 Search terms in second literature search

*Table 5 – Search terms for second literature search*

| New Literature Search | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Boolean Phrases** | | **AND** | **AND** | **AND** |
| **Search terms used** | Help-seek* OR help-seek* OR treatment seek* OR advice seek* OR support seek* OR asking for help OR looking for help | Masculin* OR boy* OR male* OR young men or schoolboys | Adolesc* OR youth OR young OR teen OR child* or school* | Mental health OR wellbeing OR well-being OR emotion* OR mental illness OR anxi* or depress* |
| **Found in** | Title | Title | Abstract | All text |

### 2.2.8. Articles included following second literature search

126 pieces of literature were found in the second search. All literature was subject to the same limiters found in *table 2* and *table 3*. Following this screening process, three pieces of additional literature met the criteria. The reference list of these three papers were then hand searched for potentially eligible papers. One additional paper was found. These four papers were then reviewed and have been included in the literature review. Their titles can be found in appendix S.

## 2.3. Critical Appraisal of Literature

Throughout this literature review, the following critical appraisal tools were used, dependent on each study's methodology:

- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) - Qualitative Studies Checklist.

- CASP - Randomised Controlled Trial Checklist.
- Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018).
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2012) - Critical Appraisal Checklist for a Questionnaire Study.

### 2.4. Review of the literature

There were a range of methodologies across the included studies. The majority were qualitative studies (n=8), with one mixed methods, three survey-based studies, and three using controlled trials. Having used a range of appraisal tools dependent upon each study's methodology, the quality across the research was of a high standard. There tended to be a strong lineation between the aims, research questions, and methodologies used, sample sizes were appropriate to each study's methods, and most were thorough in explanation of their methods.

There was also a wide spread of groups who participated in the studies. Across the adolescent phase, different age groups were studied. Though none of the literature focused solely on younger adolescents (12-13), many included these ages in studies where participants were spread across the full adolescent age range of 12-18 (Clark et al., 2018a; 2018b; Clark et al., 2020a; King et al., 2014; Liddle et al., 2019; 2021a; 2021b). One study included participants aged 12-17 (Swann et al., 2018). One focused only on middle adolescence (14-15; Best et al., 2016) while seven studies older adolescents (16-18; Burke et al., 2022; Calear et al., 2020; Hassett & Isbister, 2017; Meechan et al., 2021; Randell et al., 2016; Samuel, 2015; Slotte et al., 2022). There was also a spread of school types as some studies were based solely in secondary, private, or grammar schools, whilst some collected data from a variety. One area where reporting was poor was in relation to race and ethnicity. Most

studies did not report race or ethnicity data (Best et al., 2016a; 2016b; Calear et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2018a; 2018b; Hasset & Isbister, 2017; Liddle et al., 2019; 2021a; 2021b; Randell et al., 2016; Slotte et al., 2022; Swann et al., 2018), one had all white participants (Burke et al., 2022), three involved all or mostly black participants (King et al., 2014; Samuel, 2015; Meechan et al., 2021), and two reported a spread of different races and ethnicities, discussing Oceanic descent as opposed to race (Clark et al., 2020a; 2020b).

There were some notable exceptions in terms of quality, such as questionable sampling techniques (Calear et al., 2020), only three of the studies explaining their epistemology and ontology, and very few of the qualitative studies using reflexivity statements to explain the relationship between the researcher, participants, and collected data.

Each of these studies will be explored individually, though the review will be primarily organised by the themes found in each study's findings.

### 2.4.1. Themes of Literature Review

The common themes throughout literature were forms of masculinity, stigma, relational aspects, EL, online help-seeking, and the factors of effective systems and interventions.

### 2.4.2 Forms of Masculinity

The most commonly discussed factor for male help-seeking throughout the literature was the presentation of various forms of masculinity.

Clark et al., (2020a) aimed to research how hegemonic masculinity impacted attitudes towards, and intentions to engage in, help-seeking behaviours. This involved an online questionnaire completed by 1732 Australian males aged 12-18, using measures exploring help-seeking attitudes, masculinity, EL, and EW.

A preliminary exploratory factor analysis was used to enable understanding of the factor structure of the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire, finding the four factors of ‘formal’, ‘informal peer’, ‘informal family’, and ‘online’ help-seeking.

Positive correlations were found between masculinity and help-seeking, as higher masculinity scores were associated with less favourable attitudes towards formal and informal help-seeking, and lower intentions to seek help from family, formal sources, and peers. Higher masculinity was also associated with greater intention to seek help online, a finding similar to other included papers, with adolescent males often preferring to search for MH advice (Best et al., 2016a; Samuel, 2015) or access MH support online (Best et al., 2016a; Burke et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2018a; Randell, 2016).

Moderate analyses in Clark (2020a) found alignment with masculinity norms a significant predictor of all help-seeking intentions and attitudes, with high masculinity associated with lower intentions to seek help from peers, family, and formal sources, and less favourable attitudes to informal, and formal help-seeking. Masculinity was not a significant moderator between MH literacy and attitudes towards help-seeking from informal sources, or intentions to seek help from online or formal sources. It did, however, have a significant moderating effect between MH literacy and attitudes towards formal help-seeking. This is an issue potentially exacerbated by the consistently low MH knowledge amongst adolescent males (Liddle 2021a). Similarly,

low alignment to masculinity and high anxiety MH literacy was associated with more positive attitudes towards formal help-seeking, though not quite at the significant level (P = 0.52). This may evidence differences between affinity to masculinity and the types of help-seeking that boys are willing to engage in, rather than affecting all help-seeking types.

Interestingly, which school participants attended was not a significant moderating effect on help-seeking. Though it is unclear how each school differed in help-seeking options, it is surprising that no variations in help-seeking attitudes or intentions were dependent on school environment. This is also oppositional to findings in Clark (2018b), King et al. (2014), and Burke et al. (2022), in which participants discussed importance of school-based factors in enabling help-seeking. Due to these findings, school was dropped from the overall logistic mixed model which investigated whether help-seeking intentions, attitudes, MH literacy, masculinity, and age predicted help-seeking behaviours. The model was significant and found higher affinity to masculinity norms was associated with being less likely to seek help. It also found that of those with symptoms of anxiety and depression, attitudes and intentions to help-seek from family were significant predictors of help-seeking behaviours.

Strengths of the study included its large sample size (n=1732) and cross-section across multiple schools. There were limitations in relation to its sample, however, as all participants attended fee-paying schools. Even in countries with universal healthcare systems, such as Australia, prevalence of adolescent MH difficulties (Deighton et al., 2019) and accessibility to healthcare resources (Stuckler et al., 2017) are affected by wealth. That this is mentioned only in the limitations and not in the title or abstract seems neglectful of the significant impact these factors likely had

on results. Furthermore, some used measures, including the Friend In Need Questionnaire (Burns & Rapee, 2006), are not psychometrically evaluated, raising questions about their validity and reliability.

A qualitative constructivist grounded theory study was conducted by Randell et al. (2016), analysing interviews with 33 Swedish boys aged 16 and 17. The study aimed to explore adolescent boys' views of masculinity and emotion management, and their potential effects on wellbeing. Data collection and analysis were performed simultaneously, using the grounded theory method of constant comparison.

Two main themes of 'gender-normative masculinity' and 'non-gender-normative masculinity' were presented, with the former split into subthemes of 'orientation towards toughness' and 'orientation towards sensitivity', and the latter sub-themed to 'orientation towards sincerity'. In the 'gender-normative masculinity' theme, quotes focused upon some males' necessary conformity to masculine ideals when with male peers, with many recognising social context as an arena for character formation. Some explained this as character differences when with male peers compared to girlfriends, whilst others explained different masculine contexts in their current and previous school.

These character differences included necessity to display toughness amongst other males whilst vying for hierarchical positions. Toughness was explained as having to "take the role of a hero" (pg. 490) and never showing fear. Some mentioned never sharing emotions so they never appear "gay or girly", a finding also noted in King et al. (2014). Vying for hierarchical position was explained as never showing emotions, as it impacts social status, with one participant explaining the weakest in the wolf

pack gets left behind. Boys also discussed concealing emotions through fear of appearing weak and using drugs and self-harm to escape emotions.

The effect of emotional displays upon social status was a common finding across many studies, with Clark et al. (2018a; 2018b) discussing that boys' help-seeking for MH issues enabled stigma-related bullying, whilst Samuel (2015) explained stigmatisation causing social isolation and ostracism. Furthermore, participants in Hassett & Isbister (2017) discussed that others knowing about their MH difficulties damaged their image and chances of social acceptance, with one preferring to say he'd been mugged than admit self-harming.

To return to Randell et al. (2016), those who showed orientation towards sensitivity revealed some males rejecting stereotypical masculinities, happily adopting more stereotypically feminine ideals. Some participants explained the difficulty of wanting to be a boy who shows emotions, the risk and vulnerability of doing so, and the importance of having friendships which enable safe emotional talk.

The non-gender-normative masculinity theme revealed males who felt the ultimate show of masculinity was being true to oneself and to be who you are, regardless of what others think. This meant being a 'respectful individualist' and allowing all to act as who they are without fear of social consequences. This included the bravery of discussing emotions with others, so they felt able to discuss their emotions, too.

Strengths of the study included its credibility and dependability due to its large sample size for a qualitative study (n=33) and its use of continuous collection, coding, and analysis until data saturation. It's limitations, however, included all participants coming from one small town, causing uncertainty around its generalisability.

Findings around non-conforming masculinities are intriguing as no other included studies discuss anything similar. Randell et al.'s (2016) theme related to toughness and weakness, however, was similar to others. This included participants in Burke et al. (2022) and Samuel (2015) discussing that showing emotions is weakness, stigma-related comments claiming MH difficulties are weakness and not real illnesses (Clark et al., 2020b), that help-seeking is weak (Clark et al., 2018b), and role-related comments about male requirements of toughness (Best et al., 2016).

Another frequently discussed area of masculinity was maintaining independence. Clark et al. (2018b), Samuel (2015), and Meechan et al. (2021) found most participants preferred self-reliance when experiencing MH difficulties, whilst Hasset & Isbister (2017) found adolescent boys engaged with MH services wanted to distance themselves from requiring help to maintain an independent self-concept and feel in control. King et al. (2014) found some boys keep issues to themselves as they did not see their problems as important enough to necessitate support, whilst participants in Meechan et al. (2021) felt they wouldn't go to anyone else for support until things had gotten 'really serious'.

This links with another masculine ideal, considering oneself the protector of others, with boys discussing the importance of protecting friends, females in general, or their families. Burke et al. (2022) noted adolescent boys wanting to protect their families from the burden of their emotions, whilst boys in Samuel (2015) didn't want their parents worrying about them 'being crazy'.

### 2.4.3. Stigma

Stigma relates to negative stereotypes or views around a group of people due to their differences from social norms. MH-related stigma was a common finding in six studies (Liddle et al., 2021b; Clark et al., 2020b; Samuel, 2015; Best et al., 2016; Hassett & Isbister, 2017).

Liddle et al. (2021b) conducted an exploratory factor analysis, using data from 361 Australian adolescent male sport participants, aiming to validate an MH help-seeking measure for adolescent males. Additional correlational results were found, linking four factors: ‘social distance’, ‘stigmatising attitudes towards people with mental illness’, ‘confidence accessing information about MH’, and ‘negative help-seeking attitudes’, with ‘recent contact’, ‘knowledge about anxiety and depression’, ‘psychological distress’, and ‘intentions and attitudes towards seeking formal and informal help’.

Desire for social distance was negatively correlated with recent contact with people with mental illness and with depression and anxiety knowledge. Stigmatising attitudes also had strong significant correlations with depression and anxiety knowledge. This suggests stigma is linked with both lower desire for social contact with stigmatised people and knowledge of the issues potentially causing their abnormal behaviour.

Attitudes towards help-seeking was strongly correlated with intention not to seek help and confidence accessing information was correlated with formal help-seeking. Though there were no direct significant correlations between stigma and help-seeking, there was a small correlation between lower help-seeking intention and more desire for social distance, which is likely driven by stigma. This lack of

correlation differs from Best et al. (2016) and Hassett & Isbister (2017), who found minimising stigma of MH help-seeking helped increase boys' help-seeking.

Though its sample size was ample for the exploratory factor analysis to yield reliable results (de Winter et al., 2009), participants only being sports players limits generalisability somewhat. Though most Australian adolescents play sports, willingness to take part in competitive activity may be suggestive of the types of masculinities performed by participants. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional nature also limits potential of recognising causal relationships between variables.

Clark et al. (2020b) also explored MH stigma and help-seeking, investigating MH stigma elicited when boys were shown vignettes including people experiencing Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), and non-clinical anxiety. In the mixed-methods study, 702 males, aged 12-18, completed a vignette-based MH literacy survey alongside measures of help-seeking intentions, attitudes, and behaviours. The survey included open-response items, enabling a concurrent design, with content analysis used to code qualitative data, and Mann Whitney U and Friedman's One-Way ANOVA to explore relationships between help-seeking and stigma variables.

Qualitative coding showed more participants (10%) exhibited stigma towards the non-clinical vignette than the clinical (4%). Those showing stigma towards the SAD vignette had more negative attitudes towards formal help-seeking than those not exhibiting stigma, but this difference was not reflected in attitudes towards online or informal help-seeking. Participants exhibiting stigma toward the GAD vignette had more negative attitudes towards online help-seeking, but not towards formal or

informal options. No significant differences were found in relation to stigma and help-seeking for the non-clinical vignette.

91% of stigmatising comments were related to people in vignettes being ‘weak, not sick’, linking closely with Best et al. (2016), Burke et al. (2022), Clark (2020b), and Randell et al. (2016), which all mentioned toughness and weakness in relation to masculinity and emotions. ‘Dangerous and unpredictable’ related stigma was considerably higher for the SAD vignette compared to others. Amount of stigma was found to be low across the study (10% of comments), though of the comments made, between 11 and 50% of stigma was considered to be related to people failing to live up to masculine norms.

Stigma severity was also ranked using a Friedman two-way ANOVA and pairwise comparison using a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The non-clinical vignette was found to have more severe comments and though effect size was small, it was significantly higher than the GAD vignette. Stigma severity was not significantly associated to help-seeking attitude and intentions and was not a predictor of help-seeking behaviour.

This was considered a weaker piece of literature as too many subjectivities seemed apparent throughout coding. Though short explanations were given for why some comments were coded to certain categories, the severity scale was barely explained, and measures were recognised to have likely inaccurately captured stigma. This calls into question the use of content analysis over methods that would enable deeper exploration of meaning.

Quantitative data offered alternative conclusions to Liddle et al. (2021b) as it found presence of stigma increased the likelihood of help-seeking behaviour, but

methodological issues discussed above make this finding questionable. Findings suggesting stigma is higher towards non-clinical levels of poor MH may offer insight into the split between adolescent males' beliefs of what level of MH difficulty deserves empathy, and what is considered weakness.

In addition to stigma's impact on help-seeking found in these studies, some participants in Samuel (2015) suggested admitting wellbeing difficulties could bring on the shame of being considered crazy by others, whilst others in Samuel (2015) and Clark et al. (2018b) denied that mental illnesses were real illnesses. Participants in Meechan et al. (2021) also discussed the risk of being diagnosed with a mental illness as problematic, and that this label would follow you forever and link you to unwanted services.

### 2.4.4. Emotional Literacy

Emotional literacy is the knowledge and understanding of emotional states, self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social competence that enables a person to recognise how thoughts and emotions impact people and their interrelationships (Killick, 2006; Knight, 2014; Orbach, 2001). EL was a factor in six studies, Clark et al. (2018b), Samuel (2015), Hassett and Isbister (2017), Swann et al. (2018), Meechan et al., (2021) and King (2014).

Clark et al. (2018b), a qualitative grounded theory study which analysed interviews and focus groups (FG) with 29 Australian adolescent males, aged 12-18, explored facilitators and barriers to help-seeking for anxiety. This was the same group of participants as in Clark et al. (2018a), though the method of data collection, the data set analysed, and the method of data analysis were different. Purposive sampling

was employed to recruit participants accessing clinical (CAMHS) (n=8) and non-clinical (n=21) support for FGs or interviews. Thematic analysis was then adopted to find facilitators, barriers, and help-source preferences.

EL was found to be a key barrier to help-seeking, due to limited awareness and knowledge of anxiety. This included limited understanding of symptoms and treatment options, with some feeling anxiety was untreatable or unchangeable. Many felt others' minimal understanding of mental illnesses made help-seeking more challenging, particularly from peers. School awareness days and MH teaching programmes were considered too formal and uninteresting, featuring little explanation of symptoms or how to get help. This meant boys feared the unfamiliarity of help-seeking, believing it would mean being labelled or forced into therapy.

EL was a facilitator for some, as boys explained helpful features of MH education to support help-seeking. This included that resources should be highly visible, easily accessible, and need a masculine tone. Information should also be available online in places CYP access, such as social media, to enable incidental learning. Participants also felt schools should teach the potential seriousness of anxiety if left untreated, but also teach that people can get better, through real male success stories. Similarly, participants in Hassett and Isbister (2017) suggested the minimal teaching and resources related to male MH difficulties meant anxiety was not normalised, making help-seeking harder.

Other barriers included stigma, such as embarrassment of leaving class for counselling and that having MH issues risks bullying or social exclusion. This stigma often had masculinity related themes; that help-seeking is tough but doesn't make you look tough, and that having MH difficulties make boys appear weak. Being

‘confronted by emotion’ also featured, alongside the idea that help-seeking would mean recognising and admitting having a problem.

Boys’ lack of recognition of MH difficulties and the need for help were found in Samuel (2015), and Hassett and Isbister (2017), too, where participants explained their anger when others suggested they may be experiencing MH issues. This may be partially explained by boys’ low awareness of their emotions, but also their limited language to conceptualise and verbalise emotions, issues found in King (2014) and Hassett and Isbister (2017). Additionally, participants in Meechan et al. (2021) discussed the link between culture and understanding of emotions, as different cultures have different models of diagnosis, whilst some cultures were explained to not speak about mental health at all.

Strengths of Clark et al. (2018b) included recruiting participants accessing both clinical and non-clinical support and the ethical consideration of participants choosing FGs or interviews depending on their comfort discussing MH. With a population known for difficulties sharing emotions, this may have enabled invaluable additional data from boys with diverse personalities. Examples of quotes, however, were minimal, leaving questions around appropriateness of themes.

EL was a key factor in the study by Swann et al. (2018). This involved 16 focus groups, including 55 male participants aged 12-17, all of whom were involved in a range of organised sports. Data was analysed through an inductive thematic analysis using an interpretivist paradigm, constructionist epistemology, and relativist ontology.

Participants discussed that their knowledge of, and exposure to, mental health difficulties had a considerable impact on their help-seeking and management of their wellbeing. Participants also mentioned that they struggled to recognise others’ MH

needs due to lack of knowledge, making it challenging to empathise or support them effectively. Additionally, the emotional literacy of others around them was discussed, such as whether their family members and sports coaches had the knowledge and experience to help them.

Outside of emotional literacy, masculine stigma was a factor in whether participants would express their MH needs, as they felt they had a masculine image to uphold, meaning they weren't allowed to look depressed. Participants also discussed a keenness to know more about mental health, and discussed ways in which their emotional literacy could be developed through sports. This included how learning could be related to the sports they participate in, how the sharing of elite athletes' experiences could help their understanding, and how coaches could support by focusing more on enjoyment than winning. Strengths of Swann et al. (2018) include its high number of participants for a qualitative study and its large data set. This helped the researchers to find the positives and negatives of many issues, such as the facilitating and limiting traits of parents, coaches, and sports in general, to support better mental health in boys.

The large data set may have also contributed to a considerable limiting factor, however, as the findings were presented over six key themes and three to five subthemes for each, making the findings hard to follow. The use of focus groups may also have been a limitation, especially in conjunction with thematic analysis. Males are known as a group who are aware of the social impact of discussing emotions with each other, and this may have impacted what they were willing to say in FGs. This may have been less of an issue if using an analysis method which focused less on the face value of words than thematic analysis, such as discourse analysis (DA).

### 2.4.5. Systems and Interventions

The term ‘systems’ concerns the multiple interrelating environments that a human is embedded in that can affect their behaviour. This ranges from microsystems such as their school or family, to macrosystems such as ideologies built through cultures (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

The impact of macrosystems, particularly culture, was most notable in King et al. (2014) and Samuel (2015). Both studies focused upon help-seeking of adolescent males in the criminal justice system, with one key difference being that King et al. (2014) was UK-based whilst Samuel (2015) was US-based. This demonstrated intriguing differences regarding impact of culture on participants’ experiences and conceptualisations of MH and help-seeking. It is also recognised Samuel (2015) focused only on black participants and King et al. (2014) had only one participant not black or mixed race black/white.

King et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with six males, aged 13-18, attending a Youth Offending Team (YOT), analysing the subsequent data using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Findings heavily focused on the theme ‘damaged self’, with participants demonstrating shame, negative self-perceptions, and self-blaming for their emotions and actions. This led to feelings of powerlessness and emotional difficulties, but due to self-reliance, needing to uphold image, and difficulties verbalising emotions, they felt unable to share emotional issues.

Contrarily, participants in Samuel (2015) recognised the macrosystem’s impact upon their MH. This study used in-depth interviews to investigate utilisation of MH services

by 54 black American adolescent males aged 15-17, following release from juvenile detention. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Much of the findings related to experiences of systemic racism, mistreatment because of race, lack of support from government programmes in black communities, and police racial profiling. Similarly to King et al. (2014), there was a clear sense of powerlessness, but due to inability to fight back against abuse and poor living conditions because they are already considered problematic by white people in power. This does not mean participants in King et al. (2014) experience equal racially motivated mistreatment in the UK, but clear differences in framing of how MH issues occur as 'I am problematic' instead of 'systems are problematic' are noteworthy. This raises questions around people's recognition of power structures surrounding them and how they impact their understanding of MH.

Other findings in King et al. (2014) included discussion around peer microsystems, particularly that relationships are complex when friends commit crime. Boys mentioned inability to help-seek from untrustworthy peers who only act like friends to get something from them, or would use that information to 'snake' you. Difficulty explaining emotions was also prominent amongst participants, a common issue amongst boys engaged with YOT. This arguably made IPA a poor choice, given its reliance upon participants providing emotion-laden accounts of experiences in relation to phenomena (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

In addition to macrosystem factors in Samuel (2015), participants explained potential social isolation if their community knew they received therapy, linking this to stigmatising language like 'crazy', 'weak', and 'not normal' (pg. 38). Furthermore, participants strongly believed therapeutic interventions were ineffective because

counsellors could not change their distressful living conditions. Many therefore considered religion (another macrosystem, of sorts) or self-reliance more effective avenues for change. Some, however, attended therapy and found it helpful, recognising its positive impact on their anger and family relationships.

Macrosystems also played a considerable factor in Meechan et al. (2021). The study facilitated 10 semi-structured interviews with black males aged 16-18, from one South London School. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Participants spoke of black boys being part of a ‘different world’, meaning therapists would not understand them and the difficulties a black person faces. Participants mentioned this as a key reason they would not seek formal support for mental health difficulties, suggesting therapists would not be able to relate them. Similarly to Samuel et al. (2015), participants in Meechan et al. (2021) discussed systemic racism as a reason to not engage in formal help-seeking. As NHS services were considered to be part of the same governmental systems as the police, who participants related to institutional racism, boys felt it was too risky to access therapeutic support from them.

This was also partially related to stigma, as participants felt there was a risk of being diagnosed with a mental health label, that this would stick with them forever, and feared how this could harm them in the future. This was particularly the case for boys who still felt strong bonds to cultures outside of Britain. For example, the Western diagnostic system of mental health was considered far different to the understandings of mental health in Ghana, where some participants were born or had familial ties.

In relation to masculinity, many boys considered having mental health difficulties as a failure to remain in control and be independent, and many feared help-seeking for MH risked them being seen as weak or feminine. Many participants also discussed father figures being highly masculine and that mothers tend to be the carers in their cultures, meaning they hadn't typically seen emotional expression from male role models. This also impacted participants' informal help-seeking, as they felt they couldn't go to their fathers for support and wouldn't seek support from male peers unless it was for minor issues. Similarly to many other studies, boys also mentioned not wanting to seek support until at their very lowest point.

Strengths of Meechan et al. (2021) included that the author thoroughly explained their position in relation to participants, giving the reader an understanding of how reflexivity played a role throughout. Limitations include its limited transferability due to all participants being from one school, and its somewhat confusing explanation of 'strong' and 'weak' versions of social constructionism, making the ontological and epistemological positioning of the research slightly unclear.

The impact of microsystems, such as schools, was noted in Clark et al. (2018b), where participants mentioned the importance of staff knowledge and listening skills, availability of formal and informal support, resources being available and visible around schools, and related lessons being interesting and inspiring. Other school factors included its masculine culture (Randell, 2015), school exposure to online help-seeking materials (Clark et al., 2018a), and the importance of relationship building between teachers and students (Burke et al., 2022). These studies were contradicted, however, by Clark (2020a) finding which school boys attended was not predictive of help-seeking behaviour.

Calear et al. (2020) aimed to evidence impact of school environment on help-seeking through a two-arm controlled trial in Australian secondary schools with 594 male participants aged 16-18. Those in the intervention condition attended a single session called ‘Silence is Deadly’, a standardised public health program which promotes MH help-seeking, whilst control condition students attended usual classes. All participants, alongside six members of school staff, completed surveys assessing help-seeking attitudes, intentions, and behaviours at pre-intervention, post-intervention, and between 6-12 weeks after intervention.

Results found intentions to seek help from friends were not significantly different post-intervention, but, at follow-up, were significantly higher in the intervention group. No other interaction effects were statistically significant between intentions and other help sources.

Qualitative staff survey results suggested the intervention had affected students’ help-seeking attitudes, improved students’ understanding of help-seeking options, and staff had seen changes in students’ information-seeking about help sources. Furthermore, some commented on boys’ increased acceptance of others with difficulties, talking about MH, and recognition of the value of talking about problems.

Qualitative student survey results suggested the intervention was positive as men were talking about men’s issues. Boys also found the practical resource-based MH information valuable, and the issues weren’t too ‘intense’ (pg. 280). Others, however, felt the presentations, which were delivered by athletes, were not relatable as they were uninterested in sports. Diversity of presenters would therefore have been valued.

Strengths included use of both quantitative and qualitative data, as only limited statistically significant effects were found. Qualitative data gave a different picture and offered deeper explanation of the intervention's strengths and weaknesses. One significant limitation, however, was that many participants in control and intervention groups had attended this intervention previously. This limits validity of results due to potential lingering effects in the control group, whilst the intervention group may have been frustrated by its repetition.

In their qualitative study, Slotte et al. (2022) held three focus groups, each with four Norwegian adolescent boys in, aged 16-18. The focus groups aimed to find facilitating factors for mental health help-seeking, with data analysed using Malterud's systematic text condensation to code and summarise the findings.

Findings were split into three themes, 'transparent information and available help services', 'proactive and outreaching help services', and 'the possibility of discreet help-seeking'.

Participants discussed that to facilitate their help-seeking, it needs to be made clear exactly what MH difficulties look like, how severe they need to be before accessing help, and where they need to go to get support. They also felt that information and MH services should be delivered to places they already access, such as schools. This could include a checkup service, as boys struggle with the process of accessing help, and would be more likely to accept it if everyone was having these meetings asking about their wellbeing. Participants also discussed a preference for online support to be available, as this is discreet and doesn't require having to tell anyone, such as a parent, that you need support.

Strengths included that snowball sampling was adopted, as this helped encourage homogeneity amongst the participants, thus enabling them to identify with each other and feel confident speaking. This may also have been a weakness however, as with homogeneity, they may have received many similar answers throughout, allowing for limited breadth of answers across the data. This appeared to play out in the results, too, with only seven quotes includes, and five of them coming from one of the three focus groups. This suggests perhaps a limited range of answers across the study or that it was minimally presented, meaning the reader has to rely upon the interpretations of the author with limited evidence.

Liddle et al., (2019) conducted a randomised control trial study with 103 males (47 intervention, 53 control) aged 12-18. Each group completed multiple measures relating to help-seeking intentions from formal and informal sources, confidence to support others experiencing mental health difficulties, and anxiety and depression literacy. These measures were taken at two weeks pre-intervention, immediately post-intervention, and four weeks post-intervention. The intervention, called Help Out a Mate, was a 45-minute workshop focusing on signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression and how males can support each other when a friend experiences either. The participants were from one sports club.

Results stated that the intervention group showed significant increases in anxiety and depression literacy at immediate post-intervention, though only anxiety literacy was sustained at four weeks post. The intervention group also showed decreased stigmatising attitudes to MH. Interestingly, all participants, whether involved in the intervention or not, showed increased MH literacy. This raises the question about whether the workshop had stimulated conversations across the club which had upskilled all group members, including those in the control group.

Somewhat similarly, help-seeking intentions from formal and informal sources increased for the intervention group at immediate post-intervention but this was not sustained at the four-week post-intervention. Both the intervention and control group showed increases in help-seeking intentions from informal sources, again suggesting the workshop may have impacted more than just those directly involved in the intervention.

Results suggest the intervention positively impacted the emotional literacy and help-seeking intentions of those in the club but lack of change at four-week post-intervention may suggest a 45-minute workshop is not enough to effect lasting change.

Strengths included the wide range of measures used, including separated anxiety and depression literacy scale measures, with this the only study not using a single scale measure for mental health literacy. It should be mentioned, however, that internal reliability for the measures were poor, with Cronbach's Alpha scores of .62 and .63 respectively.

Weaknesses included that the control and intervention group were not age-matched, with no participants in the intervention group aged over 16, whilst some in the control group were aged up to 18. Additionally, four weeks is a short follow-up time for behaviour changes such as help-seeking. This time period may not be long enough to evidence long-term behaviour or knowledge changes in either group.

### 2.4.6. Relational Factors

Relational factors concern the types and strength of relationship between those offering help-seeking options and those seeking help. Relational factors were found

in five studies (Burke et al., 2022; Clark et al, 2018a: 2018b; Hasset & Isbister, 2017; Samuel, 2015).

Hassett & Isbister (2017), found many relational factors enabled young people's MH help-seeking following self-harm. In this qualitative study, eight adolescent males, aged 16-18, who were involved with CAMHS due to self-harm were interviewed, with data analysed using IPA. Participants described journeys of initial access and ongoing engagement, discussing how timing and characteristics of helpful others and their beliefs and attitudes impacted help-seeking behaviours.

Key relational factors included the importance of considerate friends, parents' caring nature, and knowledge of MH services. For some, contact with a caring male encouraged help-seeking.

Considerate friends seem key, as Burke et al. (2022) found that sharing similar difficult experiences was vital in shaping attitudes towards help-seeking, potentially due to reduced feelings of perceived stigma. Friends were, however, frequently recognised as a reason boys did not seek help in other studies. Participants in Samuel (2015), Clark et al. (2018a; 2018b), and Hassett and Isbister (2017) considered telling friends a threat to social status, whilst participants in Burke et al. (2022) said friends would laugh at their emotions. This suggests adolescent males' attitudes and how they discuss emotional expression is a factor, as caring friends facilitate help-seeking, whilst friends sharing stigmatic attitudes create barriers.

In relation to gender of helping others, participants in Hassett and Isbister (2017) explained discussions with male family members, older friends, and parents' friends convinced them to seek MH support. For some, helpers being male affected whether they would seek support. Additionally, some boys with male therapists appreciated

their more straight-forward, ‘no bullshit’, motivational style over talking excessively about feelings (pg. 8). Helper gender was, however, less influential than expected, and not positively discussed in other studies. Burke et al. (2022), for example suggested seeking help from fathers was harder than from mothers due to fathers’ embedded masculine ideals.

Other supportive relational factors included that boys appreciated being treated like adults. This meant being offered choice and control over treatment so they could maintain their concept of an independent self. Furthermore, others’ ability to normalise MH issues and help-seeking was a supportive factor.

Outside of relational factors, and similar to Samuel (2015), many boys had difficulty recognising need for help. Sometimes this related to masculine ideals, including beliefs about handling one’s own issues and that help-seeking is weak. For others, it related to EL, as they could not understand how emotions impacted their behaviour.

Strengths included its in-depth explanations of its analysis and quality assurance process, as this increased confidence that the extracts and findings reflected the data. One limitation, however, was that all participants were still engaged with CAMHS, when understanding why others disengaged may have been valuable.

In converse to Hassett and Isbister’s (2017) exploration of formal help-seeking, Burke et al. (2022) investigated proximity and intersubjectivity of adolescent males’ informal relationships and how this impacted thoughts and experiences of help-seeking. The qualitative study conducted semi-guided interviews with fourteen adolescent males from the UK, aged 16-18, and used thematic analysis.

The first theme related to boys’ proximity and familiarity to helpers and how this influenced help-seeking decisions. Many boys discussed importance of familiarity as

those close to you know your usual behaviours, will take issues seriously, and you don't have to explain your whole story. Boys explained that their families and staff at schools and colleges already know them (unlike a GP), meaning help-seeking experiences are personalised and managed quickly. Close and familiar people were more trustable, and this was supported by contextual systemic factors, such as school ethos and strong individual relationships with teachers. Understanding of context also factored when help-seeking from friends, as age similarity meant helpers understood what help-seekers were going through. This was particularly true for those with friends who regularly discussed difficulties, similarly to the importance of considerate friends found in Hassett and Isbister (2017).

The second theme, 'navigating feared outcomes and remaining silent' offered alternative viewpoints, many purely relational, whilst others discussed modelling of masculinities by close others. Participants discussed the masculine ideal of protecting one's family. This was discussed in relation to not wanting to let family down, not wanting family thinking they had failed, and not wanting family burdened by their supposedly unimportant issues. Discussing masculine ideals, boys discussed being raised to believe showing emotions is weak, and that male parents do not show emotions, make jokes about emotions, and ridicule their male children's emotions. Others mentioned being taught self-reliance, and that pride in one's masculinity and subsequent hierarchical positioning in social groups is paramount. One participant feared the effects of showing weakness, meaning he found anonymous online help.

Strengths include its thorough explanation of findings, intertwined with theoretical considerations and supportive examples. Whilst not necessarily a limitation,

particularly with its lengthy reflexivity statement, the main researcher was female, potentially impacting interviews.

### 2.4.7. Online Help-Seeking

Online help-seeking relates to using web searches or online methods to find self-help or receive support. Findings themed to online help-seeking were in six studies (Best et al., 2016a; 2016b; Clark, 2018a; Clark et al., 2016a; 2018a; Randell, 2016; Slotte et al., 2022).

Best et al. (2016a) used photo-elicitation techniques with 56 Northern Irish adolescent males, aged 15 to 16, in eight semi-structured FGs, aiming to conceptualise processes of online help-seeking. Thematic analysis was conducted, adopting the ontological and epistemological positions of critical realism and contextualism respectively. Their mention was notable, as only this study and Burke et al. (2022) named their epistemological or ontological positions.

Best et al. (2016b) investigated the efficacy of social workers increasing online practices, based on how online help-seeking affected EW of adolescent males. 527 Northern Irish participants, aged 14-16, completed questionnaires, surveying a wide cross-section of the population by including secondary, grammar, single gender, co-ed, urban, and rural schools.

Clark et al. (2016a) used semi-structured interviews and FGs to capture attitudes of 29 Australia-based males, aged 12-18, towards computerised MH help-seeking. Data collection took place following demonstration of a computerised help-seeking programme called ‘Chilled Out’, with data analysed using content analysis.

The most common finding across studies was that boys prefer to speak online, with 25.8% of participants in Best et al. (2016b) finding online discussions easier than speaking face-to-face. Some boys preferred online to formal help-seeking, suggesting online services offer a safer first step than face-to-face (Clark, 2018a), and that saying problems out loud is difficult when calling services like ChildLine (Best et al., 2016a). In relation to informal help-seeking with friends, boys in Clark et al. (2018a), Best et al. (2016a), and Samuel (2015) all considered face-to-face help-seeking embarrassing and uncomfortable. Participants in Randell (2016) also valued social media in enabling them to discuss problems, though sharing emotions through social media was also recognised in Best et al. (2016a; 2016b) as risky, due to potential screenshots and friends leaking sensitive information.

Studies exploring online help-seeking frequently mentioned boys' concerns about confidentiality and anonymity. Some felt online help-seeking was more confidential and anonymous; others felt the opposite. Those who felt online services were not confidential discussed potential lack of privacy, that online chatrooms might have trolls and bullies, and that preventative oversight from adults meant risking professional and parental involvement (Clark, 2018a). Those who felt online help was confidential and anonymous suggested online help-seeking meant others were unaware of their help-seeking (Best, 2016a), and this protected their masculine image (Best et al 2016a; 2016b). Many boys preferred online services without sign-up forms, suggesting anonymity was a central consideration when deciding whether to use an online service (Best et al. 2016b; Slotte et al., 2022).

Partially due to confidentiality and anonymity, many boys across studies preferred finding MH information from search engines. Generic search engines, like Google, were favoured over health websites, like NHS, due to wider variety of options (Best

et al. 2016a; 2016b; Clark, 2018a). When searching, boys most frequently accessed the top result, some checked many options to see if information was similar (Best et al, 2016a), whilst others looked for logos of organisations they knew and trusted (Best et al., 2016b). This linked findings in Best et al. (2016a; 2016b) with Calear et al. (2020), where males preferred receiving health information from qualified professionals.

A key issue of online help-seeking is the risk of accessing false, poorly explained, or untrustworthy material (Best et al. 2016a), making education around finding reliable information online key. This is particularly important, as Liddle (2021b) found those with lowest confidence accessing MH information also had lowest confidence and willingness to seek support.

Additionally, Best et al. (2016b) found that 29% of adolescent boys accessed MH info online, but there was no correlation between using internet searches and improved mental wellbeing. There were, however, significant positive correlations between number of online friends and help-seeking behaviours. Best et al., (2016b) also found between three help-seeking profiles (online search only, online then face-to-face, and face-to-face then online), there was a statistically significant wellbeing improvement in those who sought help in addition to searching. The effect size, however, was small.

### 2.4.8. Profiles of help-seeking

Liddle et al. (2021a) used latent profile analysis to identify help-seeking profiles amongst 1038 adolescent male sports participants, aged 12-18, in Australia. These profiles were low, moderate, and high general help-seekers (GHS), dependent upon

help-seeking frequency from all sources, and ‘high family and friends help-seekers’ (FFHS), those with high help-seeking intentions from informal sources, such as relatives and friends.

There were demographic differences between profiles, as low GHS were much older than high FFHS. Low GHS also had recent contact with others with MH difficulties more frequently than other profiles.

One key finding was that high GHSs experienced significantly less MH difficulties than other profiles. They also had higher wellbeing, higher intention to help others, and lower stigmatised attitudes. High GHSs also had more family support, similar to Burke et al. (2022), who found having close proximity to supportive people led to increased help-seeking and better MH.

Low GHSs were older than other profiles and had more recent contact with people with MH difficulties. When contrasted with high GHSs, low GHSs had lower family support and experienced more severe psychological distress.

### 2.5. Summary

This literature review identified six key themes in the literature base. These findings have helped to answer the question of “What does empirical research say about adolescent boys’ help-seeking behaviours?”

One prominent feature throughout was a link between boys displaying particularly masculine attitudes often having the biggest difficulties with help-seeking. This was shown in the quantitative study from Clark et al. (2020a), with qualitative and mixed methods studies (Best et al., 2016; Burke et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2018b; Randell et

al., 2016) offering masculinity related reasons. These mostly related to how males were expected to be tough, but that showing emotions were considered a sign of weakness (Best et al., 2016; Burke et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2018b; Clark, 2020b; Randell, 2016; Samuel, 2022) or failure (Randell, 2016). Males also felt it was key to be seen strong for their families, either to protect or not burden them (Burke et al, 2022; King et al; 2014; Samuel, 2015). Furthermore, because of importance of masculine image and stigma attached to emotional expression, boys feared their social status being compromised by help-seeking (Best et al., 2016; Clark et al., 2018b; Hassett & Isbister, 2017; Randell et al., 2016; Samuel, 2015).

Stigmatic attitudes were also rife amongst adolescent males, such as denial of mental illnesses as real (Clark et al., 2018b; 2020b; Samuel, 2015), and not wanting to be seen as crazy (Hassett & Isbister, 2017; Samuel, 2015). This may relate to boys' having poor EL (Liddle et al., 2021a), leading to them struggling to recognise their emotions (Clark, 2018b; Hasset & Isbister, 2017; Samuel, 2015), verbalise their emotions (King et al., 2014; Samuel, 2015), and not knowing a socially acceptable way to share emotions. This was often modelled to them by other males, such as their stoic or ridiculing fathers (Burke et al., 2022), and hierarchical friend groups (Burke et al., 2022; King et al., 2014; Randell et al., 2016).

The review highlighted boys' appreciation for online support tools and search engines, often because confidentiality and anonymity are vital to their help-seeking (Best, 2016a; 2016b; Clark et al., 2018a; 2018b). Participants suggested online resources should be highly visible in spaces males occupy, including social media (Clark et al., 2018b), should be male-oriented (Clark et al., 2018b; Hassett & Isbister, 2017), and should include examples of men seeking help successfully (Clark et al., 2018b; Calear et al., 2020). Male-oriented resources were suggested to help

normalise MH difficulties amongst men, as they are currently not normalised in society (Hassett & Isbister, 2017).

Relational factors were also key, with proximity, trust, and being considerate (Burke et al., 2022; Hassett & Isbister, 2017) key influences. These were seen as helpful towards building relationships that enabled help-seeking from friends, teachers (Burke et al., 2022), and, occasionally, more formal sources (Hassett & Isbister, 2017). Interventions also evidenced potential to support help-seeking in schools (Calear et al., 2020), amongst other systems factors such as school culture and ethos (Burke et al., 2022). Finally, new masculinities were important to some, with participants in Randell et al. (2016) valuing males who are sensitive, caring, and independent from pack mentality.

### 2.6. Gaps and Future Research

The quality of included research was mostly high, though some areas were left either unconsidered or given too little attention given the direction of theoretical literature. Connell's (2005) much-vaunted hegemonic masculinity theory hypothesises male dominance and power structures as key to constructing masculinities and male behaviours. The lack of discussion around power and its impact upon help-seeking is therefore considered a significant missing factor in understanding these phenomena.

Additionally, given that gender is widely considered to be a social construction built through culture and history, the lack of social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology throughout research seems striking. Content analyses and thematic analyses were common throughout, offering mostly descriptive

explanations of the data. This is limiting, however, as there is minimal discussion to how these phenomena occur and what social constructions are causing ideologies to form. Equally, discourse analyses are notably missing.

Likely due to methodologies adopted, research also rarely considered the impact of larger macrosystems of culture and society and their impact on masculinities. There is therefore a gap in the literature surrounding consideration of cultural and societal forms of power, how these become socially constructed, and how these impact upon attitudes and behaviours. Research which enables analysis of macrosystemic power structures, microsystemic hierarchies, and the social constructions which enable their maintenance would therefore be valuable additions to the literature base.

# 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research aims and purpose, alongside justification for its methodology. Epistemological and ontological stance are then explored, considering suitability to the study. Procedures, including recruitment, data collection methods, and analysis are then defined.

Trustworthiness is then discussed, considering credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Reflexivity is then considered in relation to decisions made throughout the study.

## 3.1. Research aims and questions

This research considered how masculinity acts as a barrier to help-seeking behaviours in secondary school boys.

The study aimed to answer the question:

“How does boys’ talk affect their help-seeking behaviours?”

The study aimed to:

- Explore how adolescent boys construct their masculinity in relation to their MH when in conversation about their help-seeking behaviours.
- Explore adolescent males’ discourses relation to societal gendered power structures, and how this impacts boys’ thoughts and beliefs about help-seeking.

## 3.2. Purpose

Though masculinity and help-seeking has been well studied, little research is focused on adolescent males, especially within the UK. For this reason, the purpose of the study was exploratory, as this enabled a broad investigation of the topic area, allowing identification of new concepts surrounding the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Exploratory research also aims to generate new knowledge in the field, rather than being theory driven (Howitt, 2016).

The present research aimed to explore the language used by adolescent males which constructs their beliefs and ideologies around help-seeking for EW difficulties. It looked to analyse discourses in relation to constructions of masculinity and how these are associated to behaviours when considering finding support for their MH.

## 3.3. Philosophical Positions

It is recognised this research was influenced by its philosophical positions of epistemology, the nature of knowledge, and ontology, the nature of reality. The analysis of this research has also been affected by the researcher's worldview and its findings cannot be separated from this.

### 3.3.1. Epistemology

The epistemological orientation of the current research is social constructionist. Social constructionism is an epistemological position that suggests knowledge is constructed through the use of language (Andrews, 2012). It stands diametrically opposed to positivism, a worldview that proposes psychological phenomena can be objectively proved through empirical methods as scientific laws generalised across populations

(Hughes, 2011; Jones & Elcock, 2001). Social constructionism alternately proposes discourse used amongst populations cause the popularisation of norms, values, beliefs, behaviours, and cultures (Galbin, 2014), making fully generalisable research a near impossibility (Burr, 2015). Language is therefore of great interest to social constructionists, as it is considered to generate and sustain knowledge through social processes.

Many social constructionists consider language a social action which produces and maintains power structures, aggrandising or oppressing certain groups (Parker, 2015a). It is often therefore the intention of researchers who adopt social constructionist epistemologies to explore the language which enables these constructions of power, with the aim of deconstructing and reconstructing discourse to create a more balanced and fairer world (Parker, 2015a; Burman, 2017). This is relevant to gender research due to continuous oppression of many groups due to gender politics, despite social progress made in some areas (Asta, 2022). For example, transgender people, people of non-heterosexual sexualities, women, and masculinities stereotyped as exclusive to the working class may be considered oppressed by power structures maintained by gender-related language.

Though a frequently contested point, particularly with current gender politics surrounding transgenderism and its acceptability throughout the ‘anti-woke culture war’ (Cammaerts, 2022; Gevirtzman, 2022), it is my position that gender is a social construction. Western societies typically see gender as biologically determined and thusly performed (Lorber, 1994), but biological sex and gender are largely separate entities. As evidenced throughout cultures across the globe, roles, clothing, mannerisms, and infinite other social prescriptions associated with masculinity change

dependent on their locality and timeframe (Kimmel, 2004). If purely biologically determined, gender would present uniformly throughout all societies and histories. Gender and masculinity, however, change and progress, and the modelling of behaviours and language seen as ‘gender typical’ enable intragender belonging and acceptance (Lorber, 1994).

Similarly, MH and EW hold their own languages, and their discourses socially construct how we understand psychopathology. Though progress in brain scanning equipment has encouraged contemporary focus upon neurophysiological, and thus positivist, explanations of mental processes, there has been a recent turn to integrate social constructionism with natural science’s medical models (O’Reilly & Lester, 2017). It is suggested that through a positivist lens, there is direct relationship between the world’s objects and events and our perception of them, making it possible to explain what exists and be definitively correct (Willig, 2013). This way of thinking, however, places an increased emphasis upon the importance of neural determinants of behaviour and risks scientists making ungrounded presumptions bereft of sociocultural understanding of societal issues (Gergen, 2010). Many social constructionists therefore argue that naturalistic explanations of mental wellbeing are overly reductionist, as there are significant disparities between what occurs in the brain and what occurs in the mind (O’Reilly & Lester, 2017). Furthermore, when considering the impact of how mental distress has been progressively positioned throughout society and how this has (often harmfully) impacted assessment, treatment, and social policy, it seems ill-informed to consider mental wellbeing outside of where social constructions have placed it.

Much like the language of gender, the language of MH can empower or oppress groups. Sociocultural presentations of what it means to be mentally ill has deeply impacted public perceptions of MH (Brown, 1995), where its discourse is intimately aligned with the deficit-focused vernacular of psychiatric and medical models (Walker, 2006). One does not have to look far into history to find evidence of psychology's wilful collaboration with the eugenics movement against people with mental disabilities (Selden, 2000), and terms from associated journals are still used in popular UK media today (Li et al., 2021). These discourses contribute to stigmatic attitudes which subordinate those who experience MH difficulties and influence the shame culture that affects males' help-seeking (O'Reilly & Lester, 2017). For each of these reasons, a social constructionist epistemology seems not only a logical standpoint for the present study, but ethically appropriate, too.

### 3.3.2. Ontology

Ontology is the philosophical study of being, or what exists (Effingham, 2013). A researcher's ontological position will guide the questions they ask about the world, steering their research (Willig, 2017). The ontological stance of the present study is relativist.

Relativism is an ontological position that assumes existence of multiple subjective realities, which vary depending upon an individual's interpretation. People's interpretation of reality is thus affected by experiences, understanding, and culture, altering their perception of objects and situations (Mosteller, 2008). Relativists believe that in relation to morals and material objects, senses and the mind distort the nature of objects and experiences, intertwining the person's own nature with

them (Bowen, 1876). It is oppositional to realism, an ontological stance suggesting a single reality exists independent of human interpretation (Heaviside, 2017).

Relativism fits neatly with social constructionism as relativism considers items of knowledge, values, logical entities, and qualities to only obtain existence and/or natures from aspects of human activity, including cultures, beliefs, and importantly, language (Mosteller, 2008). This makes it a logical fit with both gender and MH, each of which have obtained their natures based upon the cultures, beliefs, and language surrounding them. The present research is therefore focused upon how males used language to construct realities, and how these affect their willingness to seek help when faced with EW difficulties.

### 3.4. Methodology

The methodology chosen for this study was qualitative, using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse data. Qualitative design was seen as most appropriate, given the topic, as it enables focus upon the meanings of social actions in their social context (Coolican, 2014). As gender and MH are considered social constructs which cannot be measured devoid of sociocultural influences, a quantitative methodology searching for objective truth was deemed unsuitable.

#### 3.4.1. Discourse Analysis

DA is used to help us better understand how language creates and mediates psychological and social realities (Willig, 2014), not making assumptions about neural events, mental processes, or cognition behind social interactions (Wiggins & Potter, 2017). It considers social and performative actions of language, analysing

how choice and expression of words may bring about new social and experiential worlds (Willig, 2014). This makes it fitting for research employing a social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology (Esin et al., 2014).

DA encompasses a range of research techniques and applications, each concerned with analysis of language, text, and social interactions (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Different types of DA are used to investigate different concepts and uses of language, such as a focus on naturalistic data in discursive psychology (Wiggins & Potter, 2017), the structure of conversations in conversational analysis, social issues and power in CDA (McMullen, 2011), and how language governs formation of objectivity and subjectivity through patterns of knowledge in Foucauldian DA (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017).

As this study focused upon how men perform masculinities through their language, constructing and maintaining power in the macro- and microsystems, CDA was seen as most appropriate.

### 3.4.2. Discourses, Power, and Masculinity

Masculinity is a construct deeply impacted by discourses that affect men's thinking and behaviours. It is therefore relevant to discuss what discourses are, how they produce and navigate cultures, and how they maintain power relations which inflate social positions of some males, whilst leaving others needing to construct power through alternative, potentially harmful, means.

Discourses are coordinated patterns of words which display beliefs, values, tools, objects, places, and times, performed by people through social interactions (Gee, 2011). As such, humans share ideologies through imparting discourse, with shared

meaning making constantly shaping and reshaping their thinking and experiences (Matheson, 2005). As part of this shared meaning making and repeating of common rhetoric, some discourses become prevalent, creating common ideologies as people making agreements through language (Catalano & Waugh, 2020). Widespread discourses can consequently represent a culture, as people within it share common worldviews built through similarities in understanding (Willig, 2013).

Masculinities are therefore proposed to have been built through discourses over time. Though some suggest these cultures were initially instilled in small localities, Marx and Engels (1848/2016) suggest the ruling class's discourses, those that maintain power structures and resource inequality, always were, and always will be, dominant societal ideologies. This was developed upon in Gramsci's (1935/1971) theory of hegemony, which suggested those lacking economic power consent to ruling class hierarchies, as they popularise the nobility's worldview as paramount. Through media and state discourse dispersal, dominant elite groups can therefore incite oppressed groups to tacitly cooperate with their own inequality, accepting their position in the societal hierarchy as an ideological imperative (Bloor & Bloor, 2013).

Masculinity, in this sense, can be considered to have been influenced by the Bourgeoisie's actions, rhetoric, and hunger for power, in that males replicate leaders in stratifying themselves to produce inter- and intra-gender divisions. Though this may have built a gender-based hegemony that continues through patriarchal privilege today, working class males who cannot construct power through economic means may apply alternative methods to find control.

Though many theorists dispute whether class governs the complex social interrelations producing social power (e.g., Stoddart, 2007; Haraway, 2006), prominent masculinity academics have adapted Marx and Gramsci's ideas to gender

relations theories. Connell's (2005) Social Organisation of Masculinity theory discusses importance of labour divisions between men and women and how their paid and unpaid work enabled society's shaping. Connell notes that Gramsci's hegemonic power theory influenced her theory of hegemonic masculinity, described as the cultural dynamic through which some men claim and sustain power. Additionally, Frosh et al. (2002), in their large-scale study on young masculinities, noted prevalence of masculinities performed and expressed through class positions. Throughout Frosh et al. (2002) and Laberge and Albert's (1999) work with adolescent boys, toughness and unemotionality enabled young males to construct power from contexts of relative powerlessness. The present study must therefore recognise the importance of class stratification and its impact upon how males position themselves socially, whilst still recognising the many other social hierarchies which facilitate social inequality for them.

### 3.4.3. Critical Discourse Analysis

When discussing DA and power, leading discourses are named dominant discourses, described as those which favour social realities that legitimise existing power relations (Willig, 2013). It is of great importance to consider dominant discourses' effects from both structural and economic points of view, but also through how gender politics demand hierarchical structure amongst males searching for social power outside of class. It was therefore key to utilise a method of data analysis which facilitated examination of discourses of power, with the aim of understanding the resistant discourses which offer opportunity for change. As CDA relates to challenging societal and institutional power structures (Parker, 2015b), it was seen as a logical and effective choice.

CDA is a form of DA which argues for emancipation of subordinated, marginalised, and oppressed groups. Fundamental to CDA is the belief discourse is a primary aspect of institutional oppression and control, making it the researcher's role to critique such discourse in aiming to challenging the status quo (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). CDA therefore takes an explicitly political stance, aiming to expose ideologies that underpin dominant discourses afflicting groups and individuals, and highlight alternative discourses which may reduce inequalities acting against them (Wiggins, 2017).

CDA's greatest strengths include that it facilitates opportunities for researchers to recognise discourses which enable power structures to oppress groups. This includes males impacted by power structures which encourage importance of physical and emotional strength as a method of constructing power due to limited opportunities for power afforded to them through other means. This may contribute towards CYP, like this study's participants, modelling themselves on father figures who display minimal emotion due to the requirements of masculinity. It also offers opportunities to recognise discourses of new 'hybrid' masculinities. These are suggested to offer hope for positive allyship amongst males who diverge from stereotypical masculinities which admire toughness and dominance (Elliott, 2018).

Potential limitations of CDA include Widdowson's (1995) suggestions that researchers using the method assume ideology is premeditatively fixed in participants' language, when it is actually the analyst's standpoint. He states that socio-political ideologies of analysts and the structural power they commit to challenging therefore become conflated, causing complex relationships between what is interpretation and what is analysis. Fairclough (1996), however, notes this is a recognised part of CDA, in that scholars use CDA to see difficulties in society and

commit to language-focused change, not to favour their ideologies. Furthermore, he explains CDA encourages a range of interpretations as a core element of its theoretical framework and all qualitative research is written within researchers' own discursive practices and interests. CDA is therefore considered better placed to see its own partiality.

Fairclough's reply appears to acknowledge an area of vital importance in critical approaches, reflexivity (Billig, 2002). Reflexivity is about "the politics of positionality" (Madison, 2005, pg. 6) and conceding that throughout the research process, the researcher's privilege, power, and biases will impact analysis (Leavy, 2014). Catalano and Waugh (2020) suggest lack of self-reflexivity and self-criticality are notable areas of CDA critique, with Billig (2008) explaining that analysts must not allow their work to be corrupted by impressing their ideologies on others' language. As such, committing to CDA is committing to identification of researchers' own positionality and expression of its impact upon processes of data collection and interpretation (Parker, 2015b). This may include researchers outlining their positions at the outset of research (Fairclough, 1989), and ensuring cultural competence in understanding the historical social power relations surrounding the research topic (Parker, 2015b). As reflexivity heavily links with ethical and effective practice in qualitative research, my own position is discussed later in the chapter.

Though males are often considered a group which holds much societal power, this is not true of all males. Though males tend to hold advantages over other genders in some arenas, it is important to consider intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016) and how other social labels outside gender impact their ability to construct and maintain power. Intersectionality is a way of recognising the complexities of social and political life, as social positions are shaped by several factors. Therefore, social inequality

faced by this study's participants are not singularly because of gender, sexuality, physicality, or social class, but by many axes which influence each other (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The assumption that males hold significant power through distinct virtue of their sex is therefore inaccurate, as all hierarchies are decided by multiple characteristics and social contexts.

Though these hierarchies are based around existing societal structures, popular theories of masculinity suggest males' societal position is based upon power they construct amongst their peers. This is true of young people in secondary schools, who find themselves impacted by social pyramids where popularity, and thus the absence of bullying, is key (Frosh et al., 2002). Due to constructions of masculinities being closely related to power in terms of both societal structures and infrastructure of even playground politics, CDA was seen as the most appropriate form of analysis to use in this study.

Alternate methods of analysis were also considered, such as thematic analysis or reflexive thematic analysis. These were decided against for many reasons, primarily due to suitability to the study's epistemology and ontology. Though thematic analysis is not tied to any particular qualitative research approach (Willig, 2013), its broad-brush descriptive style does not allow the detailed interpretation necessary for identifying and examining discourses which build towards social constructions (Howitt, 2016). As discussed previously, due to the socially constructed nature of gender and MH, a social constructionist epistemology was selected, and forms of DA are typically most suitable.

## 3.5. Research Design

### 3.5.1. Participants

The present study conducted one FG containing six participants. The FG's participants were aged 14-18, and attended a school in South-East England

Though forms of trustworthiness suggest attempting to saturate themes through collecting data at multiple sites (Ravitch & Carl, 2015), social constructionist and DA research is heavily focused upon data context. This reduces need for cross-site referencing as the study focuses on specific discourses developed in small social groups alongside those on institutional levels. Willig (2013) notes DA does not require extensive volumes of text to deliver meaningful analysis, so the study focused on one FG.

Online FGs are gaining in popularity due to ease of transcription and increased accessibility for widely dispersed populations (Lobe, 2017). However, the population needed for this study was not considered sparse or difficult to access, and face-to-face interaction increased the likelihood of authentic replication of participants' social context (Hennink, 2014).

### 3.5.2. Participant Recruitment

Participants were identified through advertisement in their school (appendix G). The research was advertised to male students aged 14 or older. Once an eligible person showed interest in participating, they were asked to select peers (aged 14+) who may also be interested in participating. These peers were then invited to participate. The study was advertised, as opposed to using random sampling methods, to

ensure participants were interested in the topic. This helps encourage participants to discuss the topic thoroughly in the minimal time available (Acocella, 2012), especially if they feel they have direct experience and an everyday relationship with the subject matter (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

This participant recruitment method is known as snowball sampling, a sampling method through which potential participants are asked to gather others who meet relevant characteristics (Frost, 2011). Snowball sampling can reduce effects of power differentials and suspicion of researchers in FGs (Cohen et al., 2018). It can also increase likelihood of homogeneity amongst group members, meaning members feel more equal, thus feeling comfortable to speak fluently (Acocella, 2012). Some homogeneity between group members is key, as those feeling distant from others in terms of social status, cultures, life experiences, and world representations may be less likely to spontaneously express their positions and thoughts (Ruiz, 2017). Furthermore, snowball sampling can bring organic social networks to the fore, helping to reproduce social systems and replicate the social knowledge and existing power relations in groups (Noy, 2008). This is particularly valuable in a study which considers power relations and hierarchies of masculinity of note.

### 3.5.3. Participant Inclusion Criteria

*Table 6 - Participant inclusion criteria*

| Inclusion Criteria | Reason |
|---|---|
| Male | This was specific to the research questions as the present study aims to understand constructions of masculinity formed by adolescent males |
| Aged 14-18 | This age group was decided upon due to theoretical suggestions that many gender-related behaviours begin during the secondary school years (Lundgren et al., 2013; Priess-Groben & Lindberg, 2018). |

### 3.5.4. Exclusion Criteria

*Table 7 - Participant exclusion criteria*

| Exclusion Criteria | Reason |
|---|---|
| Students known by their school to experience mental health difficulties | Though the present study did not aim for participants to directly discuss their MH or what situations might point them towards help-seeking, the conversation could have directed towards this. Due to this potential, it was seen best that participants whose difficulties may be exacerbated by such talk were excluded from participation. |
| Transgender males | This is not to exclude transgender males from their existence as males. This was decided due to the social constructionist epistemology adopted. Gender studies suggest different gender-based discourses are used towards children depending on their sex through their early childhood years (Blaise, 2012; Chapman, 2016). Therefore, had a transgender male agreed to participate, they likely would have grown up receiving different gender-related discourses from their family and society prior to transitioning. This means they may have built different constructions around help-seeking. |

### 3.5.5. School Recruitment

The present study was conducted in a large, suburban, mixed sex secondary school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18. This was selected based on the following inclusion criteria.

*Table 8 - School inclusion criteria*

| Criteria | Reason |
|---|---|
| Location | The school is based in South-East England. Due to the vast number of eligible schools in the area, selection was narrowed based on location. To ensure credibility through prolonged engagement, schools were first considered based on locations I know well. This aimed to ensure an understanding of the local context of the school, so a thick description of context could be provided (Appendix H). |
| Relationship with Researcher | I must not have a relationship with the school through an EPS traded agreement. This was to reduce the likelihood of working with participants who may later require my support in a different professional capacity. |
| Pupils attending | The school has male students aged 14-18 attending. It is recognised the demographics of various schools such as all-boys, grammar, private, and mixed comprehensive may be considerably different. Though the context of the setting is likely to interact with the data, these factors are not considered to be reasons to exclude certain schools from participating. Due to the study adopting a constructionist epistemology, context will be thoroughly considered throughout data analysis and these characteristics will be discussed throughout findings. |

One school was initially invited to participate by email but did not respond within the allotted two weeks. A second school was then invited to participate and accepted. Advertisements were then posted in the school inviting participants (Appendix G). Once a student offered to participate, the advertisements were removed. As the student then found others who wanted to participate and all signed consent forms, the research was no longer advertised in this or any other school.

### 3.6. Procedures

Participants were invited to a session one week prior to the FG to meet me, understand the research process and title, and sign consent forms. The information

sheet and consent form were read aloud to ensure participants understood information and expectations. As participants were happy to sign consent forms, they were also given parent information sheets. These were different depending upon whether the child was first to respond (Appendix L) or was invited to join by their peer (Appendix M). They were then given a date and time for the FG session and assured that if they changed their minds, they did not have to return for the main FG session. Five boys attended the first meeting, but only four attended the main FG.

The FG was held in a classroom which was not a through-route, giving no reason for interruption. The room was available for two hours. This allowed 15 minutes for participants to ask questions prior to starting, 75 minutes for the FG, and 30 minutes at the end for questions and debriefing.

A member of staff was asked to be available throughout the FG. This staff member was part of the school's pastoral team and therefore experienced in discussing wellbeing-related issues with young people. This was to ensure participants could withdraw from the FG and speak to an appropriate adult should they find the FG distressing.

At the start of the FG, participants were reminded the FG was expected to be a conversation between the participants, not with the researcher. Participants were reminded of the topic and asked if they would like consent or information sheets read again.

Three topics were given to the group during the FG, with minimal additional input:

*Table 9 - Focus group topics*

| Topic order | Question | Prompt time (mins into recording) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | When you have a problem, or are worried about something, what do you usually do about it? | 2 |
| 2 | How might a girl, or female, deal with a similar problem or worry? | 21 |
| 3 | Why do you think these responses are similar or different? | 48 |

Upon conclusion, participants were thanked for their time and reminded of details on the information sheet, such as my contact details, and details of multiple support services should they require them.

### 3.6.1. Focus Groups

The present study collected data through one FG. FGs seek to gain insight into a topic, focusing upon how individuals construct meaning as a group (Bryman, 2012). Holland et al. (1998) suggest worlds are socially produced and culturally constructed, and people make sense of themselves in relation to others. As discussed in detail above, this appears true of gender and masculinity. As such, using FGs instead of interviews may enable me to view naturalistic production of social systems within each group (Wilkinson, 1998), whilst simultaneously reducing power dynamics between facilitator and participant (Bryman, 2012).

FGs are also suitable as they enable a somewhat more naturalistic production of data than the 1-to-1 interview. Researchers become more visible participants in interviews, as their various group identity memberships influence interaction as both

parties enact fulfilment of their associated roles and expectations (Widdicombe, 2015). Effective FGs, however, have moderators or researchers offering minimal input, allowing participants to explore issues whilst receiving occasional subtle probing to keep discussion on topic (Hennink, 2014). This, therefore, provides a less artificial setting than 1-to-1 interviews, making it more likely that FG data has higher ecological validity (Willig, 2013). FGs also allow participants to generate new ideas amongst themselves, enabling constructed understandings which relate to social context, rather than individual views based upon self-reflection (Breen, 2006). One FG was therefore seen as most fitting to research adopting a social constructionist epistemology.

Additionally, FGs tend to produce especially rich data, as participants respond to each other's contributions. This enables researchers to see how statements are developed, extended, challenged, or agreed upon amongst the group, whilst they construct new meanings and form new attitudes (Willig, 2013). As the researcher uses occasional provocative enquiries to promote discussion and invite expression of different positions and beliefs, issues such as lack of consensus, dissent, and debates create view diversity, producing a wide array of discursive outputs (Ruiz, 2017). This produces greater data depth, so analysis can involve interpretations that span assortments of disparate realities, emotions, and experiences (Seaton, 2017). This must be done with care, however, as asking about attitudes and motivations may reduce perception of group belonging and encourage more direct response toward the moderator (Acocella, 2012). The greater depth enabled by FGs compared to interviews, and the intensity of analysis possible in critical discourse analysis made it logical that a single FG would provide enough data for this study. In

discourse analysis, amount of text does not equate to richness of data in the way it might for other qualitative methods (Fairclough, 2013).

There are some limitations to FG research. This includes issues such as overly dominant voices, meaning decreased variety of views shared (Cyr, 2019). When dominant voices overwhelm the opinions of others, those who speak less are more likely to conform to the views of the dominant voices (Hollander, 2004). This can cause the phenomenon, 'groupthink', a preference towards agreement which can make data biased towards particular viewpoints (Viscek, 2010).

Groupthink is suggested to cause a bandwagon effect, triggering people to express alternative ideas than they would have individually due to pressure to play certain roles or satisfy perceived expectations of other group members (Ruiz, 2017). Though this seems a negative due to apparent bias, it is not seen as problematic to the present study, due to its focus on power differentials and their effects upon males. Hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 2005) suggests power is bestowed upon individuals who dominate other males' voices, with some offering complicity and others becoming subordinated. In this sense, the dominating voices of some participants causing others to conform may evidence how power can affect construction of dominant discourses and certain masculinities. This could also show how certain gender performances impact narratives and behaviours related to help-seeking.

It is recognised that discursive psychology can focus upon naturally occurring data rather than interviews or FGs. This to decrease the potential distorting imposition of the mediator's identity and assumptions upon the group, the subsequent reduced likelihood of discovering unanticipated issues, and the removal of people from genuine social contexts (Wiggins & Potter, 2017).

These issues were managed through offering minimal involvement, with only rare interjection used throughout the FG to guide participants and offer new discussion topics. There were also potential ethical issues with trying to access naturalistic data, given participants' ages. Finding applicable data may also have been challenging, given the specificity of the issue requiring exploration.

### 3.6.2. Recording Resources and Software

Audio data was recorded using a laptop and its microphone. Once audio data was captured, it was held on an encrypted USB drive before being uploaded to an encrypted and password protected laptop.

### 3.6.3. Transcription

All data was transcribed manually, with names immediately pseudonymised once all data had been transcribed. This was decided due to the many analytical insights which can be gained as part of the transcription process, as the researcher becomes intensely engaged with the text (Frost, 2011). This is also key as theoretical decisions can be made by the researcher during transcription regarding what is important for analysis and what is omittable (Dunne et al., 2005).

Once the transcript was written, the audio was relistened to and the text reread to enable me to gain an understanding of the data's context and story, whilst noting its key themes.

### 3.7. Analysis

CDA is usually considered an academic movement or shared perspective as opposed to a definitive uniform methodology (Williams, 2021). As such, there is no single theoretical framework which guides a researcher in critical discourse studies (Wodak & Meyer, 2015), with CDA offering tools to examine power and ideology through the social conditions of discourse (van Dijk, 2008). Researchers adopting CDA are therefore required to consider various discursive methods when considering how to approach analysis.

van Dijk (2015) explains that there are two key levels of analysis, macro and micro, with meso levels bridging the intermediary gap.

#### 3.7.1. Macro-levels of Discourse

Macro-levels of discourse involve power, inequality, and dominance between social groups and involves organisational, institutional, and structural powers that influence discourse. Macro-levels of discourse display what is happening on a societal level and indicates the links between speech and social context (Fairclough, 1989).

#### 3.7.2. Micro-levels of Discourse

Micro-levels of discourse involve individual agency and interactional forms of speech and discourse. This relates to smaller units of speech given in a specific social exchange and can relate to issues of syntax, sentences, stanzas, and intonation during interaction (Gee, 2011).

### 3.7.3. Meso-levels of Discourse

van Dijk (2015) explains the various ways of bridging the gap between the macro and micro are in relation to:

- Members and groups – How speakers engage in discourse as representatives of multiple social groups and institutions, acting through these lenses.
- Actions-process – How individuals perform social actions on behalf of groups to produce social processes, reproducing discourses to enact their group's positions.
- Context-social structure – Situations of discourse which act between the institutional and individual levels.
- Personal and social cognition – the connection between shared levels of group and culture membership and individuals' memories, knowledge and opinions. This splits the oft-debated dichotomy of individual agency and actor as part of wider social structures.

### 3.7.4. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework

Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional framework is a method of CDA which enables systematic inquiry into the connections between properties of 'language text' (spoken and written language) and the nature of social processes. It facilitates analysis of 'macro-', 'meso-', and micro-levels' of discourse to uncover interrelations between said text's properties; the social processes that underlie, and are created by, it; and the ideologies and power relations it presents and represents. This assists visibility of social structures which require opacity to be effective, so they can be critiqued, and potential reconstructions considered (Fairclough, 2010).

The figure below illustrates that, within the framework, all discursive practices are simultaneously considered a language text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. Within this sociocultural practice, discourse is embedded at immediate, wider institutional, and societal levels (Fairclough, 2010). For example, a boy's utterance on the playground may relate to their immediate relationship with the listener, male peer groups in the school environment as an institution, and gender relationships in wider society.

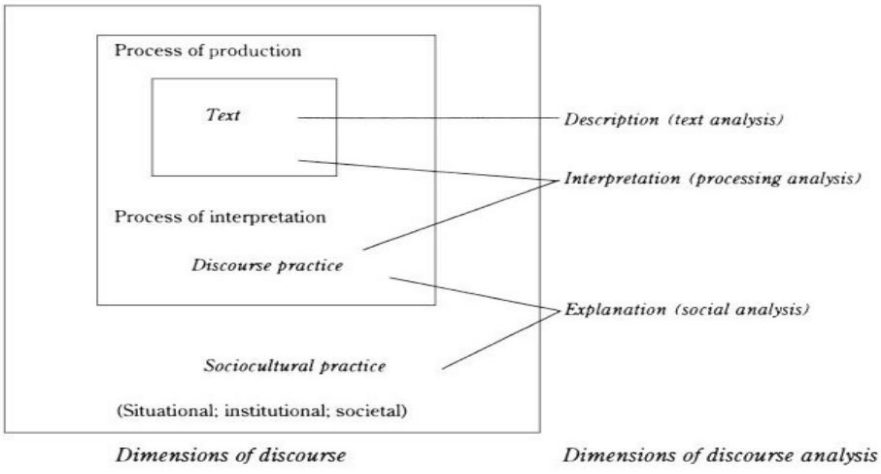


*Figure 2 - Fairclough's (2013b) three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis*

The method itself then requires three steps, linguistic description of the text, interpretation of relationships between discursive processes and the text, and explanation of relationships between the discursive and social processes (Fairclough, 2013b). Discursive processes relate to the production of discourse by the speaker and interpretation by the receiver, whilst social processes considers the text's association with multi-levelled sociocultural practice. This enables analysis of the relationships between the micro- meso- and macro-levels of discourse from within the same text.

### 3.7.4.1. Description

At the ‘description’ level, linguistic properties of language are considered through the following ten questions, split into 3 sections of vocabulary, grammar, and textual.

*Table 10 - Vocabulary questions for description level of analysis*

| **Vocabulary** | |
|---|---|
| **Question** | **Sub-questions** |
| 1. What experiential values do words have? | What classification schemes are drawn upon? |
| | Are there words which are ideologically contested? |
| | Is there rewording or overwording? |
| | What ideologically significant meaning relations (synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy) are there between words? |
| 2. What relational values do words have? | Are there euphemistic expressions? |
| | Are there markedly formal or informal words? |
| 3. What expressive values do words have? | None |
| 4. What metaphors are used? | None |

*Table 11 - Grammar questions for description level of analysis*

| Grammar | |
|---|---|
| **Question** | **Sub-questions** |
| 5. What experiential values do grammatical features have? | What types of process and participant predominate? |
| | Is agency unclear? |
| | Are processes what they seem? |
| | Are nominalizations used? |
| | Are sentences active or passive? |
| | Are sentences positive or negative? |
| 6. What relational values do grammatical features have? | What modes (declarative, grammatical question, imperative) are used? |
| | Are there important features of relational modality? |
| | Are the pronouns we and you used, and if so, how? |
| 7. What expressive values do grammatical features have? | Are there important features of expressive modality? |
| 8. How are (simple) sentences linked together? | What logical connectors are used? |
| | Are complex sentences characterized by coordination or subordination? |
| | What means are used for referring inside and outside the text? |

*Table 12 - Textual questions for description level of analysis*

| Textual | |
|---|---|
| **Question** | **Sub-questions** |
| 9. What interactional conventions are used? | Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others? |
| 10. What larger-scale structures does the text have? | None |

Appendix O shows an example of description level analysis.

### 3.7.4.2. Interpretation

The term interpretation is intentionally used in two areas of the method as they are considered by Fairclough to be the same. Interpretation is firstly considered a discursive process through which participants interpret other participants' utterances, and secondly, how the analyst interprets the text, including in relation to their own assumptions, worldviews, experiences, and biases.

Fairclough (2013b) split interpretation into interpretative procedures and interpreting, with the below figure illustrating. Interpretative procedures are considered through the lens of '*members' resources',* the prototypes created by long-memory that impact a person's expectations around a sequence of events in a situation. These are both in the person and in the participants and thus shape all conversation and analysis of it. The interpreting column are domains of interpretation, with the top two showing context and the latter four are based around interpretation of text.

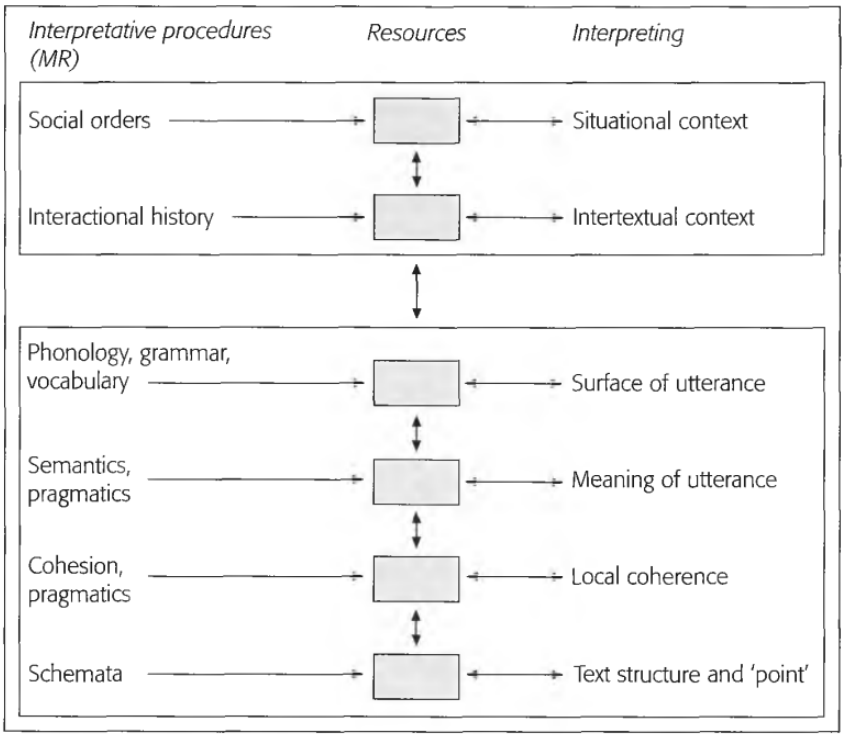


***Figure 3 - Interpretation model (Fairclough, 2013b, pg. 119.)***

Interpretation of the four textual features are discussed in the table below.

***Table 13 - Interpretation of textual features (Fairclough, 2013a)***

| | |
|---|---|
| Surface of utterance | How interpreters convert strings of sounds into understandable words, sentences, and phrases. This requires drawing upon the member's resources, such as knowledge of the spoken language. |
| Meaning of utterance | This relates to the interpreter assigning meanings to the language segments used. These segments of language are known as utterances, possibly corresponding to sentences or phrases. The member's resources required here are understanding of semantic aspects of utterances, word meanings, and what the speaker aims to propose and perform through their language. |
| Local coherence | This relates to drawing upon member's resources to interpret the cohesion between utterances and understand the meaning connections between small segments of language. |
| Text structure and 'point' | Interpretation of the global coherence of a text, drawing upon members' resources to apply a repertoire of schemata to a type of discourse. For example, interpreters may immediately have expectations of a text because it is a phone call or newspaper article.<br>The text 'point' relates to the interpreter's summary of the text they can more easily store in their memory, so they can rely upon it later. |

Interpretation of contextual features is discussed through the questions in the table below.

*Table 14 – Interpretation of contextual features*

| | |
|---|---|
| What's going on? | This considers interpretations of what is the activity, topic and purpose of an utterance or text.<br>This section is somewhat muddied by the unnatural circumstance of the focus group, as activity and purpose both relate to the researcher setting up a focus group and asking participants to discuss a specific topic. |
| Who's involved? | This question is asking the subject positions of the people involved in the text. For example, this could relate to the researcher and the participants holding certain subject positions in this type of activity.<br>Subject positions also relates to the social identities ascribed to people by the institutions they are part of. In this case, researcher, psychologist, school student, year 11, may all require interpretation of how this impacts the discourse. |
| In what relations? | This considers the social relations between the people producing the text. As the study's researcher rarely spoke in the focus group, consideration of the power relations between each of the participants was also necessary. |
| What's the role of language? | The considers how language impacts the context, particularly in relation to what its objective is. |

Appendix P shows interpretation process of an extract.

### 3.7.4.3. Explanation

The 'explanation' level focused upon the social determinants and effects of the discourse (Fairclough, 2013b). This meant recognising the dominant discourses and linguistic features of the text, then explaining their relationship with power structures in the group at the immediate, institutional, and societal level. It also aimed to explain

how discourses are generated from social structures and what they do to either maintain or alter them.

This was achieved by considering the following questions:

*Table 15 – Questions for explanation level of analysis*

| Section of explanation | Questions |
|---|---|
| Social determinants | What power relations at situational, institutional and societal levels help shape this discourse |
| Effects | How is this discourse positioned in relation to struggles at the situational, institutional and societal levels? Are these struggles overt or covert? |
| | Is the discourse normative with respect to Members' resources or creative? |
| | Does it contribute to sustaining existing power relations, or transforming them? |

### 3.7.4.4. Dominant Discourses

Dominant discourses were generated from carrying out the description and interpretation phases. The transcript was reviewed several times, until I noticed patterns in the data. I set these patterns into themes, altering their labels and rearranging the quotes frequently as I considered possibilities of the linguistic, social, and power purposes of the discourses. Appendix Q is a diagram of the theming process.

## 3.8. Ethics

Ethical approval was received from Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC). The application can be found in appendix I.

### 3.8.1. Informed Consent

Informed consent was agreed by participants prior to research commencing. Each participant information was given a sheet explaining; title and topic of study, who can participate, why they were invited, their anonymity, who to speak to if they have concerns following the FG, and contact details for myself and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Quality Insurance Officer. These information sheets were slightly different depending on whether the participant was first to respond to the advertisement (appendix J) or was invited following a peer's suggestion (appendix K).

Participants were also given consent forms which asked the participants to confirm their understanding regarding confidentiality and anonymity, their right to withdraw, the information sheet, and that their quotes may be used in a published study (Appendix N). Participants were also asked to confirm that they understand limits to confidentiality should they share any information regarding risk of harm to themselves or others. These forms were given in written form and verbally read aloud with all participants.

### 3.8.2. Right to Withdraw

In a session one week prior to the FG, participants had information sheets read aloud to them, which included information regarding right to withdraw. This was explained as follows:

If someone chooses to withdraw during the FG, I will speak to them after the FG has ceased. At this point, I will:

• Ask the withdrawn participant if they also wish to withdraw their data. This can also be further explored with their link teacher if they do not want to discuss this with me.

• If yes, explain that their data cannot be removed entirely as what they have said would have influenced others' contributions, but instead I will not quote their contributions.

• If this is not satisfactory, I will delete the recording and the collected data will not be used as part of the study.

### 3.8.3. Duty of Care

I recognise I have a duty of care for each of the participants. This was key during the FG, where conversations could have steered towards discussions about challenging times in participants' lives and how they managed them. It was therefore my duty to recognise if participants needed additional support and/or needed to withdraw from the FG. Due to this same duty of care, I ensured to explain that the aim of the session was not to hear stories about specific reasons why participants sought help. This helped to boundary the discussions and reduce likelihood of disclosures. Participants were also given the opportunity to discuss any issues that arose from conversation with a trusted member of school staff during and/or after the FG.

Duty of care was also necessary throughout the analysis process, as Iam required to faithfully represent participants' voices and consider the impact of potentially uncomfortable quotes being used in publication.

This became particularly taxing in presenting the findings, as, even with pseudonyms, participants may recognise their own quotes. Given the small number of participants and types of critique required, it became important not to overly

emphasise critical language towards particular individuals or their language. As such, overly using names during analysis was decided against, despite the richness of information in the data relating to how participants discussed and hierarchised each other.

### 3.8.4. Confidentiality and Anonymity

In writing the results and analysis of the study, all names of students were replaced with pseudonyms, with potential identifying information removed. The schoolhas also been pseudonymised and descriptions of its location excluded any identifiable information.

Due to the FG involving multiple participants in one space, it was important to consider how this may impact confidentiality and potential for disclosures. As such, ground rules were written into the participant consent forms and were explained verbally before the FG. Each participant had therefore agreed that what was said in the group is not shared outside. Participant information sheets also explained that, upon publication, other people in the FG may recognise quotes that they have stated, so that participants were aware of this and could withdraw if necessary.

### 3.8.5. Vulnerable Populations

There were elements of risk due to the study involving young people under 16 who may have had prior experience of psychological adversity, as these are both considered vulnerable groups (BPS, 2021). It was not part of the sampling approach to seek out participants who have had MH difficulties but was highly likely that some

young people across the school population had experienced psychological adversity, unbeknownst to their school. There was, therefore, a chance they could participate.

It was not expected that topics of conversation would cause emotional distress, however, discussions around potentially sensitive topics, including EW and gender, were possible. Due to these reasons, there was potential for participants to experience stress if talking about past harm.

The information sharing and consent seeking process was age appropriately designed to protect participants' interests by ensuring they were fully informed about all research aspects. By conducting the research in the participants' school and ensuring there was support available before, during, and after from familiar adults in a familiar context, their interests were further protected.

### 3.9. Trustworthiness

Qualitative research does not follow the same evaluation standards as positivist quantitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest qualitative researchers therefore consider, in counter to positivist standards such as validity and reliability, trustworthiness criteria. These criteria are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

#### 3.9.1. Credibility

Credibility is based on study elements which enable readers to recognise whether researchers have interpreted and discussed the participants' words representatively (Cho & Trent, 2014).

### 3.9.2. Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

As constructionist and relativist research requires deep understanding of contextual settings that impacts people's realities and language, it is key to spend considerable time embedded in their social environment (Bryman, 2012). This enables congruence between observations and interpretations, and engenders rich data (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982).

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation were achieved for this study through the recruited school being located within the local authority and county in which I work and live respectively. I therefore have a good understanding of social context related to the school's surrounding area. I also made sure to be reflexive throughout the FG and analysis, considering how my personal experiences and related emotions may have impacted my questions and interpretations. I also ensured to meet with participants in the FG before the session to gain an understanding of their social mannerisms and build trust with the group.

### 3.9.3. Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing involves use of an experienced colleague to re-analyse some of the data (Rolfe, 2006). Peer debriefing was achieved through regular check in sessions with my research supervisor throughout the analysis process, with considerations to alternate perspectives made following these checks.

### 3.9.4. Member Checking

Member checking was not seen as a useful or appropriate strategy for improving credibility of this research. As interpretation in CDA is not aimed to reflect

participants' understanding of their experience, the participant's endorsement, or lack thereof, is not considered an issue (Willig, 2017).

### 3.9.5. Negative Case Analysis

Negative Case Analysis is the process of adjusting working hypotheses through hindsight as new information is found and understood (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). As with tests for statistical significance in quantitative research, no study will have every single case tested meet study hypotheses. Negative case analysis relates to the understanding that while not all cases will meet the working hypothesis of the study, a reasonable number should, and once this is achieved, confidence can be placed in the proposed hypothesis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Throughout analysis, considerations were made to alternative hypotheses through searching for cases which did not fit with the early themes or core concepts.

### 3.9.6. Dependability and confirmability

Dependability is the qualitative parallel to post-positivism's reliability, which relates to stability and replicability of the study's results over time (Mertens, 2015). This is less applicable to social constructionist research as change is expected over time, as language progressively alters people's perspectives and realities. Dependability can still be achieved, however, through ensuring reflexivity throughout analysis and use of an inquiry audit and audit trail.

This was achieved by my research supervisor acting as an auditor. Much of the study's analysis was therefore scrutinised, with questions asked of interpretations and whether biases were impacting the findings. Additionally, peer review took place

through other trainee EPs critically appraising analysis and whether interpretations were reasonable. Furthermore, findings of this study will be assessed by an external examination process, including a formal Viva.

### 3.9.7. Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability is the counterpart to post-positivism's external validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As qualitative research does not assume generalisability of findings, transferability aims to enable readers to assess whether the study's results may be applicable to another context based on similarities and differences (Mertens, 2015). This can be achieved through thick description, a deep and extensive explanation of the culture, context, time, and place in which the research was conducted (Geertz, 1973). Other areas of thick description have been provided throughout this research, so a description of the location (school) has been added in appendix H.

## 3.10. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a part of qualitative research which facilitates researchers offering explanations for their subjective and personal interpretations in social research. It gives additional authenticity to the researcher's experiences and identities through critical and self-conscious reflection (Whitaker & Atkinson, 2021). It is also an opportunity for researchers to reflect on their beliefs, preconception, assumptions, and what Mann (2016 pg. 27) describes as 'conceptual baggage', considering how these will impact the dynamics of interaction in data collection. Though it is considered by some as a personal choice of whether to offer reflexive or subjectivity

statements, it is widely recognised that if analysts look beyond participants' surface messages, it is important to question the researcher's thought processes in producing new dialogue about it (Davies, 2008). This true for CDA and has been the case throughout the analysis process.

A frequent area of critique in CDA research is that reflexivity is not present enough throughout studies (Catalano & Waugh, 2020), as researchers fail to recognise the potential of searching for their own ideologies in others' language (Billig, 2008).

Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest researcher subjectivity and reflexivity should be considered a resource instead of a threat to knowledge production, and scholars are now calling for more reflexivity in CDA to progress it as an academic discipline (Catalano & Waugh, 2020). As part of this, the researcher must make their own position transparent and justify reasons particular discursive events and their analyses are given more prominence than others (Lin, 2014).

I have offered a reflexive account to support the reader's understanding of my positions (appendix R). This account is based upon the four areas suggested in Mauthner and Doucet (2003), which are below.

### 3.10.1. Social Location and Emotional Responses to Respondents

Having read the transcripts many times prior to analysis, I engaged in a reflexive reading of the data. This involved elements of Brown and Gilligan's (1992) voice-centred relational methods of data analysis, in which I placed my history, background, experiences, and myself in relation to participants. This helped me recognise the sameness and difference between myself and the participants, whilst ensuring to not overly focus upon social categorisation (Patai, 1991). Additionally, I

considered my emotional response to the data in the transcript. Thinking about my social location alongside my emotional and intellectual responses enabled me to consider how my views and assumptions may affect my interpretations and how I write about each participant.

### 3.10.2. Academic and personal biographies

Academic biographies relate to the researcher's academic background prior to starting research. This may include knowledge of the research topic and their theoretical understanding of it, and how their academic background may influence the paradigms through which they view the world.

Personal biographies relate to the researcher's life experiences and how this relates to the participants. It considers how the researcher then positions themselves in relation to their participants when interpreting their words (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

### 3.10.3. Institutional and interpersonal contexts

Institutional and interpersonal contexts relates to researchers' philosophical, theoretical, and methodological choices. Research cannot be decontextualised from institutional, interpersonal, and political circumstances in which researchers are embedded (Haraway 1991), and it is key to recognise this when interpreting data.. Particular theories or philosophies may therefore appeal to researchers' thinking more than others, dependent on their university, workplace, or other political factors.

### 3.10.4. Ontological and Epistemological Conceptions of Subjects and Subjectivities

It is key to recognise epistemological and ontological assumptions incorporated into data analysis methods, as a researcher's interpretations automatically philosophically align with the positions of their chosen method (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). It is therefore important to be aware of the strengths and limitations of alignment to particular positions, alongside what is gained or lost in interpretation by doing so.

# 4. Findings

In this chapter, findings from the data analysis are presented. Data has been analysed using CDA, looking to answer the research question of “How does boys’ talk affect their help-seeking behaviours?”

This analysis is my interpretation and not an objective view of what is in the data. This is discussed in the reflexivity sections and will therefore not be repeated throughout findings. It is also recognised that throughout the data, different tones were taken, and the sincerity of utterances was not always consistent. It has therefore been key to discuss the tone of statements and look beyond purely what was said, and towards how it was said. Finally, some views expressed by participants are negative towards some social groups and are critiqued as such.

As is common when adopting a social constructionist epistemology, participants are considered social actors who draw on discourses shared, accepted, and reinforced amongst peers and various social environments. Thus, critique is of the view, and not the participants, nor their characters. The analysis should be considered a critique of the systems and institutions which enable oppressive discourses to thrive, to the harm of affected groups.

Through analysing the boys' discourse, following the steps described in the methodology chapter, four themes were identified.

1. Vying for and maintaining hierarchical position through masculinity.
2. Acceptable masculine emotion related behaviour.
3. Help-seeking behaviours shaped by masculine discourses.
4. Avoidance and prevention of emotion-related talk.

### 4.1. Vying for and maintaining hierarchical position through masculinity

The data presented frequent examples of discourses related to power creation and maintenance. Some were at macro-level, positioning masculine boys as more positive societally than other groups, particularly those oppositional to typical masculinities; females and homosexual males. The boys often used these discourses to vie for and maintain position within their own group hierarchy, alongside other methods, such as working together to back up each other's points. Subthemes are therefore as follows:

1. Positioning femininity and male homosexuality below traditional masculinity.
2. Masculine discourses for within group positioning.

#### 4.1.1. Positioning femininity and male homosexuality below traditional masculinity

There were many examples of masculine males being positioned above other groups, particularly women and homosexual males. These intergroup positioning mechanisms are described here.

The following extract shows homosexual boys positioned negatively against other boys in terms of attractiveness.

> **Charlie:** What do you worry about, Tom?
>
> **Tom:** Not much really... Other than GCSEs.
>
> **Charlie:** Do you worry about when your girlfriend cheated on you with a gay kid?
>
> **Tom:** Ah na not at all, mate.
>
> **Elliot:** *Laughter*

(Lines 196-204)

When Tom offers minimal answer to a question, a loaded follow-up question is asked using information to embarrass him. Using ‘a gay kid’, rather than their name shows the boy’s supposed non-straight sexuality is being used as an additional reason to make fun of Tom. This also suggests boys displaying more feminine attributes are automatically less desirable to females. Others’ laughter after the joke suggests agreement this was reason for embarrassment and an acceptable joke.

Graphic jokes were made about boys engaging in homosexual acts.

> **Harvey:** … When he’s in front of Billy he’s like “you’re my idol, I wanna bum rape ya”.
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah, saying “I’ll do you up the bum, you’re so orgasmic” and stuff like that.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah, making sounds like *puts on female voice* “oh yaaaa”. And he’ll be breathing heavy down his throat and sticking his tongue in it, it’s weird bruv. And then their braces get caught on each other and you’re just locked there forever. Until his mum finds out and you’re just sat there, panicking, thinking what’s my mum and dad gonna say about me being gay? That’s another problem you’d have if you ever got in that situation.
>
> **Elliot:** Why, what you saying? Being gay is wrong?
>
> **Charlie:** It is a bit homophobic actually, if that’s your opinion.
>
> **Harvey:** Well, that’s my opinion.
>
> **Elliot:** What, so you’re homophobic?
>
> **Charlie:** *Laughter*
>
> **Harvey:** It’s not homophobic.
>
> **Elliot** Yeah, you…
>
> **Harvey:** My opinion is…

> **Charlie:** How do you feel when you…
>
> **Harvey:** It's not wrong is it? I'm just saying I would not like it if, I dunno, to have a gay child, I wouldn't wanna have a gay son.
>
> (Lines 1766-1796)

It is suggested one participant offers sexual favours to boys for popularity, including examples of non-consensual sex. The following monologue used graphic detail, possibly to impress the ideology that male-on-male sexual interaction is shock-worthy and might gross out others, alongside stating that it's 'weird'. This ends with suggestion that parents finding out their son was gay would be cause for panic.

Upon suggestion the comments were homophobic, the label is disagreed with but the idea that having a gay son was problematic continued. A rhetorical device of a 'disclaimer' is then used, before denial of the term 'homophobic' and suggestion "[being gay is] not wrong, is it?", prior to stating something unequivocally homophobic. The disclaimer gives the pretence of political correctness, potentially to protect identity whilst not feeling silenced about not desiring having a gay child. The dysfluencies, such as pausing and saying, "I dunno", also gave opportunity to suggest continued questioning of the view, in case the group rejected it.

There were attempts to resist this discourse, showing there is a line where homophobia becomes unacceptable in the group. This was perhaps the most explicit example of labelling homosexuality as problematic, which may explain why it was called out. On other occasions, when homophobia was evident but somewhat veiled, the group tended to agree or leave it unchallenged. In this example, however, it was notable how quickly the alternative discourse proposing 'homophobia is wrong' was dropped after Harvey's insistence to be heard, despite frequent interruption.

The following extract, which immediately followed the extract above, demonstrates the quick change in tone:

**Elliot:** So, what would you do?

**Charlie:** Kill ‘em.

**Tom:** Put ‘em up for adoption.

**Harvey:** Naaa, I’m just like.

**Charlie:** Well, it’s hard though.

**Harvey:** I wouldn’t do anything, you can’t do anything.

**Charlie:** How would your dad react if you said you were gay?

**Harvey:** He would faint. He wouldn’t know how to cope with it.

**Tom:** Yeah.

**Charlie:** Every dad, will have questioned it. No dad would cope with it.

**Harvey:** You can’t just disown them or kill ‘em or put ‘em up for adoption.

**Elliot:** Na, that’s just out of order. Just because of their sexuality?

**Harvey:** You have to support their decision and let it go, innit. You can’t just start... that’s the only thing you’d do.

**Charlie:** I’d be quite scared about that.

**Harvey:** Then you’ve just got two daughters instead of one.

(Lines 1798-1827)

Though said in jest, suggestions of killing or putting gay children up for adoption are offered but not strongly rejected. This is followed by some evidence of semogenesis (production of the semiotic) occurring due to history of the system (phylogenesis) and linguistic history of participants (ontogenesis).

Three participants appear to have experienced feeling their fathers would react negatively if their son was gay. This likely draws on personal experiences with their fathers and systemic history of language used to oppress homosexual males, including the assumption that ‘no dad would cope’ with having a gay son. Where this seems to progress into the genesis of new meaning, is where modern systems may have influenced discussion, in repeated use of the indirect pronoun ‘you’ to suggest fathers must ‘let it go’. Though this implies progress towards acceptance, there is still disappointment that you must ‘let it go’, a term often used when something emotionally valuable is lost. In this case, this seems to be their child’s heterosexuality, an idea agreed with through an admission of fear about this situation (line 1825). Finally, it is proposed that gay males are so feminised, they are actually women.

Some disagreed that sexuality is problematic for parents but implied it may be an issue if a friend came out to straight peers.

> **Elliot:** What about your worries if you’re mates?
>
> **Harvey:** What do you mean the worries of your mates?
>
> **Elliot:** When you come out?
>
> **Harvey:** I’m not gonna come out am I? What are you saying?
>
> **Elliot:** No, It’s an exaggeration!
>
> (Lines 1829-1837)

When asked a question which, upon clarification, may suggest a participant might ‘come out’ to his friends, it is met with anger and rhetorical questioning (line 1835). There are frustrations that someone made this suggestion, as if homosexuality is so

oppositional to masculine identity, it is worthy of ridicule. This is backed down on through claims it was a joke and exaggeration. Each extract shows positioning of homosexual males as inferior or antithetical to group norms and ideals.

Gay males were further discussed, and women similarly positioned.

> **Elliot:** Who suffers more, girls or boys?
>
> **Harvey:** Well, with what?
>
> **Elliot:** With their emotional state?
>
> **Harvey:** ummmmm
>
> **Charlie:** It's not about who suffers more, it's about who talks about it more.
>
> **Harvey:** It's boys innit? I feel like it would be boys, but boys. It depends what boys you are. Like Could be a little homo or could be.
>
> **Charlie:** *Laughter*
>
> **Harvey:** Or could be straight innit and it's like. I reckon the straight lads would probably bottle it up a bit more than like homosexuals.
>
> **Charlie:** 'Cause homos actually always talk out about it cos they've got their little girl mates.
>
> (Lines 1614-1636)

The group discussed which sex generally has more emotional difficulty, but distinction is made of "what boys" emote differently, using the dysphemism "little homos". This both belittles gay males and uses the, usually negative, term, 'homos'. There is positive reinforcement of this view through laughter, before suggestion of how different masculinities might share emotions. Gay males' friends are termed 'little girl mates', perhaps belittling females, which, when considering links in previous

extracts made between gay males and (all) females, may imply femininity should be looked down upon. Alternatively, or maybe congruently, suggesting gay boys go to “little girl mates” may aim to belittle the action of going to a girl, or anyone, for support.

Referring to those displaying femininity as small was common across other extracts, too.

> **Elliot:** What do you think the differences might be?
>
> **Harvey:** Between what?
>
> **Elliot:** Between a man and a girl.
>
> **Harvey:** What between a man? With what? Like problems.
>
> **Elliot:** Problems. Emotions. Everything.
>
> **Harvey:** I really said my opinion, masculinity.
>
> **Charlie:** Expand on that.
>
> **Harvey:** Well, if you have a little female bitch, you're not gonna be as brave as men like me.
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah, but is it brave?
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah.
>
> (Lines 2105-2123)

When discussing differences between how males and females deal with emotions and problems, it is stated a "little female bitch" would not be brave like a man. The intonation indicated this was insincere, but the exaggerated joke gives insight into

common gender stereotypes. The term ‘little’ denotes someone of smaller character or value, and ‘little bitch’ insinuates frequent complaining about minor issues.

This mirrored other discussions, that females are too emotional about small issues, and their management of emotional issues is worthy of derision.

> **Tom:** If we go to the toilet and cry, what would happen?
>
> **Harvey:** Get called gay.
>
> **Elliot:** Gay.
>
> **Charlie:** Gay.
>
> **Harvey:** We joke about shit like that, but think about it.
>
> **Tom:** and then what happens if a girl goes to the toilet and cries?
>
> **Harvey:** They cry and then they all get little hugs.
>
> **Tom:** *Puts on feminine voice* “Ohhhh are you ok?”
>
> **Charlie:** “take as long as you need” and that shit.
>
> **Harvey:** You gotta think about it like that.
>
> (Lines 889-909)

When discussing what would happen if boys displayed emotion similarly to girls, the group seemed disappointed they would be called gay. These jokes were reflected upon, and Harvey encourages the group to think about their impact. Discourse is then turned back towards what girls do and the tone became instantly negative, as girls’ handling of each other’s emotions is disparaged. The term "little hugs", the mocking of checking on someone who is crying, and offering time to calm oneself cast alongside "that shit", all show a demeaning of girls and their emotion-related

behaviours. What started with reflection of how boys prefer to make fun of than help each other, turned to mocking those who offer support. This was bookended by suggested additional reflection, seemingly without realisation that offering support might be difficult when those who do offer are ridiculed.

Many discourses involved the group positioning themselves against females and homosexual males, but they did similarly based on other characteristics, including physical attractiveness, having low intelligence, being a nerd, having physical disabilities, and having certain jobs. As in previous extracts, these were frequently framed as jokes which made light of others' actions, but in doing so, tended to idealise the wealthy, healthy, masculine male, and condemn others outside of that.

### 4.1.2. Masculine discourses for within group positioning

The extracts presented so far have related to societal intergroup positioning of traditional masculinity against its supposed opposition of femininity, and conjunctively, male homosexuality. These, and other, discourses were used for intragroup positioning, where participants vied for position amongst each other by showing their own emotionally masculine behaviours and mentioning peers' supposed lack thereof.

This was discussed through hardness and softness.

> **Researcher:** You said something, like, for some people you wouldn't be surprised if you saw them crying.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah. Because they're not masculine.
>
> **Researcher:** Well, Ok. What about, what is it about these people? Who are these people that you think would be crying more?

**Harvey:** The soft ones. They're all like fragile. If you dig them in the arm, they get all sensitive and don't like you anymore, or something like that. So, if you did something like that to Elliot, if you dig him in the arm a bit too hard he gets a bit emotional, but if you did it to Tom Smith then he's gonna start running away crying and stuff like that, innit?

**Elliot:** I just get more angry.

**Tom:** It's like appearance as well though, innit.

**Harvey:** it's like about…

**Charlie:** What about appearance?

**Harvey:** Well look at Noah, like, look how small and skinny he is.

**Charlie:** What you trying to say? Are you trying to say he's anorexic?

**Tom:** Pretty much is to be fair, you can see his rib cage.

(Lines 1923-1948)

Following discussion about certain people seeming more likely to cry publicly, it is explained, "they're not masculine", before added discourse around what masculinity might mean. The terms soft, fragile, sensitive, and emotional are used conversely to masculinity, with examples given of two boys who are positioned as non-masculine because of their likely reactions to being punched. One's reaction is to suggest he would actually show anger, a more typically accepted emotion amongst males, whilst the other ignores the insult and agrees with the discourse that some boys appear more emotional due to their size.

This starts a discourse around physical strength, with looking strong related to masculine appearance, and the oppositional example of a smaller male, Noah. This ascribes hardness, physical strength, larger build, and ability to not cry when

punched to masculinity, with the opposite as soft, fragile, sensitive, and emotional, used to position certain participants.

Hardness and softness were also discussed around Noah and Jake (two boys not in the FG), who are supposedly not hard, bringing further intragroup comparisons.

> **Charlie:** It's true. People like Noah, Noah could talk. If Noah was crying, I, I wouldn't even think much of it. I'd be like yeah alright, I accept that.
>
> **Elliot:** Yeah 'cause like, he's a lot softer.
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah, he's a super softie.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah, for some people.
>
> **Charlie:** Then you've got hard people, like Jake.
>
> **Elliot:** Like, imagine if you see Jake crying.
>
> **Charlie:** Na, I'll make Jake cry when I hurt him.
>
> **Harvey:** Just think about it like, Elliot crying.
>
> **Charlie:** Na, he's, like, in the middle. But hard people like me and Harv, wouldn't ever.
>
> **Harvey:** Tom's at that, like, Noah level of expectation about crying. You see Tom Smith crying you're like ah.
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah but you expect some people to cry more than you do others, don't ya.
>
> **Harvey:** Mmm
>
> **Charlie:** You know what I mean? I wouldn't even be surprised if someone like Elliot started crying because you called him goofy.
>
> **Elliot:** Na, I don't think I would cry about that.
>
> (Lines 1862-1891)

Following discussion about who finds it easier to seek help, Noah, described as weak and unmasculine, is mentioned as someone who ‘could talk’ and whose crying would be expected and accepted. This is agreed by three participants alongside multiple mentions of his softness. The suggestion, ‘Noah could talk’ also suggests the ‘soft’ can discuss emotions, whilst the ‘hard’ cannot. Noah's crying potential is then positioned against “hard people, like Jake”, who could not be imagined crying. The group then vie for position amongst the hard, with one participant claiming the physical toughness to make Jake cry, further positioning himself and another participant as hard.

Keenness to declare oneself as hard, physically and emotionally, shows hardness’ value and its relationship to social status in the group. Furthermore, positioning of one participant as "in the middle" indicates intragroup social hierarchisation based on hardness, and thus, levels of acceptable performance of masculinity. This is somewhat confirmed through discussing “level of expectation about crying”, making comparisons to “super softie”, Noah. In addition to discourses of hardness, softness, and associated masculinity levels, there seems intent to deliberately push certain participants down by equivalating their masculinity to the feminised Noah, concomitantly helping secure their own status as a harder group member.

This was done on multiple occasions, with participants keenly discussing times others struggled emotionally.

> **Harvey:** You see what I mean? You start like that thing. Putting on a brave face in front of your mates then you go away tearing up, Elliot.
>
> **Charlie:** Did you cry with your mum that day?
>
> **Elliot:** No.

**Harvey:** Once on Roblox, I took his, like, ‘adopt me pet’. Which was his favourite ever pet.

**Charlie:** Yeah.

**Harvey:** Shit pet, but yeah, favourite pet. He cried as soon as I took it off him.

**Charlie:** Did ya?

**Elliot:** Yeah.

**Harvey:** Burst into tears. And when someone called his dad, um, fat.

**Charlie:** See that’s quite out of order actually ain’t it.

**Elliot:** Yeah.

**Harvey:** And someone called his dad fat, he started crying on the Xbox. And then remember when you called my dad a DILF. For some reason I started crying.

**Elliot:** It’s not very good is it?

(Lines 1149-1175)

It is suggested one participant acts braver than he really is, to perform for friends, but is actually upset when they are not watching. This statement is a complex but common hypocrisy for masculine males, as expressing emotion and fearing emotional expression are both negative. It impresses the idea that not only must males lack emotionality to keep social status, but lack of emotionality must be provably real, through somewhat undefined measures.

The follow-up question “did you cry with your mum that day?” seems intended to further embarrass, aiming to demasculinise Elliot by suggesting he cried and needed help. It also infantilised him by suggesting he needed his mother. Additional examples are then related to crying over a minor issue, like a digital animal in an online game.

Using “burst into tears” also implies great upset about a small issue, amplifying potential shame over this emotional expression.

Harvey then admits his upset over comments about his father, possibly to protect himself from others using this against him. This showed self-deprecation as a defence mechanism, with awareness of his own supposed masculine faux pas disarming the group before they can threaten his position.

There was also challenge about ability to handle emotions.

**Charlie:** Why wouldn't you cry?

**Tom:** Because I'm not a very sensitive person.

**Charlie:** Hmm.

**Harvey:** That is a lie.

**Elliot:** But how do we know that?

**Harvey:** If his mum took his Capri Sun off him, probably.

**Elliot:** How do we know?

**Tom:** Well, have you ever seen me cry?

**Charlie:** I have.

**Harvey:** Yeah, when I took your Capri Sun.

**Elliot:** You’re too scared to show it in your actions.

**Charlie:** Yeah, cos he doesn’t want to be mocked?

**Elliot:** you’re not showing us your heart.

**Charlie:** You did cry once when someone banged you in the balls. Just gonna get that one right.

**Tom:** Oh yeah.

**Harvey:** Oh and when someone apparently broke your leg.

**Charlie:** Oh yeah.

**Tom:** Oh. Yeah.

**Charlie:** I got red listed for that as well, which was awful.

**Harvey:** Yeah, sat there crying his eyes out, bless him. But we don't need to talk about that now, do we?

(Lines 1073-1112)

One participant claims he is not sensitive and therefore doesn't often cry. Potentially because of the masculine positioning this claim enables, every other participant challenges this. Between wondering, explicitly calling it a lie, and questioning the assertion's evidence, the group work together to fight the claim to block any climbing of the social hierarchy without due substantiation of masculinity.

The group quickly find examples of crying over minor issues, such as someone taking their drink, then claim his lack of crying is actually fear of showing his true emotions. Similar challenges were frequent, that even when someone evidenced their apparent emotion-free state, others claimed it was a masculine act, as they feared being bullied by others. That even when actions seemed to confirm masculinity, it was false, and surely another 'less masculine' trait, feeling scared.

One participant recognises the folly of this, stating "Yeah, cos he doesn't want to be mocked?" showing awareness that boys bully those displaying sadness. Two lines later, the same participant mentions more instances of crying, enabling continuation of the mocking.

As new examples are added that pick at the claim to masculinity, the somewhat celebratory "just gonna get that one right" and apophasis "but we don't need to talk

about that now, do we?" show the group's pleasure as they no longer have to entertain a change in social standing. This was treated as victory for status quo resumption, with continuation of certain members remaining masculine hard boys, with the supposedly emotional others pushed back into position of unmasculine and soft.

Many similar examples showed boys were outed for their apparent worry about certain things. This included members suggesting others worried about being bullied, meeting girls, having bad dreams, and being dumped. Challenges were far more frequent from some members than others, suggesting a group hierarchy playing out, in that the suggestion of failed masculinities were always levelled towards them, not by them.

Unsurprisingly, given discussions about male homosexuality being negative, there were examples of positioning others as homosexual to demasculinise them.

> **Harvey:** Tom don't like the woman. He's into the male type.
>
> **Tom:** And what's wrong with that?
>
> (Lines 2064-2066)

> **Harvey:** I'm not gonna come out am I? What are you saying?
>
> **Elliot:** No, It's an exaggeration!
>
> **Tom:** Elliot, are you trying to tell us something?
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah, innit. Why you always like this when we talk about gay people? As soon as we talk about your horniness.
>
> **Charlie:** *Laughter*

(Lines 1835-1844)

These examples enable a view of masculine hierarchy both societally and within this group. Women and homosexual males are portrayed negatively, partially due to their femininity, which they link with increased emotionality. Emotionality is therefore negative, too, especially crying. Males, who mostly show less emotionality, are therefore idealised, with those who are hard, physically and emotionally, holding higher social value. Within the group, the boys play out this system by suggesting others hold feminine traits, cry often, are soft, are gay, or display traits of gay males. Touting of one's own strength, hardness, minimal sensitivity to emotions is therefore important, if to grow or maintain social standing amongst other boys. Though alternative discourses are sometimes accepted, particularly to veil identity threats such as being termed 'homophobic', there is great risk offering new, less masculine ideas. Even when stating they do not emote, they are challenged by others, who suggest it must have been masculine acting, fearing the social consequences of failing to be manly enough.

The additional method used to hold hierarchy was through multiple boys supporting each other's ideas or working together to end certain discourses. Here, two participants work together to create doubt around claims that one participant respects women.

> **Harvey:** You took it to heart. That's a lot of things that boys do, they take it to heart and then let it out as anger.
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah, take it out as anger.
>
> **Harvey:** You gotta be careful, lads.

**Charlie:** And then they go home and take it out on their family. Drink some Stellas. And beat their wives.

**Elliot:** No. That's not me.

**Charlie:** Are you sure?

**Harvey:** You sure?

**Elliot:** I treat women respectfully.

**Charlie:** That's not what you said about ten minutes ago that you would do to your… [girlfriend].

**Harvey, Charlie & Tom:** *Laughter*

**Harvey:** Nut in 'er and leave 'er.

**Elliot:** Oh yeah, of course.

**Harvey:** It's quite rude, that.

**Charlie:** Yeah. You ain't respectful to women.

**Elliot:** I don't think she'd want me to do that, no.

**Charlie:** Are you worried about that?

**Harvey:** Should be worried about Harvey coming to take the prize.

(Lines 591-622)

Men are suggested to perpetrate domestic abuse because they hide their emotional difficulties. When Elliot says he wouldn't, participants work together by using an earlier statement and graphic fictionalised sexual example to cast doubt over Elliot's claim of respecting women. The pace at which they followed each other's statements left little room to offer evidence against. Finally, one participant suggests he will take Elliot's girlfriend from him.

Similarly, doubt was cast around physical strength through a quick back and forth.

**Harvey:** ... If I had a problem and I was a bit stressed out, I would turn aggressive… a little bit aggressive.

**Charlie:** Was you a bit aggressive when you dropped him *points to Elliot* three times in a boxing match?

**Harvey:** That's a different thing.

**Elliot:** Year 6 mate.

**Harvey:** Year 6. Year 7, year 8. Would still be the same thing.

**Elliot:** Year 11 it won't be.

**Harvey:** You got done. three times.

**Elliot:** Na.

**Harvey:** Dropped you three times. Drop him again. Drop him again. Then drop him again.

**Elliot:** That's causing me anxiety.

**Charlie:** Why you self-diagnosing yourself?

**Harvey:** Yeah.

**Charlie:** Have you been diagnosed with anxiety?

**Harvey:** Are you trying to mock other people with it?

**Charlie:** yeah.

**Harvey:** What gave you anxiety? Harvey's fists. *Makes punching sounds* pow pow pow. Anyway, we'll go back to the problem. Have you got any problems, Charlie?

(Lines 439-471)

In discussing showing aggression when stressed, one participant is asked about a moment of supposed failure in masculinity, due to losing a boxing match to another

participant. There seems great pride throughout claims that “it would still be the same thing” if they fought again, once more suggesting physical strength and hardness’ value to the social hierarchy.

There is denial the fight would have the same result now and, seemingly jokingly, the participant mentions that this discussion is causing them anxiety. A similar back-and-forth between two other members occurs, questioning the term anxiety with rapid pace between responses, making it challenging to defend against. The confirmatory ‘yeah’ between points enables them to work together to reduce possibility of retorts, with final redirection of conversation allowing little opportunity for challenge to existing power structures.

This was frequent, with multiple examples of participants backing each other to stop others staking claim to a new group position.

### 4.2. Acceptable masculine emotion-related behaviour

The group proposed discourses around acceptable masculine emotion-related behaviour. In earlier extracts, participants suggested females and homosexuals show more emotions, feminine people are soft, and these are negative traits. This section discusses what emotion-related behaviours the group say boys show, what they are allowed to show, and how they police it.

The group discussed what emotion-related behaviours boys usually show.

> **Elliot:** It could be different because women have more people to talk to.
>
> **Tom:** Are you calling men loners?
>
> **Elliot:** No, because men don't open up as quickly as well.

**Harvey:** I'm just gonna say it.

**Elliot:** it takes some time to get out it out of men.

**Charlie:** Kick my foot again and I'll spark ya.

**Harvey:** And men, I think men overthink things more than a woman does.

**Charlie:** Na, the thing is, women. women definitely overthink things but then let it out. Men overthink things and keep it in.

**Harvey:** They let it out straight away.

(Lines 2017-2034)

When discussing why males display emotion differently, the group questioned whether it related to support networks, and whether males share emotion as quickly. It is then indicated males are quiet about issues that cause them emotional difficulty, and suggested that men overthink difficulties more than women. This is quickly disputed, that thinking patterns are similar, but women share their emotions, whilst men do not.

Though participants were uncertain why this might be, the following extract suggested it may be due to sharing emotions being seen as problematic, especially if shown for too long.

**Harvey:** Well, I feel like it's alright to cry about everything but except like… don't… don't make it everyone else's problem. Don't be like.

**Charlie:** *Laughter*

**Harvey:** If you have to cry, you don't have to cry and like mope about.

**Charlie:** You talking about boys or everyone?

**Harvey:** Both. Everyone. Boy, girl, pan. Whatever you wanna be.

*Laughter*

**Harvey:** Just don't sit there crying and making it everyone else's problem. Don't be a self-pity person, like.

(Lines 1471-1485)

When participants discussed whether crying about certain things is ok, there is a disclaimer that "it's alright to cry about everything", but not to share that emotion with others. This suggests emotionality is something that must be hidden, so other people don't have to share in that emotion. Similarly to the issue with girls sharing hugs when upset, it is implied emotions should not be cared for by others or seen in social spaces. Showing emotional pain is equivalated to the identity of "self-pity person", showing the potential social consequences of displaying need for emotional support.

Other names were also used for those showing emotion.

**Harvey:** It's just grief ain't it? There's different signs of grief. There's aggression, depression.

**Charlie:** Yeah but some people grieve in silence and some people expand out into punching people.

**Harvey:** It depends how you put…

**Charlie:** How did you deal with grief?

**Elliot:** What grief?

**Harvey:** There's one thing with grief ain't there? The thing with grief is you could just sit there moping about being a little bum all your life.

**Charlie:** Everyone mopes it out for a bit.

**Harvey:** Or you can try do something. Try and do something about it.

**Charlie:** You've got to be hard.

(Lines 1362-1380)

When discussing emotions one might feel after breakup with a long-term partner, grief is discussed, and how it might be felt and shown. Aggression and depression are mentioned, both displays of emotions, with the former usually more acceptable amongst stereotypically masculine males. Depression-related symptoms are discussed, using the terms “moping about” and “being a little bum”. These terms insinuate holding on to emotions, or at least letting others know you are, is negative.

Common discourses around MH are offered, particularly that people experiencing depression have simply failed to try something other than be depressed. This is backed by the statement that people need to "be hard", implying that long-term grieving is someone’s failure in emotional toughness.

Though there appears to be little awareness of how the group position displays emotions in these extracts, the below extract shows recognition that participants believed those who reveal their feelings do, and deserve to, get bullied.

> **Harvey:** It depends what the reason is. Cos girls cry over, like, little things.
>
> **Charlie:** Na cos girls, yeah. Girls, yeah.
>
> **Harvey:** Elliot, if you started doing things what a girl cries over, like… “oh no”
>
> **Tom:** *Puts on feminine voice* “Oh no, my eyelashes are too small.”
>
> **Harvey:** *Puts on feminine voice* “oh no, I’ve got the wrong sized nose” or summink, and you cried over that, you’re gonna, like, get bullied. If Tom ran to the toilet crying saying “oh, my nose is too big. So ugly…”, I’ll probably bully him.
>
> **All:** *Laughter*

**Harvey:** Not in the bully sense, like, I'm gonna bully him until his life's a living hell.

**Tom:** Just like take the mick out of him.

**Harvey:** Yeah and just be like "shut up crying."

**Charlie:** May as well have a couple of…

**Elliot:** Yeah, get over it.

**Harvey:** Yeah, chin up.

(Lines 1010-1034)

The group suggest what girls cry over is pathetic and worthy of mocking. It is explained that if a boy cried over something like this, the group would bully him, before one participant admits he would partake in said bullying. Though there is withdrawal from the idea of persistently victimising someone for crying, there is support for this as it is intimated that it is ok to make fun of someone who is crying. This leads to recommendations, such as telling someone to "shut up crying", "get over it", and "chin up". Each indicates boys' keenness to reduce others' emotion-related behaviours and 'don't cry or you will receive verbal abuse' may be strong enough reason for males to reduce public emotionality.

Once there is almost universal agreement that picking on upset people is reasonable, one participant agrees with his own fictional bullying; that others should encourage him to suppress his emotions. Though this participant tended to offer alternative discourses about what emotions are ok to show elsewhere in the FG, his agreement here may show how boys come to accept this worldview. There is enough support to suggest bullying is ok if a boy shows emotion 'incorrectly', to the point someone rationalises their own persecution to reduce risk of ostracization.

The direct impact of mocking and bullying because of displays of emotions is recognised below, when a participant discusses having to hide crying because of potential social consequences.

**Charlie:** So, when have we seen Elliot cry?

**Harvey:** Oh, a lot of times.

**Charlie:** I've seen him cry when someone nicked his Doritos.

**Tom:** Yeah

**Harvey:** Remember that time when we were walking home? Oh yeah, Doritos.

**Charlie:** Doritos, yeah.

**Harvey:** You ran down the opposite hill.

**Charlie:** Had to go with you to your house.

**Harvey:** Yeah and that. That's a key point. Even when you do cry, yeah. You feel like men feel the need to go and hide it somewhere.

**Charlie:** He did cry.

**Harvey:** Yeah and then he ran in the opposite direction from us.

**Tom:** What did you think would happen?

**Harvey:** Yeah what did you think would happen, you'd get mocked for it?

**Elliot:** Yeah

**Harvey:** Yeah, you probably would have. But

**Charlie:** *Laughter*

**Harvey:** You see what I mean? You start like that thing. Putting on a brave face in front of your mates then you go away tearing up, Tom.

(Lines 1116-1150)

Frequency of one participant's crying is discussed, after others raise a time he cried then ran away from the group. The question, 'So, when have we seen Elliot cry?' was seemingly asked to enable opportunities to embarrass him for crying, with participants obliging with examples. Two participants discussed someone taking his Doritos, suggesting he should be ashamed crying over something as petty as a bag of crisps. Whether emotions were extreme or not, the group had a named example, ready to use to position this handling of emotions as lesser than expected of masculine males.

Elliot admits running so the group could not see him crying, explained by another participant as males having to hide emotions. When asked why he ran, the obvious answer is included in the question, that Elliot thought he would be mocked for crying. When he agrees, it is established by others that he probably would have been mocked by the group for crying.

The extract shows conflict between Elliot and Harvey. Both are conscious of structures causing their behaviour, but even with this understanding, there seems an unwillingness to change because of how embedded the group are in the norms of boyhood. The rapid steps between bringing up a friend crying to embarrass them, recognising boys must hide emotions, knowing this happens because of mocking, then agreeing they would engage in said mocking, says much about this age group and masculinity. There is awareness of potential harm of making fun of someone for crying, but there is also a need to uphold and perpetuate the system to keep social standing.

The extracts thus far have only discussed mocking around emotion and emotion-related talk, but there was also a direct example of what can happen when boys try to discuss emotions.

**Elliot:** Do you not think you should open up every once in a while?

**Harvey:** Shut up. Why you trying to be inspector Ghoul? You Christmas Carol nerd.

*Laughter*

**Charlie:** He said it's [inaudible]

**Harvey:** Well, it's not. Got Scrooge over here.

**Charlie:** And how'd you feel when people say stuff about your nose?

**Elliot:** It's the first time it's ever happened, so… I'll have to get used to it.

**Harvey:** Might have to.

**Elliot:** Just take it on the chin and walk away.

**Charlie:** And which one is that?

**Harvey:** Is that your mum's three or your dad's four? Have you got one or two? You've got one actually. You've got a nice face. What about your sister though? Oh, she got about five.

**Charlie:** Yeah but imagine doing her from behind when she's on all fours.

(Lines 2125-2150)

A comment about whether boys should open up is immediately shut down, followed by many quick-fire insults. These suggest the participant asks too many questions, include jokes about physical appearance, and others join in to imply his family are overweight. Even with seemingly calm acceptance of insults, discussion is directed towards others having sex with his family members. Though this was likely not only

driven by the question's content, enquiry of whether males should open up more turned into others insulting him and his family. With this, the group have rejected a potentially positive discourse around boys sharing emotions and insulted the person starting said discourse.

The extracts show discourses about people not conforming to typically masculine emotional behaviour and where they stand in the social pecking order. This was shown through suggestions emotions shouldn't be shared, shouldn't be seen, and that if a boy is seen showing emotions for a certain length or over certain topics, they are ripe for mocking and bullying. Participants' occasional awareness of the potential consequences of this behaviour didn't seem to affect their application of social consequences for displaying, or discussion of, emotion. This upholds the masculine ideal that those showing less emotion receive fewer social consequences than those emoting regularly and publicly.

These values had exceptions, however, particularly when about practical situations or worrying about family members or friends.

> **Charlie:** What do you worry about, Harvey?
>
> **Harvey:** I don't really worry about anything… but maybe a bit worried about college and that. That's about it. I'm not really a worrier.
>
> **Elliot:** Who would you talk to, or what you would if you was worried?
>
> **Charlie:** What you worried about?
>
> **Harvey:** Probably like my family and my mates and that. I have been a bit worried about.. say I was to choose bricklaying, maybe that ain't the right pathway for me.

**Charlie:** I see how it is. ‘Cos you’ve gotta be proper stupid to go into bricklaying.

**Harvey:** Uh.

**Tom:** Is that what you wanna do then?

**Harvey:** Yeah, like that’s made me reconsider.

**Tom:** Is that what you wanna do?

**Harvey:** Probably.

(Lines 286-308)

When asked about his worries, Harvey’s immediate answer is that he doesn’t worry and is not a worrier. Whilst potentially true, the known social capital in unemotionality may make this a more beneficial portrayal than stating any worries. Harvey then admitted he can worry about family, friends, and college applications.

Harvey also shared worry about his work pathway, feeling pressure to pick a socially acceptable job by implying reconsideration upon Charlie’s suggestion bricklaying is for stupid people. Concern about work roles and finances are another common discourse for males and are closely linked to the aforementioned protector role. Harvey may be discussing importance of finding the right pathway for a job society sees as important and that offers financial stability, so he is wealthy enough to be considered a respectable male and capable of supporting a family.

There was agreement that family and friends were amongst the only things acceptable to show emotion about.

**Charlie:** So what do you find it acceptable for boys to cry about?

**Harvey:** Ummmmm.

**Elliot:** A lost family friend or member.

**Charlie:** And that's it.

**Harvey:** Yeah.

**Charlie:** So you're telling me if I hurt myself, I can't cry?

**Elliot:** No.

**Harvey:** Well I feel like it's alright to cry about everything but except like… don't… don't make it everyone else's problem.

(Lines 1457-1472)

Participants discussed when boys can cry. Harvey's position changes somewhat; initially uncertain, then affirming Elliot's suggestion that "lost" family or friends are all males can cry about. This may, again, place males as protector of family and friends, as death of a close one is one of few times boys are allowed to be upset. It also shows the limited topics boys can show upset about, at least publicly, given Harvey's final assertion about not making it "everyone else's problem".

Elliot discusses how he grieved for his grandmother.

**Charlie:** Everyone's had grief in their life.
**Harvey:** I've had a bit of it I think. I dunno.
**Elliot:** When my nan died.
**Charlie:** Yeah, you grieved.
**Elliot:** I grieved.
**Charlie:** And how did you react with that?

> **Elliot:** Oh, I was, I was very upset when she died. I was… Gave it about a week and then I carried on.
>
> **Tom:** Used it as motivation.
>
> (Lines 1392-1407)

Participants didn't appear to have an issue discussing death-related grief, with Elliot admitting experiencing grief and fear of others dying. The group were often made fun of for emotion-related behaviour, but at no stage during death-related discussion was any attempt made to make fun of Elliot. It cannot be known whether he truly coped with this grief after one week, but stating his ability to move on from emotional pain quickly may have been necessary to evidence his emotional strength. The suggestion Elliot used his pain as motivation also suggests males must turn emotions into something other than sadness.

There were many other examples of the group suggesting they were worried about exams, college applications, football skills, family, and death, with these seemingly the only examples where they were happy to admit worry and weren't attacked for it. The most common discourses could be categorised into practical issues, finances, and death of family members, suggesting these are the non-taboo subjects males can be upset about without social reprimand. Mentioning worry or upset about non-practical issues was extremely rare.

### 4.3. Help-seeking behaviours shaped by masculine discourses

Thus far, dominant discourses have related to problematising emotion-related behaviours ascribed to females and homosexual males. The group generally oppose association with these behaviours, as they are linked with softness, whilst they want

to be positioned as hard. These discourses are used within their peer group to shame them, using examples of unmasculine behaviour, suggesting they have female and homosexual traits, and challenging suggestions they are not emotional. Many emotion-related behaviours are unacceptable amongst participants, especially crying, especially for reasons associated with femininity. If these standards are not adhered to, the group sometimes encourage and enact bullying. The few examples where emotion is acceptable was with practical issues, such as college applications and football skills.

This section discusses when and how the group seek and offer help, and what they can seek help for.

> **Charlie:** Sometimes they might be searching for support, Harvey.
>
> **Elliot:** Yeah, maybe they would like support.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah but that's not what I mean, that's not getting support. You don't get support when you stub your toe by going "ohhh ohhh my toe" and stuff like that. It's not right… Ya get me?
>
> **Elliot:** Yeah but for some stuff it is.
>
> **Harvey:** No!
>
> **Tom:** Yeah but it's about, like, the way you get help. You ask. You ask for it, not like "ohhh my stomach hurts"
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah but some people struggle to ask for help.
>
> **Harvey:** Na, just man up.
>
> **Charlie:** Have you ever asked for help?
>
> **Elliot:** No.
>
> **Tom:** Na, I never did.
>
> **Charlie:** Well, then. Have you ever asked for help.

**Elliot:** Don’t think so.

**Charlie:** I haven’t.

(Lines 1487-1517)

Following explanation that you shouldn’t be “a self-pity person”, the view is challenged, as showing emotion may enable receipt of support. This creates disagreement, as it is suggested that if people want support, they need to ‘man up’, as complaining about the issue itself will not help. The term in this context suggests a real man should have the strength to ask for help when they need it.

The suggestion that "it’s not right" that people show pain suggests emotion should be hidden and support-seeking for pain is an unmasculine act. It is then suggested that people must be direct in help-seeking and should not expect help by displaying pain. Issues are identified with this, however, as three of the four participants say they have never asked for help before, with the only example related to college application.  Lack of help-seeking examples may have been masculine performances, but given Tom argued people should ask for help directly but had no personal examples suggests flaws in this plan. This demonstrates a problem in masculine help-seeking norms. Some proposed expressing emotion wasn’t acceptable help-seeking, but none had examples of being able to directly ask for help with an emotional difficulty either.

Their difficulty asking for help makes sense given acceptance of peer bullying for showing emotion, and more examples mentioned riskiness of showing emotion to groups.

**Harvey:** If you cry, say you was in a massive group of people, everyone acts up differently in a group of people don't they? But if it was one to one with someone, then the kid's gonna support him.

**Charlie:** Mm-hmm.

**Elliot:** that's what I thought but then it's like, girls…

**Harvey:** but if he was on Xbox in front of like six, seven other lads then yeah.

**Elliot:** yeah.

**Harvey:** Sat there crying to us all going, "oh, my dog's passed away". You know one person's gonna give it a little giggle and the whole party is going off at him.

(Lines 1432-1443)

The group discussed how boys act differently in groups, and that 1-to-1, most boys would be supportive. When online with a group of boys, however, a dog dying is not severe enough to stop the group laughing at their crying. The suggestion that one person might laugh before the rest join in, suggests boys may have socialised numbness to caring for one another when there is opportunity to improve social standing. This is mentioned elsewhere in the data as "taking the piss" to impress others and may explain why boys don't express emotions keenly to others, especially other males.

Similarly to how girls' emotional expression was derided, their support-seeking and support-offering was disparaged, too.

**Charlie:** … So, what we've learned is that we've all gotta stop talking about peoples' dads.

**Tom:** How do you reckon a girl would react in this situation?

**Charlie:** They'd cry.

**Tom:** Yeah but how would their mates react?

**Harvey:** I reckon they would self-harm as well.

**Charlie:** Yeah, they'd definitely self-harm.

**Tom:** Do you reckon their mates would mock it though?

**Charlie:** Yeah I reckon they'd be right up each other's arse. *Puts on feminine voice* "Oh yeah don't worry, your lashes look fine".

(Lines 1177-1193)

In discussing how girls would react to jokes about their parent, discourse is accepted that girls would cry and self-harm. Tom's question "how do you reckon a girl would react in this situation?" suggests he believes girls deal with upset friends differently to boys. It is then implied girls self-harm because of their appearance, and girls' support is "right up each other's arse." Line 1177 shows awareness abuse between boys is damaging, and in previous extracts that their support for each other is inadequate, but the 'feminine' alternative of helping each other is an intolerable concept. This is another challenge for boys' norms in help-seeking. There is awareness mocking causes emotional pain. Emotional pain can cause self-harm. Should people who self-harm get help from peers? No, they should be mocked. It appears to create unending circularity that gives boys little option for feeling better, unless they are providing the mocking and enjoying the subsequent laughs.

How girls offer help was unacceptable to the group, but the boys gave insight into how they offer support instead.

**Charlie:** What would you do if Elliot called you up crying?

**Elliot:** Saying that my girlfriend left me.

**Harvey:** Do what I'd do for previous ones innit. Be like supporting. Tell him to be money motivated. That's what I said to him the last time.

**Charlie:** Who, Billy?

**Tom:** Did it work?

**Harvey:** Yeah. It worked.

**Charlie:** Well, it didn't cos he still ain't making money.

**Harvey:** Err, he made a little bit of money. It's more that I told him to focus on money, not make money. It's just like not… not crying every time over something that can't be changed.

**Charlie:** Why can't he cry?

**Harvey:** It's better not to cry over everything ain't it? It makes you feel more better if you can't cry. You don't wanna cry, innit?

**Charlie:** Na, you don't want to cry.

**Harvey:** You'd rather be swimming in dough.

**Charlie:** Yeah.

(Lines 1272-1299)

The group discussed what they would do if a boy cried to them, and the idea is offered, "Tell him to be money motivated". This discourse returns to importance of finance for masculine males, as it is proposed emotional pain could be improved by focusing on money. This links to current societal discourses surrounding adolescent boys amidst the rise of online 'alpha males' and their speeches putting finance and sex above engagement with emotion. This recommendation of thinking about money over feeling one's feelings may reflect both online alpha male influence and the tools males rely upon to escape emotional reflection.

The rhetorical questioning to move Charlie from asking why Billy can't cry, to being given a dichotomic option of "crying" or "swimming in dough" seemed a persuasive tool in altering the narrative. It proposes polar opposites; perhaps implying that one cannot be wealthy (masculine) and crying (feminine) simultaneously, and moved the group from questioning to agreeing with the new discourse.

It was questioned how long supporting people with MH difficulties takes.

> **Harvey:** There's some things you should be able to sort out by yourself and some things, you like, need someone else.
>
> **Elliot:** It's nice to have some support.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah it is nice to have some support.
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah. How long did it take you to sort out your problem with your college?
>
> **Harvey:** Probably like five months.
>
> *Laughter*
>
> **Harvey:** Joking, probably like, it took about an hour.
>
> **Tom:** Did you have any problems sorting out your college?
>
> **Charlie:** Yeah it did take quite long. Like an hour. An hour compare that to someone that comes to you and says they wanna kill themselves. How long is that gonna take?
>
> **Harvey:** Will take minutes for me. I'm a good social worker.
>
> *Laughter*
>
> **Charlie:** Just get em in a headlock and do it for them. *makes punching noises*
>
> (Lines 1572-1596)

In discussing whether it's harder to seek help for practical or emotional difficulties, Harvey notes people should be able to sort some things independently. Though unclear if this implies emotional difficulties should be managed alone, it is possible given his happiness seeking help for his college application.

The time it takes to support people with practical or emotional difficulties is discussed. It is mentioned practical issues would take "an hour", before the question is asked about supporting a suicidal person, "how long is that gonna take?". This suggests emotional problems are considered time consuming and a hassle, implying boys have good reason to steer clear from helping people with their MH.

Following a joke about how quickly someone could support a suicidal peer, a joke is made suggesting you could "do it for them", implying it saves time to kill someone before they do it themselves. Though said in jest, it suggests some boys struggle not only with their own emotions, but with others', too. Whether turning conversation towards money, laughing about people crying, worrying how long it takes to support others, or making jokes, there is frequent avoidance of both getting and offering emotional support.

The group discussed suicide as almost an inevitability for some men, especially after long-term relationships, mostly due to isolation.

> **Harvey:** I feel like… the reason men… commit suicide more than women… when they get to the older ages.
>
> **Charlie:** It's cos they don't talk.
>
> **Harvey:** It's more, it's not more like you are always around your mates at school ain't ya and until 18 you are like either working or you're just at home.
>
> **Elliot:** You're on your own.

**Charlie:** Yeah. You're either working.

**Harvey:** It's not exactly like you have to go meet people.

**Elliot:** You're isolated.

**Charlie:** You ain't got time to go meet people like you did before.

**Tom:** It was like that in lockdown as well.

**Harvey:** That is, I think, the main reason for men's MH going downhill.

(Lines 1195-1215)

It is posed and elaborated upon that not talking is the reason for higher levels of male suicide. The group offered reasons older males become isolated, from being surrounded by friends at school to having few people around when older. Older male life is then compared to pandemic lockdown.

The group seemed to agree upon a slow journey from friendships, to bleak loneliness, to potential death. No challenges for this discourse came from anyone, as though this was men's definitive pathway. "It's not exactly like you have to go meet people", suggests what is understood about masculine men's social lifespan. Having to live up to masculine ideals amongst social groups until you're confined to providing for a home and family, as protecting them stoically trumps all other social and emotional needs. Seeking out new friendships beyond those men "have to" have, may be acceptance that one cannot cope with their emotions alone, thus making it unmasculine to have relationships beyond those occurring incidentally.

### 4.4. Avoidance and prevention of emotion-related talk

Participants, particularly those seeming to hold greater social power, frequently used discourses positioning them as masculine. This seemed to mean unemotional, hard,

overtly straight boys, who do not need, and only occasionally offer, emotional support. This amounts to participants avoiding and preventing emotion-related talk by diverting it towards other topics or shutting it down entirely. Below are examples of how the group work to avoid these discussions.

One common method was by asking questions instead of answering. This enabled the asker to keep control of discussion and reduced likelihood of them being asked a question. One member asked the most questions in the FG, asking over 50 more than others, usually asking about their emotions or using questions which aimed to embarrass.

Other times, questions were used to redirect the conversation, particularly when emotional content of conversations started to build.

> **Harvey:** Elliot, you used to tell me when we was younger, that you used to have dreams about passing away and stuff like that. Is that like a worry that you have?
>
> *Laughter*
>
> **Elliot:** No. I have overcome that.
>
> **Charlie:** To be fair, I used to be shit scared of that when I was younger.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah, it's… Everybody's had a dream before where they died, woke up shaking.
>
> **Tom:** Oh yeah.
>
> **Charlie:** yeah cos I've had that about exams and that.
>
> **Harvey:** Yeah I've had it about exams.
>
> **Harvey:** (Inaudible)
>
> **Charlie:** So, does safari ever come up in your worries?
>
> (Lines 356-375)

A question is asked, seemingly to embarrass a participant in relation to their childhood dreams. The group then share a rare moment where all agree they've experienced emotional difficulties about something, nightmares. Soon after, Charlie ends this by asking an entirely random question about 'safari' which redirects the group to ask what he means. It was unclear whether this was an intentional redirection due to the conversation's content, but the frequency at which redirecting questions were asked as soon as emotions were being discussed was notable.

The following extract shows another example of question use to avoid emotion-talk.

> **Charlie:** Yeah it did take quite long. Like an hour. An hour compared that to someone that comes to you and says they wanna kill themselves. How long is that gonna take?
>
> **Harvey:** Will take minutes for me. I'm a good social worker.
>
> *Laughter*
>
> **Charlie:** Just get em in a headlock and do it for them. *makes noises suggesting he's punching the person*
>
> **Harvey:** Na I've got this, trust, cos I've done it with Archie.
>
> **Charlie:** Can you stop itching your arse there, mate?
>
> **Harvey:** I've got itchy crack. Make sure you keep that in the tape.
>
> *Laughter*
>
> (Lines 1589-1604)

It is discussed how long it takes to support suicidal people, with Harvey claiming it wouldn't take him long. There is then a joke from another participant. When Harvey explains the time he supported a friend through this, the conversation is redirected through Harvey being asked to stop "itching [his] arse". This was another rare

moment in which participants spoke seriously about difficult situations they'd been through, where one participant says their friend felt suicidal and they managed to help. This seems to be a point of pride, especially mentioning he had to engage with another's emotions in front of a group of boys. The first joke doesn't quell the conversation, so the second joke is offered as a question, and conversation is redirected.

Question asking seemed a valuable way to prevent being asked questions or stop emotion talk, but there were also tactics when participants were asked questions.

> **Harvey:** Have you got any problems, Charlie? And how would you take care of them?
>
> **Charlie:** I've got none. I've got no problems, thank you.
>
> **Elliot:** and if you did?
>
> **Charlie:** If I did, umm. I would talk out. I would reach out for support.
>
> **Elliot:** Who would you talk to?
>
> **Charlie:** Well, normally I'd go to Tom's mum, but…
>
> (Lines 471-482)

> **Tom:** Have you got any worries?
>
> **Charlie:** I've got no worries, thank you.
>
> **Tom:** not even GCSEs?
>
> **Charlie:** Sometimes I get a bit annoyed, worried about my Fortnite skills but that's about it.
>
> (Lines 216-222)

In both extracts, short answers were used, suggesting Charlie doesn't have problems or worries, ending sentences with "thank you". Given the similar answers, they appeared rehearsed, as though he intended to give no thought to whether he had worries or problems and knew how to answer these questions. In the first extract, he seems to be stating the 'right' answer, as in the answer a teacher might want to hear, so further questions are not asked. This ends with him being asked who he would talk to, before making a 'your mum' joke to a participant.

In the second, he deflects using a self-deprecative joke about his gaming skills. These tactics may be planned avoidance of emotion-related questioning, suggesting to the group that any further examination of his inner-workings was probably a waste of time.

Others also used jokes to avoid or prevent emotion talk.

> **Harvey:** That is, I think, the main reason for men's MH going downhill
>
> **Charlie:** And do you feel like they could, err, talk to their wives? Or do they not wanna look weak?
>
> **Harvey:** Depends who your wife is, dunnit? Depends if your wife's a bloke.
>
> (Lines 1215-1219)

The group discussed why males had higher suicide rates, mentioning loss of friendship opportunities and subsequent isolation. When asked whether men could speak to wives, a joke is made relating to men marrying men. This may have been asked sincerely, implying there might be emotional differences between marrying a man or a woman. It appeared, however, to be a joke and led participants towards ribbing about whether each of them planned to marry men.

This takes the group from potentially engaging with difficult emotions to making jokes, preventing further focus on feeling.

> **Harvey:** So, like if I was gonna go talk about a sensitive subject, I'll probably go to my dad. ‘Cos dad is more like, son to son.
>
> **Elliot:** More chilled.
>
> **Harvey:** Son to father.
>
> **Charlie:** Depends what the problem is though dunnit… Say you got a problem with your dick, right.
>
> *Laughter*
>
> (Lines 951-960)

Harvey discusses who he would speak to about sensitive subjects, suggesting something beneficial about male-to-male, father-son support, and Elliot suggests fathers might be “more chilled”. Rather than discuss who to seek support from, a joke is made about having genital problems, and conversation is redirected towards sexual issues.

Sex was used to redirect in other extracts, too.

> **Tom:** I reckon girls probably talk out more.
>
> **Charlie:** A girl would talk out more yeah.
>
> **Elliot:** Why?
>
> **Tom:** Cos the way they go and cry in the toilets.
>
> **Harvey:** yeah like your mum.
>
> **Charlie:** Plus yeah… would you help a girl?

**Harvey:** Yeah if Tom's mum was bent over and stuck in a washing machine, and I was the step son. I'd be like "oh no are you stuck? Let me help you." Stick the bone in it, like oi oi.

(Lines 1657-1670)

When discussing who talks more when experiencing emotional difficulties, it is generally agreed that girls would. As was common throughout, this was related to girls crying in toilets. Girls are suggested to feel emotion more, display emotion more, talk about emotions more, and though this wasn't necessarily positioned negatively here, was done so frequently elsewhere. When Charlie asks whether boys would help a girl, presumably whilst upset, a joke is made positioning someone's mother in a pornographic scenario. Considering the discourse of gay boys having 'little girl mates' earlier, this may have related to fears of outing oneself as feminine by saying they would help crying females. With this comment, however, the emotional conversation was avoided and someone could be made fun of, namely about their mum being in pornography. The joke also helped to imply sexual prowess, making the comment beneficial to their claims of masculinity on many fronts.

The previous extracts showed strategies to avoid and prevent discussion, but consciousness of the boys doing so was unclear. Some examples, however, seemed intentional attempts to prevent emotion discussion before it got deeper.

**Tom:** Same with Zack, ain't it. Like, take the piss out of Zack's grandad.

**Charlie:** What happened to Zack's grandad then?

**Harvey:** He's a world war vet ain't he?

**Elliot:** Harvey takes the mick cos he's a world war two veteran.

**Charlie:** That's going on the chat.

**Elliot:** Well maybe Zack might worry about that.

**Harvey:** Shut up, you melt.

**Elliot:** Oh, shut up.

(Lines 1910-1918)

The group discuss what makes certain boys upset, with Zack (not in the FG) disliking jokes about his grandfather being a war veteran. One participant revels in having something new to make fun of Zack for, and Elliot wonders if Zack worries about his grandfather. This discussion is quickly prevented through Elliot being told to "shut up", and being called a "melt", suggesting Elliot is soft and easily upset. Elliot's response of "Oh, shut up" was said in far softer tone, giving the impression Elliot had given up on the conversation, tiring of his ideas being trodden on.

This is multi-faceted in its prevention of emotion talk. In this one comment, further discussion has been immediately prevented, and Elliot disempowered. This indicated his thoughts are not worth discussing and implied he is soft, the antithesis of manliness. That it was in response to comment about whether they should consider Zack's feelings also positions feelings as something not worth talking about, and only for soft people. This shows a strong example of prevention, as it immediately stops conversation and ends opportunity to gain experience of emotion-related talk. Those feeling confident to confront the conversation are shut down and disempowered, potentially reducing likelihood of them raising similar discussions in the future.

Finally, there was prevention through interruption.

**Elliot:** So Tom, what do you think of it?

**Tom:** I think the response are different because

**Harvey:** Yeah, I think that as well, Tom, yeah.

*Laughter*

**Harvey:** Carry on, carry on.

**Tom:** Nah cos like women

**Harvey:** Again yeah (interrupting)

**Tom:** Like women are more

**Harvey:** (Interrupting) just carry on mate.

**Tom:** Like women have got more people to open up to.

(Lines 2044-2062)

Tom discusses different responses between males and females to difficult situations but is continually interrupted. Though it's unclear whether this related to the emotion-related content or a general attempt to make it difficult for Tom to speak, it is notable Tom was trying to say something slightly different in each sentence. Each related to women's emotions compared to men's, and all are interrupted, disrupting the emotion-related discussion. This, similarly to the extract above, could easily knock the assuredness of someone trying to grow in confidence in discussing emotion. Tom's keenness to speak about emotion both then, and in the future, may have been hampered because this suggested his thoughts were not worth waiting for.

### 4.5. Summary

In exploring the question, “How does boys’ talk affect their help-seeking behaviours?”, the analysis found four main themes in the data. The first theme, “Vying for and maintaining hierarchical position through masculinity” involved macro-analysis of the data through its subtheme ‘Positioning femininity and male homosexuality below traditional masculinity." Macro-analysis considers how discourses relate to societal narratives (van Dijk, 2015), and showed language which belittled homosexuals and girls, displayed disdain for girls’ emotion-related behaviour, like crying, and showed frequent examples of homophobic language. Some of this language was suggested to have been backed by parents, perhaps showing societal history of such discourses.

This does not mean these boys intentionally oppress other social groups. The boys’ awareness and intent of using language to hold power over other social groups was unclear, but their use of it may demonstrate the normativity of anti-feminine discourses which maintain patriarchal social dominance. The apparent power afforded to those who perform discourses which aim to disparage and discourage feminine-coded behaviour displays the hegemony of such language amongst adolescent males.

The second subtheme, ‘Masculine discourses for within group positioning’, involved micro- and meso-level analysis, and showed how the group use narratives of hardness and softness to find local hierarchy. Group positions were maintained through these discourses, as they discussed where each other stood on the hardness scale. When claims were made about hardness, examples of emotionality were used to evidence against the claims.

Each of these subthemes suggested a dislike for the soft, feminine, behaviours of crying, and spoke positively of the hard, masculine behaviours of unemotionality. As the former was often linked to unkind or negative terming whilst the latter seemed a valued trait, this may explain the keenness to avoid emotional expression.

The group also illustrated how these macro-levels of discourse influenced meso-levels, too. There were consistent demonstrations of the group engaging in discourse which enabled them to represent themselves as belonging to masculine culture, producing social processes to enact their intergroup and intragroup positioning, and the sharing of their memories, knowledge, and opinions that represent, and contribute to, their wider social structure.

In the second theme, ‘acceptable emotion-related behaviour, the group discussed the ways they felt people were allowed to show emotion or seek help. This included contempt towards ‘moping about’ and crying over minor issues, like girls do. It also provided evidence of bullying that can occur when boys try to discuss emotions, and admission from the group that bullying and homophobic name-calling often happens when boys show certain emotions. This, again, is likely to impact how confident boys feel to share emotions with each other, or ask for help when needing emotional support.

The third theme, ‘help-seeking behaviours shaped by masculine discourses’ showed how discourses impacted how and when the boys sought help. It evidenced a dislike for people who do not directly ask for support, those who show emotion and expect support, and that if boys ask for help from a group, they’d likely be laughed at. Having problems with people not directly asking for support was an issue, as the group noted they’d never been able to ask for support for an emotional issue before.

Whether this was through fear of social consequence of admitting need or a genuine truth, both show the difficulties adolescent boys have asking for help.

Boys also seemed to have difficulty offering emotional support as they worried about the time it would take and could only think of material ways of improving the situation. Though it may be too much to expect from this age group to offer more thorough emotion-based advice or support, it may alternatively suggest a masculine need of moving towards practicalities instead of feelings.

This may have been further evidenced by the final theme, ‘avoidance and prevention of emotion-related talk’. This showed the group using a variety of tactics to move away from discussion about their own emotions or difficult topics. Sometimes this was through humour, others through randomness, and sometimes through insults and abuse. This may show how uncomfortable boys are with talking emotions and asking for support from each other, such is their limited experience of doing so with their peers.

Each theme demonstrated discourses which may explain why boys struggle with emotional expression and help-seeking. This is further discussed in the discussion chapter.

# 5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the research findings, considering how they are embedded within adolescent males' many social structures, how this relates to the UK secondary school, and their relationship to research discussed in the literature review. It then considers implications of the findings for EP practice, the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## 5.1. Review of aims and research questions

This study looked to answer the research question of "how does boys' talk affect their help-seeking behaviours?"

Based on the findings, boys' talk affects their help-seeking behaviour in numerous ways. The group showed that certain masculine behaviours were expected and accepted, and these expected gender norms were used to position other social groups and themselves hierarchically. This was mostly in relation to typically masculine behaviours being more valuable socially than typical feminine behaviours, the performance of which were cause for mocking and bullying. This appeared to make both expression of emotion and asking for help a real challenge for them, particularly when faced with emotional difficulties, as opposed to practical ones. In conjunction with this, the group appeared uncertain about how to support each other with emotional difficulties, offering superficial and material ways of managing issues, rather than confronting the emotions they were experiencing. As emotional expression, help-seeking, and help-offering were somewhat alien experiences, their confidence in discussing emotions seemed limited, as did their EL. This may have

been a factor in their avoidance and prevention of emotion-related talk, as they made jokes and random comments to divert conversations.

The boys therefore appeared to have difficulty help-seeking due to anti-femininity norms. In rejecting femininity to ensure they are not conceived of as homosexual, they reject feminine-coded displays of emotion, usually suggested as crying. Crying was a bullyable offence for most situations, meaning occasions of crying were usually hidden from others through fear of mocking. The importance of hiding emotion makes asking for help, or even understanding the need to ask for help, a significant challenge. The boys discussed this as an issue that plays out through adulthood, where males' social circles were considered smaller. The group's narratives surrounding an almost inevitable lack of incidental friendships for adult males, having cared for their family for years, speaks of an unavoidable prophecy of late life despair and inability to seek new supportive options.

It is recognised that this group do not represent all boys, but findings suggest there are a set of norms that some boys displaying certain types of masculinity must adhere to if they are to achieve social success. As this social success is so important during adolescence, it is deeply embedded in secondary schools and the students' discourses. If lack of emotionality and help-seeking is key to these masculinities, healthy emotional expression and support-seeking may be a significant challenge for this group. This has been discussed below in the explanation of findings, in relation to theory and potential ways EPs could improve the MH landscape for boys in UK education.

## 5.2. Explanation of findings

The following section, in line with the three-dimensional framework of CDA outlined by Fairclough (2013b), shall work as an explanation of the findings. This illustrates how discourses are moulded by social structures and will discuss theoretical underpinnings of why some discourses were likely dominant, and how language is used to uphold said structures. The key theories discussed will be hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), gender monoglossia (Bakhtin, 1981; Francis, 2012), and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977).

### 5.2.1. Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity relates to Connell's (1995) theory of gender as an ordering social pattern. It describes how particular masculinities sit atop a hierarchy due to the ways that some men, sometimes, use patterns of behaviour to subordinate and marginalise people who behave outside masculine norms. Others who benefit from the patriarchal dividend watch on in complicity. There are no fixed hegemonically masculine character types, not within a singular person nor across contexts, as this is a theory of ever-changing power relations built around certain performances of gender, legitimating patriarchal oppression. The hegemony is imposed through opposition to femininity, through which homosexual males are also subordinated, placing them at the bottom of the hierarchy (Connell, 2005).

On the macro, societal, level, the boys positioned typical masculinities as oppositional to femininity through disparaging emotion-related behaviours of females and homosexual males. This came from belittling both groups, condemning how they show emotion, and criticising how they ask for, give, and receive support from each

other. Feminine traits were portrayed as softness, whilst masculine boys want to show hardness, in terms of managing physical, and emotional pain. This positioning of the masculine as strong and feminine as weak enables a hierarchy that gives those who show toughness, power, and those who show emotions outside of happiness and anger, varying degrees of bullying to subordinate them.

In terms of intragroup positioning, participants used masculine discourses and other tactics to assert dominance amongst each other. They ascribed feminine traits by reminding of times others failed in masculinity through crying, challenged others' claims about their toughness, and made fun of those who didn't meet their masculinity standards. This is typical subordination, as the group used discourses surrounding ability to show typically masculine emotion-related behaviour to either increase their own social standing and power in the group or discourses of others' lack of masculinity to decrease theirs. When intragroup power and social popularity come from unemotionality, it becomes a social requirement to engage in the performance of toughness to push oneself up and use bullying to push the criers down.

Male culture showed in the types of emotions and topics the boys were allowed to show emotion over. Moping, opening up, making emotions known to others, and having self-pity were all positioned as unacceptable traits for boys wanting social acceptance. This also showed in how the group suggested boys should offer and get support, and what they can get support for. It was suggested boys must directly ask for help, must not show emotion and expect help to come from that, and that help must not be sought over unserious, feminine issues, like one's appearance. When showing and discussing emotions is disallowed, and femininities are positioned as societally lesser, options for who boys can get help from, and how they can get it, are

significantly limited. In addition, their EL, and thus, ability to discuss emotions and understand themselves in relation to them, is inadequate due to minimal opportunities to have such discussions.

A hierarchy between group members became clear in the FG. Those displaying certain masculinities appeared to hold more power, their opinions listened to more, their ideas dismissed less. Power appeared to be mostly held by two members and this seemed available to them due to their assertiveness and tone. Though occasionally helped by backing each other's points, acting as leaders through using masculine discourses seemed to enable them to establish authority. These actions create a power structure in which the boys who are believed to show apparent masculine toughness rule, and the boys suggested to show apparent feminine weaknesses are lesser. When one opens themselves up to bullying, ridicule, and a loss of power and social standing through exhibiting feminine-coded emotions or help-seeking behaviours, it is understandable how they become socialised to avoid such actions for both collective safety and individual protection of self-esteem.

These behaviours have thus far been discussed as typical amongst this specific group and their positioning tactics, but their language is far more systemic and endemic of UK society in general. What is currently playing out as the anti-woke culture war often focuses closely on the binarization of gender to discriminate against and oppress certain sexualities and genders (Cammaerts, 2022). Connell (2005) discusses how gender and sexuality are frequently conflated due to male homosexuality being considered femininity, as was stated by one participant.

Homophobic language is far from boys' only tool to construct power, but when political point scoring involves essentialising gender and normalising typical gender

performance, society reinforces that only one form of masculinity is allowed. If the most power constructing form of masculinity in UK schools demonises those who cry, ask for support, and offer support, these masculinities are only likely to continue and grow, thus increasing this behaviour.

Schools having to create resources to defend against the online influence of supposed alpha male, Andrew Tate, who espouses and personifies the misogynistic and anti-feminine hate speech that enables the normalisation of masculine hegemony, seems a symptom of the fight against the spectral notion of gender. When it is consistently suggested that heteronormative, anti-feminine behaviours are likely killing men, reifying these through gender politics that filter down through governmental institutions like schools seems a ploy that involves risks of which most are blissfully unaware.

What is key, however, is that that, as Connell (2005) suggests, hegemonic masculinity is a relational structure that is constantly changing against its oppositional forces. What makes it so totalitarian is its ability to adapt to what enables persistence of power for men within the culture it resides (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

There is hope, however, as behaviours which once enabled power for males in most of the UK (e.g., opposition to femininity), are being subordinated in some contexts (Paechter, 2012). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in refining the theory, suggest more than one hegemonic masculinity can exist within a society, and can pertain within subgroups. This offers possibilities that dominant masculinities amongst certain societal groups are those which no longer enable power for those who adopt anti-feminine ideologies. If this can be achieved through reducing the social value of

hegemonic masculinity in secondary schools, emotional expression and help-seeking may no longer be considered behaviours of negative social consequence.

### 5.2.2. Gender monoglossia

When considering macro-analysis of the data, it is helpful to apply Bakhtin's (1981) theory of monoglossia and Francis' (2012) adaptation of it to gender. Monoglossia is seen as the peaceful, stable, ideal of gender that represents the worldviews and interests of dominant social groups and is 'known' by most people. Given patriarchal societal norms in the UK, masculinist social epistemologies may be considered monoglossic (Francis, 2010). Heteroglossia relates to individual performances by people which may mostly stay close to the monoglossic account but allows some contradiction, resistance, and artistic licence to stray from expected performances.

This research displayed clear overarching monoglossic accounts of what boys, girls, and homosexuals are, and how they act in certain situations. According to the group, girls cry, self-harm over worries about eyelashes, and are to be belittled. Gay boys are lesser, soft, and cry, unlike the hard boys for whom such shows of emotion are unimaginable. The group perhaps see peace in the idealised and idolised glory of the tough, unemotional boy, and all heteroglossic performances of gender which do not fit the monoglossic account must be recentralised, subordinated, and marginalised, to keep stability in place.

There were clear times when the plasticity afforded by heteroglossia was evident in the group but the elasticity of the monoglossia ensured to bounce back towards stability. On multiple occasions, Harvey notices how harmful it can be when the group mock each other's emotional expressions but, within only a couple of lines, is

back demonstrating that very same mocking. The boys are very capable of reflection upon their behaviours but are held to the monoglossic account as straying risks disconnection from the dominant social group. Recognising the harm of one's actions and immediately returning to them shows the strength of what Bakhtin (1981) calls 'centripetal forces', those which bring us back to the centralised narratives and structures.

Similarly, the group show awareness that homophobic language is wrong by criticising others for using it, then quickly bounce back to using homophobic language mere sentences later. This shows evidence of sociohistorical context which influences the monoglossic account and how heteroglossia becomes tested with listeners in localised contexts (Bakhtin, 1981). There is a testing of the waters through using a discourse that might challenge what is normally said, and depending how it is received, may the group take risks into new ventures of how gender and sexuality might now be known. The group are aware of what are acceptable accounts of gender and sexuality but posit a contradiction (e.g., homosexuality is ok) and return to norms if this new gender production is considered illegitimate and thus rejected by spectators (Francis, 2012). The monoglossic account therefore holds unbeknownst powers unto the group, keeping them in their gendered structure of producing authentically male performances for fear of ostracization should language be 'read' as outside typical male identities (Francis & Paechter, 2015).

Where this further relates to emotional language is how masculinity is offered, understood, reacted to, and either accepted or rejected by the group. Bakhtin (1981, pg. 282) recognised "understanding only comes to fruition in the response" as they are "dialectically merged and mutually condition each other". As such, if the response to disparagement of emotion is negative and rejected by male groups, alternative

performances will be offered with the aim of gaining acceptance. If those with masculine identities that are respected by young people, such as teachers, are noticed to reject the dialogic micro-transactions that demonise emotional behaviour currently seen feminine, substitutive accepted heteroglossia will be required. With new discourses, the sociohistorical context can change, and though the monoglossic account will forever resist, movements towards new gender accounts can thrive.

Anderson (2009) discusses interrelations between cultural homo-hysteria, homophobia, antifemininity, and gender relations. He suggests antifeminine sentiments are boys' expressions that code them as 'not gay', and through reducing fear about being seen as gay, boys will feel safer in accepting each other's feminine behaviours. In doing so, a range of inclusivity becomes available to males as they no longer have reason to belittle women's actions, ridicule homosexuals for similar femininities, or mock each other for occasional adoption of such traits. Anderson suggests this could have a reductive impact on homophobia (towards heterosexual and non-heterosexual males), misogyny, and could therefore improve male MH. Free from tirades of anti-feminine abuse and no longer shackled by continuous reproval of their masculinity, boys can feel less anxious about whether their behaviour meets gender acceptability centralised by the monoglossic account.

This proposes the potential powers of heteroglossia and the trying of new masculinities in social spaces, as acceptance of such performances could influence new behaviours. The political resistance to new gender ideologies were made clear in the introduction chapter, but opportunities to change our sociohistorical context and thus move towards a new monoglossic account are available and possible. How EPs and educators can help seize this opportunity is explored in section 5.4.

### 5.2.3. Bourdieu's habitus

The normativity of anti-feminine language as the dominant narrative brings Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus to mind as it can easily be adopted to gender and secondary schools. Habitus, briefly mentioned in the introduction section, explains how a social order can be so embedded that its reproduction becomes common-sensical to the point of being naturalised (Bourdieu, 2002). This is due to repetition of experiences creating internalised blueprints for how one sees the world, to the point it impacts their generation of thoughts and behaviours. This causes assumptions of correct ways to behave in a system, inculcating the actions of the dominant group as indisputably correct. Bourdieu tended to relate this to class systems, for example that amongst some social groups, the idea of going to university might have never crossed one's mind. When so embedded in a system where this is rarely a consideration, to break free of such confinement is not considered unnatural, but not considered whatsoever.

Ingram (2018) relates this to schools, as these are not just thought patterns embedded by families and classes but by institutions, too. Habitus may usually relate to individuals' internal mapping of society but is embedded by the socialisation and reinforcement of status consistently conveyed by schools (Thomas, 2002). To adapt this to gender in school systems, one must consider how thoroughly reinforced the masculine norms are throughout the secondary school; with Swain (2006) citing five "masculinizing practices" which shape schools' gender regimes. These include curriculum, policy/organisational practices (e.g., discipline), sports, teacher-pupil relations, and pupil-to-pupil relations. More recent literature suggests this continues today; through literature (Adams et al., 2011), curriculum (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2017), adaptation of lessons (Roberts, 2019), and girls' school uniforms often adopting male

business norms. Indeed, Ofsted's (2021b) recognition of need for culture change to tackle 'normalised' sexual harassment of girls is born of a system often not even safe for, let alone built for, girls' success.

Delamont (2012) notes these practices enable schools to enforce and reinforce gendered rules and roles more rigid than seen in wider society, with Martino and Frank (2006) discussing how teachers' classroom practices often encourage the boy/girl and masculinity/femininity divide. Their study demonstrates how teachers police masculinities, applying Foucalt's 'normalizing gaze' to explain how adults' discourses in schools encourage a student surveillance of masculinity that allows pupils to qualify, classify, and punish children based on gender performance. Davison and Frank (2006) note school enablement of such discourses make the gender divide seem naturalised, putting those who cannot or do not conform to social demands of rigid gender definitions at risk of ostracization, bullying, and harassment. In reinforcing dominant discourses of sex differences in the school, males are empowered to regulate gender constructions, mirroring the systemic and systematic gender inequality that exists throughout society (Luke, 1995).

This normalising and naturalising of gender, structurally built through staff practices, and then reflected by students, creates a habitus in which secondary schools are a boys' world in which other gendered behaviours are secondary or less. Findings from the present study show the group policing others' gender and how others react to this policing. The group hierarchise themselves upon softness and hardness, who cries and who doesn't, when emotions are acceptable, and mention those outside of the FG and positions they occupy in said hierarchy. They accept and happily admit those who do not conform to 'correct' gender performances are ripe for mocking and bullying, and in some cases, encourage their own victimisation when believing

themselves to have committed gender failure. Peers not conforming to natural, normal, typically masculine way of managing their emotions must be punished for showing their differences, the same differences many schools are highlighting.

Key critiques of feminism are that it has enabled females to be more like males but not males to be more like females, only allowing girls to adopt the practices of a male-led society (Heasley & Crane, 2012). Our changing of structure is too focused on what Elliott (2018) calls building 'the losing side', meaning we simply help the oppressed to join the oppressors by allowing them to adapt to their norms. It is accepted that inclusivity has been part of many an education policy over recent years, but inclusion in a world still dominated by a particular group is perhaps not the new norm education should be striving for. This only serves to uphold the status quo, meaning hegemony becomes stronger and those struggling for equal power amongst the rulers only continue to be subordinated. This would, from the outside, suggest it is only females losing out from such proceedings, but naturalisation of the masculine order fails every person in the classroom. Through the habitus in which tough boy is king, we have glorification of independence and supposed emotional strength and subordination of requiring support and supposed emotional weakness. Any system in which this is considered the most logical way of thinking only reinforces and reproduces these social processes, and thus the thoughts and behaviours of those within (Bourdieu, 1977).

This is not to criticise teachers directly, the majority of whom were socialised through the same, naturalised system. Their awareness going forward, however, may enable change. Bourdieu (2002, pg. 45) explains habitus as "a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be changed by history, that is by new experiences, education or training" and though it is a significant challenge, "it may be

changed through the process of awareness and of pedagogic effort." This suggests it was discourses that took us to this structure, and it will be learning, awareness, and, subsequently, fresh discourses, that will take us to places anew. If we hope to see discourses which enable boys to reduce their reliance on the impressing of gender norms to stratify themselves socially, discourses of gender acceptance must replace the discourses of power that currently dominate. To reduce the difference of masculinity to femininity is to reduce the fear of feminine behaviours, and only then may boys accept a widened range of emotion and help-seeking behaviours as a natural and normal phenomenon.

### 5.3. Relation to current literature

Despite few included studies in the literature review bearing similarities in terms of ontology, epistemology, and method of analysis, there were many similarities in findings from the present study. A notable difference, however, was that due to these methodological differences, questions were directly answered by boys in many included studies, whether in questionnaires or interviews, whereas the present study allowed the FG to discuss amongst themselves with minimal prompting or questioning. This meant findings from the present study tend to discuss how the boys use language and how this impacts, and is impacted by, their social structures, as opposed to them specifically answering how they felt or what they believed about a topic.

Similarly to included literature (Clark et al., 2020a), this study found that boys who held more typically masculine views were less open to, and less encouraging of, help-seeking than others. This was often due to expression of emotion being

suggested as demonstration of softness, similar to many of the included studies suggesting masculine boys felt emotions were a sign of weakness (Best et al., 2016; Burke et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2018b; Clark, 2020b; Randell, 2016; Samuel, 2022). The group in the present study also demonstrated how showing emotion in front of others caused mocking, similarly to how many included studies suggested boys feared the social consequences of help-seeking or expression of emotion (Best et al., 2016; Clark et al., 2018b; Hassett & Isbister, 2017; Randell et al., 2016; Samuel, 2015).

Whilst the present study did not necessarily find that there was poor EL amongst the group, there were limited emotion-related words in the data corpus. There were occasional discussions of aggression, depression, anger, grief, fear, and anxiety, though many of these terms were only mentioned once. Though there is not comparative data for the range of emotion terms used by similar-aged females, this seems remarkably minimal for an hour-long conversation focused on help-seeking, particularly one frequently directed by participants towards how people display emotion. This linked to findings in many included studies which suggested boys struggle to put words to emotions (Hassett & Isbister, 2017; King et al., 2014; Liddle et al., 2020a; Samuel, 2015;).

There were some links with MH stigma, but these appeared in different ways to the reviewed literature. For example, there was little denial of the existence of MH difficulties, nor that males experience MH difficulties, as was presented in many included studies (Clark et al., 2018b; 2020b; Samuel, 2015). The group did, however, in line with stigma's definition (Ahmedani, 2011), attribute negative views towards people experiencing EW difficulties, particularly when displaying them in dissimilar ways to their expectations.

Understandably, since related questions were not asked, the present study did not find that particular methods, e.g., online (Best et al., 2016; Burke et al., 2022; Clark et al, 2018a; Randell, 2016), were more effective in supporting males to seek help for MH difficulties. There were also no findings related to how particular school environments may help males to seek help for MH difficulties, as was presented in reviewed literature. Nobody in this study mentioned help-seeking in school at all, making it unclear whether this is because of the group's limited help-seeking, the school environment, or another reason.

### 5.4. Implications for EP practice at an organisational level

It was theorised in the explanation that at organisational and societal levels, discourses are responsible for gender power structures, and the naturalisation of, and snapping back to, typical, essentialist versions of gendered behaviours. It was also established that each associated theory suggests opportunities for change if new discourses are established, thus enabling new social structures and norms. All that is left is the small task of changing a gendered society which has been customary since the beginning of recorded history.

Whilst said in humour, this is not the task it once seemed as there are already formational changes taking place, and newly acceptable forms of masculinity are presenting in many schools through organisational change (McCormack, 2014). As discussed in the introduction, much gendered behaviour is learned during childhood and adolescence, placing schools in a strong position to support changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and thus behaviours that enable a society structured through gender inequality. Furthermore, organisational, whole-school approaches have been

effective in improving outcomes in a broad range of areas including MH (Barry et al., 2013), building inclusive cultures (Roberts & Webster, 2022), school health promotion (Griebler et al., 2017), and reducing bullying (Vreeman & Carrol, 2007). This makes considerations of how EPs can support whole-class and whole-school approaches to reconstructing gendered language an intriguing and likely effective strategy.

### 5.4.1. Acceptance of femininities in the classroom

Heasley and Crane (2012), in their chapter on disrupting hegemonic masculinity in the classroom, discuss the value of ‘queering’ classes to reduce effects of compulsory heterosexuality. As aforementioned, masculine power structures are based on masculinities that are oppositional to femininity and homosexuality. This causes assumptions that normalise toughness and straightness as the status quo, making adolescent males fear the social consequences of being seen as gay. In past attempts to improve this, those displaying femininities have been encouraged to include themselves amongst the masculine order, which only reinforces it, and continues subordination of many groups.

There has been much discussion about the feminisation of the classroom as a negative. The higher proportion of female teachers (85% female teachers in primary, 65% in secondary; gov.uk, 2022) led to suggestions that education had become too feminine, too feminist, and that this could only mean poor outcomes for boys in school. Particularly through the mid-2000s, many educationalists insisted the reason for boys’ underachievement was based in the lack of male role models in schools (Martino, 2008), leading to government drives for additional male teachers in primary

schools (Department of Education, Science & Training, 2004). Much of this was steered by the ideology that males would provide the firm hand to guide boys towards better behaviour in schools, with a press release from the Training and Development Agency for Schools (2008) stating how crucial male teachers are as role models as they inspire harder working and better-behaved children.

There are many issues with the argument for more male teachers, however, for it provides a simplistic answer to a complex question. Firstly, it suggests male teachers are a largely homogenous group with common attitudes and beliefs, all ready to provide the strict and rigid ruling that will set the misbehaving boys straight (Cushman, 2010; Skelton, 2011). This, of course, is not only an essentialist view of male teachers, but also of male students, many of whom do not respond to the supposed automatic masculine stringency these male teachers are expected to impose (Payne, 2015). It also essentialises the common view that caring is the work of the female, whilst discipline is the role of the male (Warin & Ganerud, 2014), a view which is highly reductionist to the caring and classroom management work done by teachers of all genders. In viewing our male teachers and male students as this definitively masculine group who apply and respond to discipline-focused classroom management systems, we reinforce gender stereotypes for both and further reify the gender order that is problematic for so many (Cushman, 2010).

Secondly, the simplicity with which behaviourist discipline techniques are offered as a cure all is both outdated and moves us backwards in changing the gendered order (Moreau, 2019). If we purely treat boys with the punishment-reward model they are suggested to require, we only reduce their ability to understand their emotions in relation to social situations and their behaviours. To suggest that the way to improve boys' behaviour is by having males be firmer and louder towards them only models

that the way boys should manage those who act against them is by being firmer and louder. This seems oppositional to the models of emotional literacy and attachment-focused teaching which have been evidenced to enable young people to manage their emotions and classroom behaviours effectively (Rose et al, 2019; Sherwood, 2008).

Perhaps most significantly, there is no evidence to support that boys or girls perform better when taught by a male or female (Martin & Marsh, 2005; Carrington et al., 2008), nor is their perception of school or learning any better when taught by male teachers (Sokal et al., 2007; Skelton et al., 2009). What there is consistent evidence for, however, is that regardless of gender, students are most motivated by teachers who are emotionally supportive (Danielsen et al., 2011; Perry et al., 2010), provide positive classroom emotional climate (Reyes et al., 2012), clearly communicate their values and expectations (Gettingher & Kohler, 2006), and provide helpful and constructive feedback (Wentzel, 1998).

To summarise, there is little evidence that, if there has been a feminisation of the UK education system, it has had any negative impact upon teaching, learning, nor the emotional wellbeing or behaviour of male students. There is also little empirical evidence nor sound theoretical base (Francis & Skelton, 2005; Moreau, 2019) suggesting that remasculinisation of schools would have any positive impact whatsoever, with some research (e.g., Keddie & Mills, 2009) finding the opposite. Teachers have been majority female for close to 100 years (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006), meaning a callback to an earlier time where the masculine discipline of schools made boys toe the line is little more than false nostalgia.  What is closer to the truth is that good teaching, good classroom management, and positive emotional climate enable good education, and these are genderless teaching practices.

What appears to be wanted from those asking for more men, is a model of the hegemonic male. There is literature suggesting this is enacted by male teachers (e.g., Roulston & Mills, 2000; Keddie & Mills, 2009), who are often keen to identify antithetically to the typical female teacher, thus reinforcing masculine stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity in their teaching and relationships (Martino, 2008). As hegemonic masculinity is oppositional to those positive relational practices that are evidenced to improve student engagement, it is not merely men that are required, it is the right men.

If we are to change the gendered order in schools, it will be men who are willing to show allyship with women and non-hetero sexualities who will be the true role models to a generation of adolescent boys becoming good men. Men who are willing to subvert the norms of masculinity will alter the discourses that enable the current status quo and encourage a change in behaviour that makes schools genuinely inclusive for everyone.

Where Heasley and Crane (2012) call for the ‘queering’ of the classroom to reduce hegemonic masculine practices, it is felt that calling for queering or feminisation only reifies what is male, female, and heteronormative. What will be key, however, are teaching practices which normalise femininities in the classroom and make the enactment of them safe for all. In doing so, the power available from displaying dominating behaviours becomes decreased, thus reducing the social consequences and stratification occurring when boys do not fit gender-normative stereotypes. As discussed by Anderson (2009), normalising non-heterosexuality diverts from worries about others identifying behaviours as gay or feminine, and the right teachers can reinforce these prosocial behaviours. In a classroom where hardness and unemotionality are no longer the most valued commodities of personality, the

likelihood of boys attacking each other for their emotional displays lessens. Boys can therefore feel safer to accept emotions affecting them, engage with them, and feel confident to seek help without it having significant social consequences for them.

Theoretical musings to outcomes, however, do not a better classroom make, so practical actions to help enable acceptance of femininities in the classroom are as follows.

### 5.4.2. Challenge masculinity-oriented banter

Following the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, a website, named Everyone's Invited, gave people an anonymous space to give testimonies of their experiences of sexual harassment and abuse. A significant amount of mostly young females described copious examples of abuse they were subjected to in school, causing the DfE to fund an Ofsted report into sexual harassment and violence in schools (DfE, 2022a). The report stated nearly 90% of girls said sexist name calling happens a lot, 81% receive unwanted or inappropriate sexualised comments a lot, and 79% felt sexual assaults of any kind occurred in their school a lot (Ofsted, 2021a). Many of these young people consider sexual harassment normal and routine parts of their life, initiating Ofsted's press release stating a culture change is necessary in UK schools if we are to effectively reduce girls' harassment (Ofsted, 2021b).

DfE's most recent guidance (2022b) states that there should be a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, and it should never be passed off as "banter" or "boys being boys". It is recognised that banter is seen as just a bit of fun by many, but this type of low-level humour, once normalised, is suggested to have developed into what has been described as Britain's rape culture (Perez & Greene, 2016;

Phipps et al., 2018). It should therefore be challenged, lessons on its impacts taught in Relationships and Sex Education lessons, and girls should feel confident to be able to come to school without expecting to be sexually harassed.

Sexist jokes, Bemiller and Schneider (2010) contend, reinforce the supposed inherent differences between males and females, strengthening the binary gender system. Pinkett (2019) notes that some teachers are immune to this language and are unsure what constitutes sexualised or sexist language, such is the naturalisation formed by the common secondary school habitus.

EPs could have a role in changing this through helping schools recognise the issue's severity, encouraging senior leadership to take reports seriously, and working alongside schools to consider whether their practices reinforce particular gender norms. Organisational change work could help schools recognise and alter the normalised sexual discourses which allow masculine domination in schools. In abnormalizing these discourses, EPs could help reduce the power available to those perpetuating masculine hierarchies. This may improve school life for girls and reduce boys' reliance upon the masculine stereotypes that affect their emotional expression and help-seeking behaviours.

### 5.4.3. Normalise a range of male emotions

It is suggested that a key issue with adolescent masculinity and emotions is not usually boys not displaying emotions at all, it's how frequently they express emotion through aggression and physicality (Fives et al., 2011; Gillies, 2011). This serves many purposes for boys, but key to this discussion, it helps them construct power (Stoudt, 2006) and release emotion in a manner acceptable to masculine peers

(Navarro et al., 2011; Poteat et al, 2011). In schools, this can be problematic for a numbers of reasons, including that these displays, such as punching walls or people, cause physical harm. These behaviours, which could be interpreted as boys saying through action, “I am experiencing significant emotional pain and need others to share in it”, often mean boys are punished for their distress (Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007), when they require support (Lindsey et al., 2017).

What is key, however, is that boys are not biologically incapable of showing emotions outside of rage. There are minor differences in arousal states, inhibitory control, and language abilities of male and female children very early in life (Brody, 1999), but, as iterated frequently throughout this thesis, socialisation is considered the likeliest reason boys react differently to negative emotions than females. Deaux and Major (1987, pg. 369) suggest an emergence of gender differences when “perceivers [others] emit expectancies, targets (selves) negotiate their own identities, and the context in which interaction occurs shapes the resultant behavior”. So, to alter gendered behaviour, we may need to modify what people expect of boys, how people perceive boys, how boys understand their identities in relation to perception, and create contexts where alternate patterns of behaviour are acceptable.

Through training teachers to hold high expectations of boys’ ability to engage with emotion, and (particularly male teachers) modelling their own labelling and expression of emotion, the perception of what emotions boys can show in school may change. With this, boys may consider whether emotionality is truly against masculine identity, and contexts in which males showing emotions outside of anger could be built. This may help towards a different resultant behaviour as boys can build new expectancies of how others react to their emotional projections, enabling confidence that classrooms are safe contexts for new masculinities to thrive.

Furthermore, social and emotional climates of classrooms; and caring, empathic behaviours modelled by teachers has a significant influence on students (Roland and Galloway, 2004), acting as a protective factor against both internalising and externalising problems (Kuperminc et al., 2001; La Salle et al., 2018).

EPs offering training for teachers may support this change. Though it is currently uncommon for EPs to deliver guidance on gender and emotion in the classroom, there is recognition from schools of the gender differences in typical experience of different SEMH needs (Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008). Consideration of environments and systems surrounding the child, over or alongside focusing on within-child formulations is becoming a growing importance for EPs (Lindsay et al., 2007). Ofsted (2021b) and the DfE (2022b) are also urging schools to enact whole-school culture changes to reduce incidents largely perpetrated by males. As gender is widely considered a social phenomenon, it seems logical for psychologists to provide training and intervention to help make change on an organisational level, with recognition of how broader societal discourses of gender are impacting SEMH needs. Through helping organisations to create arenas where a wider range of emotional expression for males is normalised, EPs can support schools to improve the social-emotional climate for all, promoting help-seeking behaviour for all genders.

### 5.4.4. Emotional Literacy

Boys are consistently shown to have poorer EL than girls (Alemdar, 2018; Pinkett, 2018). Potentially due to being socialised to avoid particular emotional expressions, engagement with emotion, and conversation about emotion, boys' language around feelings is often exceptionally limited. This can be changed through both modelling

and programmes at primary and secondary level which address EL at an early stage. Having better EL is linked with improved emotional regulation and confidence to speak about emotions (Goleman, 2009; LeBlanc et al., 2020). Having the words for, and the experience of having, conversations of this type are, therefore, vital if boys are expected to talk instead of rage.

EPs have been effective in training school staff to become EL Support Assistants (ELSAs), then offering supervision to those staff as they support CYP to progress in understanding their emotions. ELSAs receive training on many child development theories alongside activities which improve children's EL (Krause et al., 2020), both in and out of school (Wilding & Claridge, 2016), and boys could benefit greatly from this support. Additionally, programmes such as Zones of Regulation have been evidenced to improve EL for children in many dissertations and theses, and further peer-reviewed publications to empirically evidence its effectiveness would be beneficial.

### 5.4.5. Discuss masculinity directly with boys.

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) discuss that throughout their many years of research with boys in schools, adults are shocked boys can critically consider masculinity and the impact of their social actions. Most boys they work with, however, felt perfectly capable, but didn't have opportunities, or feel safe to, think about their experiences because of policing and gender regulation from peers and teachers.

The present study's participants provided many examples of recognition of their actions and how it affected group relations but appeared unable or unwilling to change behaviour because of their regulated confinement. Perhaps as psychologists and educators we underestimate boys, because what we see in peer group behaviour is this:

> **Harvey**: But if he was on Xbox in front of like six, seven other lads then yeah.
>
> **Elliott**: Yeah.
>
> **Harvey**: Sat there crying to us all going, "oh, my dog's passed away". You know one person's gonna give it a little giggle and the whole party is going off at him.

But when given a moment to think and reflect, we also get this:

> **Tom**: If we go to the toilet and cry, what would happen?
>
> **Harvey**: Get called gay.
>
> **Elliott**: Gay.
>
> **Charlie**: Gay.
>
> **Harvey**: We joke about shit like that, but think about it.

Both quotes are from the same person, perhaps demonstrating someone stuck in habitual boyhood whilst searching for opportunities to question how the group impact each other emotionally and socially. Through alternative research methods, perhaps

a deeper exploration and understanding of boys' reflections on their relationships could have been gained. In the book, Young Masculinities, Frosh et al. (2002) rue the popular image of angry, grunting, inarticulate teenage boys, as their experience of interviewing adolescent males gave little evidence that this construction stands up to scrutiny. Throughout their research, boys as young as 11 reflect how constraining masculinity is for them. There is a similar feeling from this research, that there is considerably more to be known about what boys hide behind their highly social performances.

EPs can support schools to give boys these discussion opportunities, because reflection upon action, particularly from a cognitive-behavioural angle, may bring about significant change. Though EPs could do this directly with small groups, a more logical space may be through RSE lessons. A model aiming to equalise group divisions, such as Slavin's (1985) cooperative learning may support this, as it incorporates instructional methods with Allport's contact theory to facilitate learning and improve group relations.  Groups can include different genders and sexualities working together towards common goals, researching common masculinities, femininities, and how a gender-structured society can be understood. Adolescents can also be taught the value of allyship, as altering group relations often requires ingroup allies to accept the cultures of outgroup members (Gaertner et al., 1993).

Of course, in an ideal future, genders and sexualities would not see themselves as ingroups and outgroups. In current structures, however, in which difference is defined by the dominant social group (Davison & Frank, 2006), male allies can make a significant difference. Again, this is not to make heterosexual males the central factor in feminist and pro-LGBTQ movements, but as Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinities model suggests, if strength of discourses from males supporting

progressive ideologies outweighs that of the current hegemony, modern narratives of equality can replace the status quo. With this, new expectations, new behaviours, and new norms can be established. McCormack (2014) suggests that with changes to LGBTQ education in schools, homophobia from working class boys towards both straight and gay students is decreasing, lessening male reliance upon the use of homohysteric and anti-feminine narratives to organise social popularity. Though minor glimpses of this were seen in the findings, it would appear teaching and learning around gender, sexuality, and MH may be required to encourage further acceptance and understanding. With this, policing of gender and emotional expression can reduce, and acceptance of engagement with emotions and help may increase.

### 5.4.6 Training for schools

Sexual harassment, the majority of which is enacted by males, has long impacted schools in the UK. The House of Commons Library has published guidance on Sexual Harassment in Schools in December 2023 (Long, 2023) following numerous publications by Ofsted stating the severity of the problem and the significant requirement for change if society is to take gender equality seriously. Though the guidance is of value in relation to schools' duties, behaviour and bullying policies, and how to manage allegations, there is little on the teaching models which could enable change in school. Direction on the RSE curriculum is included, but there are further psychologically evidenced teaching models which could encourage gender equality in schools.

Cooperative learning is a teaching method used to operationalise the principal elements of Allport's (1954) contact theory, in which small teams of varying academic ability work together to achieve success in a project (Slavin & Cooper, 1999). It combines the 4 key tenets of contact theory; equal status of groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities (Sutton & Douglas, 2013) to create a classroom environment which improves intergroup relations, thus decreasing prejudice. Where much of the current research regarding cooperative learning has evidenced improved race relations (Lazarowitz, 1984; Walker & Crogan, 1998; Lopez-Reyna, 1997), the same can be achieved between genders and sexualities, thus decreasing the prominence of masculinity's hegemony, and reducing the subordination of females and more feminine men.

EPs can deliver training which firstly discusses the necessity for gender equality to reduce sexual harassment in school, followed by teaching in how to deliver project-based learning through cooperative learning. Recent research by Abramczyk and Jurkowski (2020) shows that the majority of teachers knew of cooperative learning and its strong evidence base (Hattie, 20013; Kyndt et al, 2013), but few had enough knowledge of it to accurately and effectively implement it in the classroom. By offering training, EPs can solidify teachers' understanding of the cooperative learning model, their understanding of its value for teaching and learning, and its merits in effecting change towards equality for all students.

### 5.5. Implications for EP practice at an individual level

There are many complicating factors with discussing implications for EPs and recommendations for their, and schools', future practice. This is due to the divergence of where we currently are and where we hope to soon be with schools

and male EW. Beyond MH, it is challenging to engage males in positive health and help-seeking behaviours across all areas of wellbeing (Evans et al., 2011). Those in health promotion are either targeting males through catering to current masculinity standards that oversimplify masculinity as a single typology (Wilkins & Baker, 2004), or offer fresh ideologies for broader gender discourses that could define newer and healthier masculinities (Smith & Robertson, 2008). It is therefore key to discuss organisational strategies which help us towards a contrasting future in which more males are more able to seek help for emotional difficulties, and ideas for individuals based on the current help-seeking difficulties they are facing.

### 5.5.1. Solution-focused approaches

Evidence from the findings and literature review suggest boys struggle to talk about problems, use emotion-based language, and express varied emotions about difficulties. Therapeutic strategies which require less focus on emotions may therefore be helpful, such as conversations based on solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT).

SFBT is a method of talking with people to enable them to make change towards a preferred future. Professionals use questions based around the language a person has already used to support them in talking themselves out of their own problems (Miller, 2017). SFBT focuses upon the person's skills and resources they have demonstrated in discussion so they can name ways forward for themselves, without professionals giving advice or telling (Ratner et al., 2012).

Given boys' difficulty naming emotions and discussing problems, conversations which use the language they are already using that move quickly towards solutions

appear a logical and valuable option. As seen in the findings, boys rarely state feeling anxious or depressed; with males more likely to say they feel ‘useless’, ‘angry’ or ‘stressed’ than words typically associated with anxiety, depression, or other significant emotional distress (Shand et al., 2015). In using the language boys use, we show understanding and listening skills, and by not focusing on problems and feelings, we may avoid discomfort for boys who ask for help. In enabling boys to use their own ideas and strategies, we empower them to feel independent and in control of their emotional lives, much like how many boys want to be seen.

SFBT has a very strong evidence base (Gingerich & Peterson, 2013) and is considered short-term support, benefitting teachers and students, who both recognise school staff have limited time to support students with wellbeing issues (Fox & Butler, 2007; Graham et al., 2011). Furthermore, SFBT is a questioning approach that need not take place in formal therapeutic sessions, which boys struggle to engage with (Haen, 2011) and are often considered uncomfortable and ill-suited for boys’ relational and communication styles (Kiselica et al., 2008). Though additional research on effectiveness of SFBT for adolescent males would be beneficial, it features many elements that may make it suitable for this demographic. EPs could offer training to schools on SFBT approaches, potentially alongside consultation and supervision for specific CYP.

### 5.5.2. Online support

For similar reasons, and as supported by reviewed literature, having online support available for boys may enable them to seek help more confidently. This does not mean EPs or schools should suddenly provide online MH services, but a range of

online resources are already available to CYP. One such service, Kooth (2021), has seen significant increase in male users since the COVID-19 pandemic, which, whilst concerning, evidences males' willingness to seek support online when aware of it. Being aware of online services and apps available to local CYP and promoting them in school may support boys' help-seeking. Schools could also consider methods of enabling students to seek support without having to first ask face-to-face, as boys may feel safer requesting support discreetly.

## 5.6. Limitations

### 5.6.1. Sample

CDA research is not expected to create generalisable findings. However, as part of Fairclough's (2013b) three-dimensional framework of CDA, research is expected to consider how discourse is embedded within sociocultural practices at many levels; the immediate situation, the wider institution, and at societal levels. As such, discussion has focused heavily on the interactions between the group, how this might be impacted by the institution (school) and what broader societal narratives might be driving their discourse. The four participants and their views are therefore not considered to be indicative of all society, but it has been key to recognise their discourses are likely embedded in these multiple systems.

This does not change, however, that four boys' views do not represent everything happening for adolescent males across the UK. Had four different males participated, the findings and how they have been made sense of may have been very different. Ethnicity, class, sexuality, family influences, and many other factors

can impact cultures of masculinity, so it is important to recognise that all participants were white, their school is in an area of deprivation, their sexuality was not verified, and family factors were not explored. Boys in different social circumstances, may have offered different discourses, meaning further research with a range of groups would be beneficial for the literature base.

### 5.6.2. Context

Lack of attention to context has been a frequent and long-term critique of CDA (Catalano & Waugh, 2020). Some theorists (e.g., Bartlett, 2012; Blommaert, 2005) suggest immediate social factors behind productions of discourse are not discussed enough, whilst others (e.g., Collins & Jones, 2006; Jones & Collins, 2006) suggest relation to social history of linguistic phenomena is not analysed in ways enabling realistic social change. In relation to the former, context and social factors of the discourse production is described thoroughly below and in the methodology section of this study. For the latter, this research has attempted, through its introduction, findings, and discussion to recognise the context of the social history of gender and its power structures and placed the micro forms of interaction within this throughout analysis.

Despite these efforts, it should be recognised that analysed data was not from a naturally occurring conversation. Though care was taken not to influence conversation, the group were still assembled for the purpose of the study, were aware their conversation was being recorded, and I was present and listening throughout. Even with attempts to make it natural, FGs are contrived settings, as it is unusual to expect people to sit round a table and discuss potentially taboo topics

with a microphone and a stranger listening (Cyr, 2019). Group dynamics, confidence in speaking their truths, and thus ecological validity may therefore have been impacted by these factors.

### 5.6.3. Ethics

Protection of participants was key to the research design, particularly as it related to the potentially sensitive topic of MH, and participants were under the age of 18. Support was offered to students on multiple levels, including opportunities to speak to me after the FG, naming of key adults in school, and suggestions of online support methods. What was not anticipated, however, was the potential identification of power structures within the group during analysis. As much of the language was potentially harmful towards many social groups, there was a risk of critique of such language appearing critical of individual participants themselves. As such, steps have been taken to reduce naming of individual participants throughout the findings, so that individual participants are not subsequently labelled negatively.

It would have been of intrigue and value to discuss particular participants in more detail and how their language impacted upon what I saw as the group's hierarchical structure. This, however, risked the possibility of participants, if reading the study, having negative thoughts about their contributions or social position amongst peers. It is recognised that should a reader, or participants, want to make assumptions about specific quotes attributed to individual participants and their positioning, they could. Leaving this as implicit, however, reduces risk of individuals being singled out as behaving in particular ways towards others. Upon discussion with my supervisor, pseudonymising participants was considered enough to protect against this issue.

Participants were also asked whether they were willing to have their quotes used anonymously in the research and all agreed.

Throughout data collection, discussions were left to flow freely, and I offered minimal interruption. This ensured no views were encouraged, dismissed, or negatively commented upon. I sat away from the group to ensure I did not influence discourse, and all topics for discussion were presented on a piece of paper and read aloud in a neutral tone. When occasional questions were asked, or when the group asked for further prompting, these were responded to in a neutral tone.

Another ethical limitation related to the decision not to include children who were considered by the school to have experienced MH difficulties in the past. At the time of initially requesting ethical approval, it seemed logical to not allow children who had experienced MH difficulties to participate in the focus group to reduce the risk of these children experiencing further MH difficulties, triggered by the potential topics of conversation. Upon reflection, this may have excluded some young people who may have had valuable contributions to make to this research. This decision may have also reduced the emancipatory potential of the study.

### 5.7. Dissemination Strategy

This study's findings will be shared with Tavistock and Portman University's Educational Psychology staff and students as part of their thesis presentation day. Findings will also be shared at a team meeting day in the EPS where this research was conducted.

I aim to also have the work published in two separate journal articles. The first will be a research article discussing the findings of the research. This may be best suited to

a journal such as Educational Psychology in Practice. The second will be based on the literature review from this thesis and may be best suited to a journal such as Educational Psychology Review. The research may also be shared with the school in which the study was conducted and shared on social media.

### 5.8. Suggestions for further research

Further research would be valuable in many related areas. There are numerous implications and suggested actions for EPs and schools that are considered theoretically sound and viable in supporting adolescent males to feel confident in increased help-seeking. Many of these, however, currently have limited research bases, particularly with the target demographic. As such, UK-based research on the efficacy of SFBT and EL programmes with adolescent males would be beneficial. Additionally, research on whole school EWB following making classroom feminisation recommendations, such as challenging masculine sexualised banter, modelling emotional conversations in the classroom, and directly reflecting on masculinity and gender with students would be valuable.

Further research of a similar methodology could also be conducted with boys from the UK but who may have alternative masculinity culture, such as across races, sexualities, affluence, and attainment levels. Through uncovering varieties of masculinities and the powers which structure society, EPs can have a greater understanding of necessary support for emancipation of vulnerable groups.

## 5.9. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore how masculinity may act as a barrier to help-seeking behaviours for adolescent males. Though there were many similarities in the findings of this study to current literature, the use of CDA has enabled understanding of how boys' use of language may affect their emotion-related behaviours.

Participants used language to police others' behaviours based on expectations of what masculine emotion-related performances should resemble. These were usually based on glorification of hardness and being stoic, and positioned them, both societally and amongst themselves, antithetically to femininity (and mutually, male homosexuality). Feminine coded behaviours were seen as being overly emotional over small issues, crying in public, and obsessiveness about appearance. This led to frequent naming of times each had failed in masculinity by crying, admission that such behaviours were liable to mocking and bullying, and suggestions boys should not seek help for certain emotional difficulties.

For these reasons, it is suggested adolescent males are socialised into recognising social consequences for emotional expression and help-seeking are greater than the potential positives of receiving support. This is not only due to fear of mocking, however, as participants also showed great uncertainty about their capability and willingness to help each other. This is perhaps due to their limited experience of emotion-related conversations, potentially reducing their EL and thus comfort when others display a need for, or request, emotional support. Potentially due to minimal confidence in these conversations, they use tactics to avoid these discussions, such as joking, random comments, or diversionary strategies to change topic.

This is theorised to be related to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), how males remain socially dominant by using anti-feminine rhetoric to subordinate females and homosexual males. I suggest these narratives are held in place by a gender monoglossia, that which ensures performances of gender do not stray from the typical societal ‘known’ of masculinity. The normalisation of the performances of the hegemonic has resulted in, and results from, a habitus in UK secondary schools, through which masculine domination has become naturalised to the point of non-recognition. Females are thus considered secondary, as evidenced by their frequent sexual harassment and experiences of sexism in UK schools.

This social order currently serves nobody. Homosexual males experience significant bullying by other boys, girls are harassed and assaulted, and straight boys not showing expected hardness experience the same lesser status due to apparent femininity. As schools often work as microcosms of society, this encourages continuation of beliefs that masculine males deserve to dominate societally and therefore continue to attempt to do so in other arenas beyond education.

This gives the illusion of hegemonically masculine males on top, with multiple valid arguments for the privileges afforded by these structures. But this also significantly impacts male MH as consistent discourses telling boys crying is weakness, independence is vital, and help-seeking is for the soft, is perhaps what obstructs males experiencing severe MH needs from understanding their feelings or what to do about them. In schools this often comes out through aggression that hurts themselves or others, and in later life, may be causal to the disproportionate levels of male suicides. A gendered order in which subordinated groups experience such challenge and the hegemonic experience such emotional struggle significantly harms all involved, making a reconstruction of such discourses necessary.

Participants in this study showed propensity for change, in that they offered moments of challenge against homophobic comments and reflected upon harm caused by mocking. With the support of EPs, schools can capitalise upon these moments of reflection, challenge the masculinity hierarchy, and teach about alternative gender performances which support a more equal and prosperous society for all. The feminisation of schools may be an idea scoffed at upon initial reading by some, but its adoption doesn't just provide a potentially better future for women, but for men, and their help-seeking, too.

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# 7. Appendices

## Appendix A – Removed literature due to being duplicate

| Title of paper | Reason for exclusion |
|---|---|
| Silence is Deadly: A controlled trial of a public health intervention to promote help-seeking in adolescent males. | Duplicate. |

## Appendix B – Removed literature as title does meet eligibility criteria

| Title of paper | Reason for exclusion |
|---|---|
| An elevated anxiety level among prepubertal autistic boys with non-treatment-seeking functional gastrointestinal disorders: A case–control study. | Relates to physical health and not emotional health. |
| Masculinity and stigma among emerging adult military members and veterans: Implications for encouraging help-seeking. | Participant age above 18. |
| Help seeking by male victims of domestic violence and abuse: an example of an integrated mixed methods synthesis of systematic review evidence defining methodological terms. | Is related to domestic violence and not emotional health. |
| Patterns of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Victims of Teen Dating Violence and Abuse: Variations Among Boys and Girls | Is related to domestic violence and not emotional health. |

## Appendix C – Removed literature as information in abstract does not meet eligibility criteria

| Title of paper | Reason for exclusion |
|---|---|
| Help-seeking behaviour among Finnish adolescent males. | Participant age above 18. |
| Young Men, Help-Seeking, and Mental Health Services: Exploring Barriers and Solutions. | Participant age above 18. |
| Barriers toward help-seeking among young men prior to suicide. | Participant age above 18. |
| Silence is deadly: a cluster-randomised controlled trial of a mental health help-seeking intervention for young men. | Is a research proposal with no results to discuss. The research was later published as Calear et al., 2020. |

**Appendix D – Removed literature as information in full text does not meet eligibility criteria**

| Title of paper | Reason for exclusion |
|---|---|
| Understanding help-seeking intentions in male military cadets: An application of perceptual mapping. | Participant age above 18. |
| Sometimes you need more than a wingman: Masculinity, femininity, and the role of humor in men's mental health help-seeking campaigns. | Participant age above 18. |
| “We’re Going Through a Lot of Struggles That People Don’t Even Know About”: The Need to Understand African American Males’ Help-Seeking for Mental Health on Multiple Levels. | Participant age above 18. |
| Informal and Formal Help Seeking Among Older Black Male Foster Care Youth and Alumni. | Participant age above 18. |
| Masculinity in young men’s health: Exploring health, help-seeking and health service use in an online environment. | Participant age above 18. |
| Young Pacific male athletes’ attitudes toward mental health help-seeking in Aotearoa New Zealand. | Participant age above 18. |
| Reluctant Help-Seekers and Agentic Victims – Swedish Social Workers’ Talk about Young Men Victimised by Violence. | Study related to help-seeking specific to violence as opposed to the mental health difficulties potentially caused by violence. |

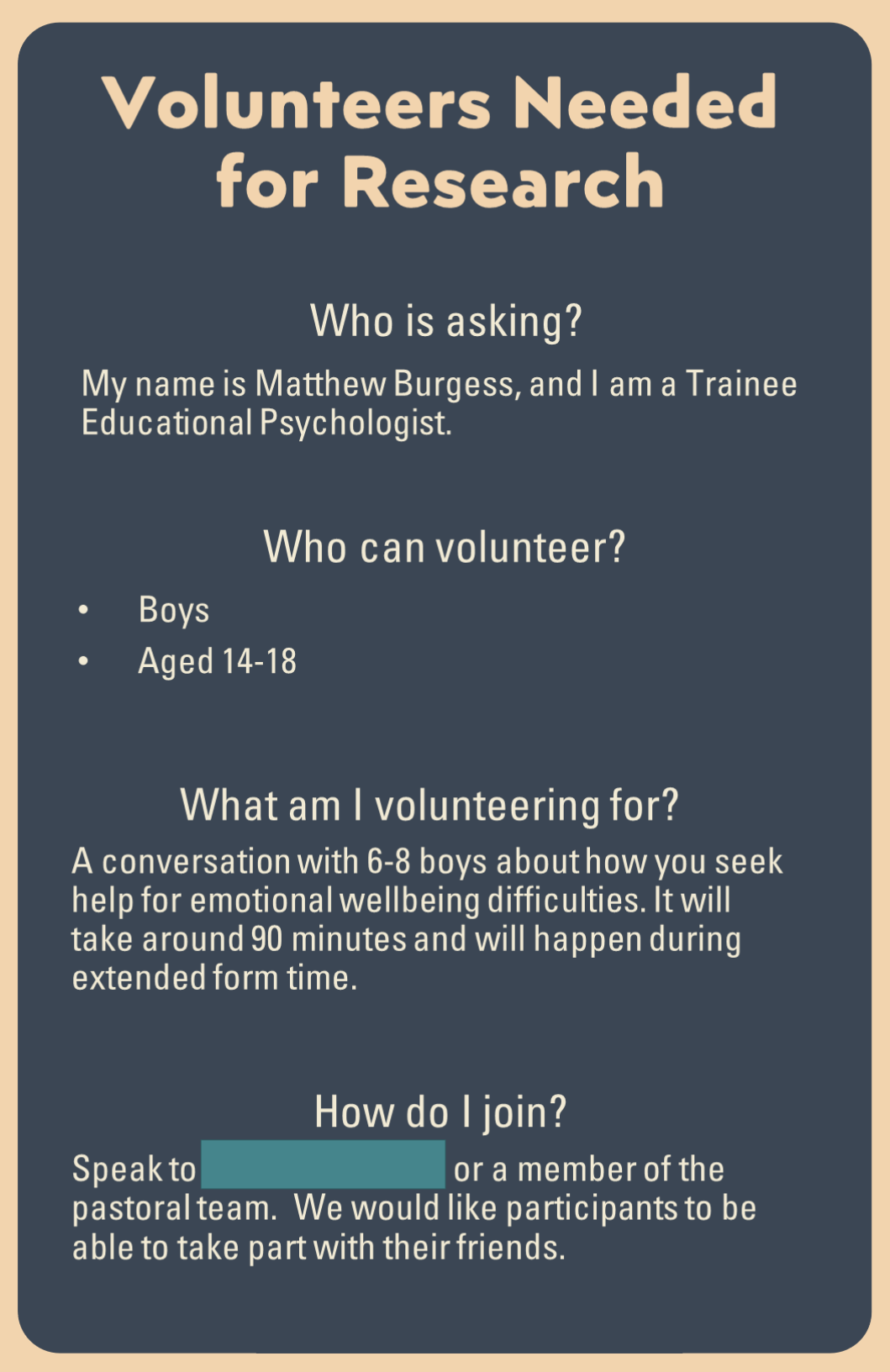
## Appendix E – Remaining papers from literature search following exclusion

| Title of paper | Reference |
|---|---|
| Seeking Help From Everyone and No-One: Conceptualizing the Online Help-Seeking Process Among Adolescent Males. | Best et al., 2016 |
| Social Work and Social Media: Online Help-Seeking and the Mental Well-Being of Adolescent Males. | Best et al., 2016b |
| A qualitative exploration of how young men in the UK perceive and experience informal help-seeking for mental health difficulties. | Burke et al., 2022 |
| Silence is Deadly: A controlled trial of a public health intervention to promote help-seeking in adolescent males. | Calear et al., 2021 |
| Capturing the Attitudes of Adolescent Males' Towards Computerised Mental Health Help-Seeking. | Clark et al., 2018a |
| Barriers and facilitating factors to help-seeking for symptoms of clinical anxiety in adolescent males. | Clark et al., 2018b |
| Investigating the impact of masculinity on the relationship between anxiety specific mental health literacy and mental health help-seeking in adolescent males. | Clark et al., 2020a |
| Anxiety Specific Mental Health Stigma and Help-Seeking in Adolescent Males. | Clarke et al., 2020b |
| Profiles of mental health help seeking among Australian adolescent males. | Liddle et al., 2021a |
| Attitudes about mental illness and help seeking among adolescent males. | Liddle et al., 2021b |
| Utilization of Mental Health Services Among African-American Male Adolescents Released from Juvenile Detention: Examining Reasons for Within-Group Disparities in Help-Seeking Behaviors. | Samuel, 2015 |

## Appendix F – Additional papers found through hand search

| Title of paper | Reference |
|---|---|
| Young Men's Experiences of Accessing and Receiving Help From Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Following Self-Harm.. | Hassett & Isbister, 2017 |
| Perceptions of support-seeking in young people attending a Youth Offending Team: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. | King et al., 2014 |
| Tough, sensitive and sincere: how adolescent boys manage masculinities and emotions. | Randell et al., 2016 |

**Appendix G - Advertisement**



## Appendix H

### Thick Description of School

This research took place in a mixed sex secondary school and sixth form college in South-East England. It's most recent Ofsted report gave it a grade of 'Requires improvement' in their most recent inspection. This is despite them being graded good in all of: behaviour and attitudes, personal development, Leadership and management, and sixth-form provision. Due to quality of education requiring improvement, however, its whole rating was graded as such.

- The school achieves 18% grade 5 or above English & maths GCSEs. The local authority average is 50%.
- The school has 31.9 Attainment 8 score. The local authority averages is 49.3.
- The school 1.2% of the school's pupils have an EHCP. The national average is 2.15%
- 21.33% have SEN support. The national average is 11.92%.
- The number of pupils whose first language is English is 17.2%. the national average is 17.48%.
- The number of pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during the past 6 years is 51.06%. The national average is 26.92%.

This information shows that the school has almost double the percentage of children requiring SEN support than the national average and almost double the percentage of children eligible for free school meals.

The school is also in an area placed in the top 10% most deprived in the country. Though these demographics are not necessarily indicative of the lives of the four participants, it gives a description of the social conditions surrounding them and their peers.

## Appendix I – Application for Ethical review

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

**Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)**

**APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS**

**This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.**

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

**FOR ALL APPLICANTS**

**If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters. You need only complete sections of the TREC form which are NOT covered in your existing approval**

| | |
|---|---|
| Is your project considered as 'research' according to the HRA tool? (http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/index.html) | |
| Will your project involve participants who are under 18 or who are classed as vulnerable? (see section 7) | Yes/ |
| Will your project include data collection outside of the UK? | No |

## SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Project title** | An Exploration of Masculinity as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Behaviours in Secondary School Boys | | |
| **Proposed project start date** | April 2022 | **Anticipated project end date** | 1st July 2023 |
| **Principle Investigator (normally your Research Supervisor):** | | | |
| **Please note: TREC approval will only be given for the length of the project as stated above up to a maximum of 6 years. Projects exceeding these timeframes will need additional ethical approval** | | | |
| **Has NHS or other approval been sought for this research including through submission via Research Application System (IRAS) or to the Health Research Authority (HRA)?** | **YES (NRES approval)**<br>**YES (HRA approval)**<br>**Other**<br>**NO** | | |
| **If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters.** | | | |

## SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of Researcher** | Matthew Burgess |
| **Programme of Study and Target Award** | Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4) |
| **Email address** | mburgess@tavi-port.nhs.uk |
| **Contact telephone number** | 07446850863 |

## SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

| |
|---|
| **Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?**<br><br>**YES NO**<br><br>If **YES**, please detail below: |
| |
| **Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES NO** |
| **Are you proposing to conduct this work in a location where you work or have a placement?**<br><br>**YES**<br><br>If **YES**, please detail below outline how you will avoid issues arising around colleagues being involved in this project: |
| I plan to conduct the research in a school in which I do not regularly work. All schools in the local area, however, are considered a usual place of work, as I can be commissioned to deliver training or support in any local authority school. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Is your project being commissioned by and/or carried out on behalf of a body external to the Trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation).**<br><br>*Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust) | **YES NO** |
| If **YES**, please add details here: | |
| **Will you be required to get further ethical approval after receiving TREC approval?**<br><br>If **YES**, please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below AND include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies (letters received after receiving TREC approval should be submitted to complete your record): | **YES NO** |
| Kent County Council Research Governance approval - https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/research-governance.<br><br>I will be seeking ethical approval from the council after receiving TREC approval. | |
| If your project is being undertaken with one or more clinical services or organisations external to the Trust, please provide details of these: | |
| Kent County Council<br><br>County Hall<br><br>Maidstone<br><br>Kent ME14 1XQ | |

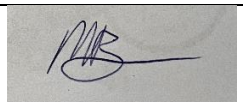
| If you still need to agree these arrangements or if you can only approach organisations after you have ethical approval, please identify the types of organisations (eg. schools or clinical services) you wish to approach: | |
|---|---|
| | |
| **Do you have approval from the organisations detailed above? (this includes R&D approval where relevant)**<br><br>Please attach approval letters to this application. Any approval letters received after TREC approval has been granted MUST be submitted to be appended to your record | **YES NO NA** |

## SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS

**APPLICANT DECLARATION**

I confirm that:

- The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date.
- I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research.
- I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding ethical principles and to keep my supervisor updated with the progress of my research
- I am aware that for cases of proven misconduct, it may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research.
- I understand that if my project design, methodology or method of data collection changes I must seek an amendment to my ethical approvals as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Applicant (print name)** | Matthew Burgess |
| **Signed** |  |
| **Date** | 22/06/2022 |

## FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name of Supervisor/Principal Investigator** | Judith Mortell |

**Supervisor –**

- Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research?
  **YES NO**
- Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate?
  **YES NO**
- Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient?
  **YES NO**
- Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance?

| YES NO | |
|---|---|
| **Signed** |  |
| **Date** | 22/06/2022 |

**SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**

| **1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)** |
|---|
| This research seeks to explore how masculinity may act as a barrier to males engaging in help-seeking behaviours which could be beneficial to their short-term and long-term mental health.<br><br>I intend to recruit approximately 6-8 participants who are male, between the ages of 14-18, and attend schools in the local authority at which I am currently on placement as a trainee Educational Psychologist. Participants will be asked to participate in one focus group, with 6-8 participants, lasting approximately one hour. Participants will be required to consent to their data being used to answer the research question, and for their anonymised quotes to be included in the doctoral thesis and any subsequent publication.<br><br>Participating schools will be asked to identify students who may want to participate in the study. They will be asked to provide a room for the duration of the focus group, which is not expected to be interrupted throughout to ensure confidentiality. This room will also need to be available for approximately an hour after the focus group so that participants have the opportunity to debrief with the researcher. Schools will also be expected to have an appropriate member of staff available during and after the focus group so that participants can speak to someone if they find the content of the discussions distressing.<br><br>It is intended that the focus group will take place face to face in the participants' school setting, providing the COVID-19 restrictions allow this at the time they are conducted. If face to face focus groups are not possible at that time, they will be completed online using an online video call service such as Microsoft Teams. |
| **2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)** |
| Over the past decade, there has a been a significant rise in the number of referrals to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) across the UK, including a 60% rise in referrals between 2018 and 2020 (Lennon, 2021). Up until the age of 10, the male to female split for mental health diagnoses is almost even but by the end of secondary school, there are double the amount of mental health disorders diagnosed in girls than boys (Hamblin, 2021). This, however, is not a full picture of the situation, as suicides in males is over double that of females between ages 15 and 19, growing to over treble that between ages 20 and 24 (Office for National Statistics, 2020).<br><br>It is suggested that a key reason for this gender difference is due to male attitudes towards seeking help. Traditional and respected versions of masculinity socialise males towards seeing toughness, independence, and emotional stoicism as valuable character traits for maintaining status and power (Casper et al., 1996; Oliffe & Phillips, 2008). These views are suggested to be socialised most strongly throughout adolescence (Lundgren et al., 2013), with secondary school social hierarchies |

playing a significant part (Miller, 2009). Some socialised hypermasculine behaviours potentially play a part in male shame and fear of emotionality and the sharing of it (Kupers, 2005).

For these reasons, this study aims to explore adolescent boys' views of how masculinity may impact their help-seeking behaviours. This study will benefit the community as analysis of the data may illustrate the barriers to help-seeking for males and illuminate ways in which schools could improve their wellbeing provision from the adolescent male point of view. Schools which consider these outcomes may therefore be in an enlightened position to provide more appropriate provision for students across the gender spectrum.

**3. Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, *tasks* assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

The proposed research will have a qualitative design. The research will involve the use of focus groups in collecting data and critical discourse analysis will be used to analyse the data.

**Focus Groups**

This research will collect data from one focus group containing 6-8 participants. The focus group will involve participants aged 14-18 from one school in Kent, England. The focus group will be conducted face-to-face, unless COVID-19 restrictions disallow this, in which case it will take place using an online method such as Microsoft Teams.

Preparation for the focus group will consider the questions outlined by Cyr (2019), many of which have been answered elsewhere in this form.

1. How many focus groups is appropriate?
2. Who will be most suitable to help answer the research questions?
3. What should the composition of the focus groups be?
4. What is the recruitment process for the focus groups?
5. What space will be suitable for the focus groups?
6. What are the material needs of the focus groups?
7. What should the moderator be saying/asking?

Due to focus groups involving multiple participants in one space it is important to consider how this may impact confidentiality and the potential for disclosures. As such, ground rules will be written into the participant consent forms and will be explained verbally before the groups commence. Each participant will therefore need to agree that what is said in the group is not shared outside.

Care will also be taken by the moderator that conversation during focus groups is focused upon the help-seeking behaviours of the young people rather than the specifics of the difficult situations which may have led to the help-seeking. This will help to boundary the discussions and reduce the likelihood of disclosures. Participants will be given an opportunity to discuss any issues that may arise from conversation with a trusted member of school staff during or after the focus groups.

**Discourse Analysis**

Focus group data will be transcribed and analysed using critical discourse analysis. The data collection and analysis will be conducted as outlined by Catalano and Waugh (2020).

1. Consult preceding theoretical knowledge.
2. Collect data and context information.
3. Transcribe data.
4. Select and prepare data for analysis.
5. Analyse through a three-dimensional framework (e.g., Fairclough, 2015) on a micro, meso, and macro level, considering descriptions, interpretations, and explanations.
6. Present detailed examples of a range of data.
7. Formulate critique and explain results taking each level of analysis into consideration.
8. Propose practical applications of the analysis, targeting social impact.

The analysis will be completed within 3 months of data collection.

## SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

**4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why these criteria are in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

**Selection of Schools**

The schools selected for this research will be based in the county of Kent. Only schools which the researcher does not have a relationship with as part of an EPS traded agreement will be selected. This is to reduce the likelihood of working with participants who may later require support from the researcher in a different professional capacity. One school will be approached by email to ask if they are interested in having their students participate. They will be given a response date on the email, by which they must respond. If a negative response or no response is received by that date, the next school will be approached. The requirements of the school during the data collection process will be outlined in the email.

The only criteria by which schools will be selected is that they have male students aged 14-18 attending. It is recognised the demographics of various schools such as all boys, grammar, private, and mixed comprehensive may be considerably different. Though it is recognised that the context of the setting is likely to interact with the data, these factors are not considered to be reasons to exclude certain schools from participating. Due to the study adopting a constructionist epistemology, context will be thoroughly considered throughout data analysis and these characteristics will be discussed throughout findings.

**Selection of Participants**

Participants will be identified through advertisement in their school. I will advertise the research to all male pupils aged 14 and older at the participating school. Pupils will be made aware that they will then be asked to select peers, who will subsequently be invited to participate. Each of these peers will also need to be 14 years of age or older.

Each young person identified and willing to participate will be given an information sheet and a consent form. Their parents will also be sent an information sheet. As part of the information sheet, parents and participants will have information relating to consent, the withdrawal procedure, the researcher's contact details, and the contact details of the Trust Quality Assurance Officer.

It will be ensured that only those who give informed and valid consent will be able to participate. On the day of the data collection, this form will also be read aloud to the participants, so they aware of their right to withdraw.

If someone chooses to withdraw during the focus group, I will speak to them after the focus group has ceased. At this point, I will:

- Ask the withdrawn participant if they also wish to withdraw their data. This can also be further explored with their link teacher if they do not want to discuss this with me.
- If yes, explain that their data cannot be removed entirely as what they have said would have influenced others' contributions, but instead I will not quote their contributions.
- If this is not satisfactory, I will delete the recording and the collected data will not be used as part of the study.

Upon the completion of the focus group, participants will be able to fully withdraw their data by a given date, which will be specified in the participation information sheet. After this, data will not be able to be removed from transcripts prior to analysis. This is due to data removal meaning the transcripts could no longer be considered whole, as their involvement will have affected the meaning of other participants' contributions. This will be agreed with participants during the consent process.

**5. Please state the location(s) of the proposed research including the location of any interviews. Please provide a Risk Assessment if required. Consideration should be given to lone working, visiting private residences, conducting research outside working hours or any other non-standard arrangements.**

**If any data collection is to be done online, please identify the platforms to be used.**

This research will take place in a school encompassed in the local authority in which I currently work on placement. It will be a requirement that the participating school must have a comfortable, safe, and confidential space for the focus groups to take place.

**6. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?*(Tick as appropriate)***

Students or Staff of the Trust or Partner delivering your programme.

Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).

Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)[1]

Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.

Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.

Adults in emergency situations.

Adults[2] with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).

Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).

Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent[3] relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).

Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).

Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.

Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

*[1]If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability[2], any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.*

*[2] 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)*

*[3] Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.*

**7. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES NO**

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from:

- the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment)
- their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness).
- where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable
- children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable.

**7.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?**

There are elements of risk involved in this piece of research due to the study involving young people under 16 who may have had prior experience of psychological adversity, as these are both considered vulnerable groups (BPS, 2021). It is not part of the sampling approach to seek out participants who have had mental health difficulties, but it is highly likely that some young people across the school population have experienced psychological adversity. There is, therefore, a chance that they could participate in this research.

It is not expected that the topics of conversation in the focus groups will be a cause of emotional distress, however, there may be some discussions around potentially sensitive topics including emotional wellbeing and gender. It is recognised that due to these reasons, there is potential for those involved to experience stress or anxieties if talking about past harm.

The information sharing and consent seeking process has been age appropriately designed to protect participant's interests by insuring they are fully informed about all aspects of the research. By conducting the research in the participant's school and ensuring that they will have access to support before, during and after the research, from familiar adults in a familiar context, their interests should be further protected. Other sections of this form detail further steps taken to protect their interests.

**If YES,** a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check **within the last three years** is required.

Please provide details of the "clear disclosure":

| |
|---|
| Date of disclosure: 11/08/2020 |
| Type of disclosure: Enhanced |
| Organisation that requested disclosure: Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust |
| DBS certificate number: 001706269793 |

*(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance). Please **do not** include a copy of your DBS certificate with your application*

**8. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research?**
**YES NO**

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

**9. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)**

Information sheets and consent forms have been written using language which makes them accessible to the age group participating. SENCOs will also be asked to read the information sheets to those that still have difficulty accessing the information in written form. I will also be available prior to the start of each focus group so all participants have the opportunity to ask any questions about their involvement.

**SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

**10. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? *(Tick as appropriate)***

use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)

use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection

use of written or computerised tests

interviews (attach interview questions)

diaries (attach diary record form)

participant observation

participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research

audio-recording interviewees or events

video-recording interviewees or events

access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes

administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process

performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction

Themes around extremism or radicalisation

investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)

procedures that involve the deception of participants

administration of any substance or agent

use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions

participation in a clinical trial

research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)

research overseas (please ensure Section G is complete)

**11. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life?**

**YES NO**

If **YES**, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.

**12. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.**

I have completed past research with adults around a similar topic related to male emotional wellbeing. Throughout focus groups, efforts were consistently made to focus upon help-seeking behaviours rather than the specific causes of the emotional wellbeing difficulties, with the aim of reducing the risk of bringing up difficult memories or past experiences. Similar efforts will be made during this research.

I also have a wide range of experiences of supporting young people facing wellbeing difficulties as I have previously worked for a mental health charity which supported young people, as an Early Help Worker, as part of a secondary school pastoral team, and in my current role as a trainee Educational Psychologist. I feel that I am therefore well placed to recognise when participants may feel distressed and can also support any young people who may be feeling distress or discomfort.

**13. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)**
**NOTE:** Where the proposed research involves students , they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

I feel that this research will benefit those involved due to the content of the conversations, particularly regarding male wellbeing, as well as how and when adolescent males seek help. Young males often see needing help as an undesirable characteristic, so it is rare that boys will let others know when they are facing difficulties and have subsequently asked for support. Since conversations in the focus groups will discuss times they have drawn on support from others, the discussions have potential to normalise help-seeking behaviour amongst those involved, potentially making it easier for them to do so in the future.

Participants may also benefit from accessing the findings of this study. Through reading the findings, participants may be able to consider how others were able to seek help for their wellbeing difficulties and adopt similar behaviours. Participating schools may also benefit from seeing what enables young males to seek support and provide an environment that encourages these behaviours.

Participants may also benefit from knowing they are contributing to something that could positively impact others. Research from Alexander et al. (2018) suggests that in many cases, participants who take part in research on sensitive topics can gain an increased sense of altruism due to their involvement in the study. This could therefore happen as a result of participation in this research as young people become more aware of the difficulties males face, meaning they can start to consider how they can affect change.

**14. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)**

The most likely potential unexpected outcomes are those related to emotional distress. It will be agreed upon with schools in which the research is conducted, that a suitable person will be available during focus groups (should someone need to leave at any time) and after it has ended. Before focus groups begin, each participant will be made aware of who will be available during and after the focus group process, so they know what they can do if they find the conversation distressing. There will also be a debriefing period following the end of the focus group, the details of which are in the next section. Details of external support will also be offered at the start and end

of each group, will be shared with school staff, and will be included as part of the participant information sheet.

If participants want to leave during focus groups, they may speak to the assigned person, the focus group may continue in their absence, and I will speak to them after the focus group has ceased. As discussed in section 4, the following protocol will be followed if someone wishes to leave during the focus group.

After the focus group has ceased, I will:

- Ask the withdrawn participant if they also wish to withdraw their data. This can also be further explored with their link teacher if they do not want to discuss this with me.
- If yes, explain that their data cannot be removed entirely as what they have said would have influenced others' contributions, but instead I will not quote their contributions.
- If this is not satisfactory, I will delete the recording and the collected data will not be used as part of the study.

Once the focus group has ended, the researcher will invite the participant into the debriefing session if they feel comfortable to do so. If they do not, the researcher will follow up with the participant as soon as possible.
If someone leaves but is happy for the rest of the group to continue, the researcher will ask whether the rest of the group feel comfortable to continue. The researcher will also consider whether the focus group can remain a safe space for other participants to continue.

Following the focus group, the researcher will contact the appropriate adult in the school after one week to monitor participant wellbeing. This adult will have the researcher's contact email and phone number, as will any participants over the age of 16 and parents/carers of those under the age of 16. If the participant is still facing difficulty, a further meeting with the young person and an adult will be held, and the external agencies they can contact will be re-emphasised.

**15. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants.**

The researcher will agree with the school that the space in which the focus group is conducted can remain available for one hour after the focus group has ended. This is so the researcher can hold a debriefing session with any participants who feel the need to stay and discuss anything regarding the session without the discussion being recorded. The aim of said debriefing session is to enable participants to have the opportunity to discuss anything complex, challenging, or distressing that they may have felt as part of the focus group, ensuring the researcher does not simply 'grab the data and run' (Barbour, 2007, pg.92). Should this only be one participant, they may also benefit from having spoken about difficulties they may have faced without the possibility of their peers hearing. Conversations held in the debriefing sessions would not be recorded nor used in any of the transcripts or analyses.

Information related to external services are in the section below, and further information about debriefing, support, and feedback are in the section above.

**16. Please provide the names and nature of any external support or counselling organisations that will be suggested to participants if participation in the research has potential to raise specific issues for participants.**

Young people from the local authority in which the research will be conducted have access to www.Kooth.com , an online mental wellbeing community for all 10-25 year olds which offers free online counselling and support. This website has been approved for use by the local authority.

YoungMinds text line - https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/youngminds-textline/

Childline 1-2-1 Counsellor Chat - https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

Samaritans – phone number – 116123 – email – jo@samaritans.org

**17. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)**

**FOR RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN OUTSIDE THE UK**

**18. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK?**
**YES NO**

**If YES, please confirm:**

I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/

I have completed ta RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration of the location of the data collection and risks to participants.

All overseas project data collection will need approval from the Deputy Director of Education and Training or their nominee. Normally this will be done based on the information provided in this form. All projects approved through the TREC process will be indemnified by the Trust against claims made by third parties.

If you have any queries regarding research outside the UK, please contact academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk:

Students are required to arrange their own travel and medical insurance to cover project work outside of the UK. Please indicate what insurance cover you have or will have in place.

| **19.** Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place. Please also clarify how the requirements will be met: |
|---|
| |

**SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL**

| **20. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.**<br><br>**YES NO**<br><br>If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below: |
|---|
| |
| **21. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.**<br><br>**YES NO**<br><br>If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below: |
| |
| **22. The following is a <u>participant information sheet</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.**<br><br>Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher and Principal Investigator (your Research Supervisor) and other researchers along with relevant contact details.<br><br>Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.<br><br>A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC or other ethics body.<br><br>If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.<br><br>A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.<br><br>Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. |

Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the Trusts 's Data Protection and handling Policies.: https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/

Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

**23. The following is a consent form checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.**

Trust letterhead or logo.

Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.

Confirmation that the research project is part of a degree

Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.

If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.

The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.

Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.

Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.

Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

## SECTION H: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

**24. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.**

Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?

The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with no record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).

The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers are able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).

Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.

Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (I.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)

The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.

Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

**25. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.**

**YES NO**

If **NO**, please indicate why this is the case below:

**NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.**

## SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

**26. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES NO**

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

**27. In line with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.**

1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 10> years

**NOTE: In line with** Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance, doctoral project data should normally be stored for 10 years and Masters level data for up to 2 years

**28. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.**

Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.

Research data will only be stored in the University of Essex OneDrive system and no other cloud storage location.

Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.

Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See **23.1**).

Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the UK.

Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the UK.

**NOTE:** Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).

Essex students also have access the 'Box' service for file transfer:
https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/it-services/box

Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.

Collection and storage of personal sensitive data (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political or religious beliefs or physical or mental health or condition).

Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.

Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops).

**NOTE:** This should be transferred to secure University of Essex OneDrive at the first opportunity.

All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

**NOTE**: For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be overwritten to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.

**NOTE:** For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

**29. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.**

**30. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the UK:**

## SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

**30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? *(Select all that apply)***

Peer reviewed journal

Non-peer reviewed journal

Peer reviewed books

Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)

Conference presentation

Internal report

Promotional report and materials

Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations

Dissertation/Thesis

Other publication

Written feedback to research participants

Presentation to participants or relevant community groups

Other (Please specify below)

## SECTION K: OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES

**31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?**

## SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

**32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.**

Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant)

Recruitment advertisement

Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant)

Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)

Assent form for children (where relevant)

Letters of approval from locations for data collection

Questionnaire

Interview Schedule or topic guide

| |
|---|
| Risk Assessment (where applicable)<br><br>Overseas travel approval (where applicable) |
| **34. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.** |
| |

**Appendix J – Participant Information Sheet (First Young Person)**

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (First Young Person)

**Research Title: An Exploration of Masculinity as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Behaviours in Secondary School Boys**

### Who is doing the research?

My name is Matthew Burgess. I am a trainee Educational Psychologist in my second year of study. I am writing this research as part of my course. Dr Judith Mortell, a practising Educational Psychologist, will be supervising the research.

### What are the aims of the research?

This research aims to find out about how teenage boys seek support from other people when they are facing emotional difficulties.

### Who can take part in this research?

Males between 14 and 18 years of age**.** Your school advertised the research and you have agreed to participate. You will now be asked to invite 6 other participants, who all must be over the age of 14.

### What will I be required to do?

You will be asked to join a small group of other boys at school to talk about how and when you seek support when you are facing emotional difficulties. I will be asking some questions and listening to your conversation. I will also make be making an audio recording of the conversation, which I will then type up. Once this has been typed up, I will then delete the audio recording. The group will last around one hour.

### Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether you want to take part in the research. If you decide to take part, then change your mind before meeting with the group, that is also fine.

If, during the group conversation, you decide that you want to leave, you can. After the group has ended, you will be given 3 options.

1. You are happy for everything you said to still be included in the study.
2. You do not want any direct quotes from what you have said to be included in the study.
3. You do not want any of the conversation included in the study. If you choose option 3, the recording of the group session will be deleted.

**Will anyone know what I have said?**

When the study is written up, some of what people have said in the groups will be used in quotes in the study. The study will be seen by my supervisor and those that mark it. It may also be published in a journal, where other professionals might read it.

Your name and the school you go to will not be written in the study, so people reading it will not know it was you who said a quote. There is a chance that if people who were in your group read it, they might remember that you said a quote.

The only time I would tell your school or parents about something you have said, is if I feel that you, or someone else, is at risk.

**Who has approved this research?**

This research has been approved by Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and Kent Educational Psychology Service.

**What do I do if I am worried about something after the group conversation?**

You can speak to the designated member of staff in school. If you would rather speak to somebody outside of school, the following organisations can support you.

www.Kooth.com - an online mental wellbeing community for all 10-25 year olds which offers free online counselling and support. This website has been approved for use by the local authority.

YoungMinds text line - https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/youngminds-textline/

Childline 1-2-1 Counsellor Chat - https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

**If you have any questions**

If you have questions, there will be time before the group starts, and after the group finishes, for you to ask them. If you have any questions outside of those times, you, or your teacher, can email me at mburgess@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

**If you have any concerns or complaints**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the researcher or your involvement in this study, you can contact Paru Jeram, the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Quality Assurance Officer using this email address - pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

Thank you for reading,

Matthew Burgess

**Appendix K**

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

**Research Title: An Exploration of Masculinity as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Behaviours in Secondary School Boys**

### Who is doing the research?

My name is Matthew Burgess. I am a trainee Educational Psychologist in my second year of study. I am writing this research as part of my course. Dr Judith Mortell, a practising Educational Psychologist, will be supervising the research.

### What are the aims of the research?

This research aims to find out about how teenage boys seek support from other people when they are facing emotional difficulties.

### Who can take part in this research?

Males between 14 and 18 years of age**.** A male in your school has agreed to participate in the study, and they have been asked to select around 6 other males to participate.

### Why am I being invited to participate?

One male aged 14 to 18 years agreed to participate in the study. This person has then invited you to participate in the study.

### What will I be required to do?

You will be asked to join a small group of other boys at school to talk about how and when you seek support when you are facing emotional difficulties. I will be asking some questions and listening to your conversation. I will also make be making an audio recording of the conversation, which I will then type up. Once this has been typed up, I will then delete the audio recording. The group will last around one hour.

### Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether you want to take part in the research. If you decide to take part, then change your mind before meeting with the group, that is also fine.

If, during the group conversation, you decide that you want to leave, you can. After the group has ended, you will be given 3 options.

1. You are happy for everything you said to still be included in the study.
2. You do not want any direct quotes from what you have said to be included in the study.
3. You do not want any of the conversation included in the study. If you choose option 3, the recording of the group session will be deleted.

**Will anyone know what I have said?**

When the study is written up, some of what people have said in the groups will be used in quotes in the study. The study will be seen by my supervisor and those that mark it. It may also be published in a journal, where other professionals might read it.

Your name and the school you go to will not be written in the study, so people reading it will not know it was you who said a quote. There is a chance that if people who were in your group read it, they might remember that you said a quote.

The only time I would tell your school or parents about something you have said, is if I feel that you, or someone else, is at risk.

**Who has approved this research?**

This research has been approved by Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and Kent Educational Psychology Service.

**What do I do if I am worried about something after the group conversation?**

You can speak to the designated member of staff in school. If you would rather speak to somebody outside of school, the following organisations can support you.

www.Kooth.com - an online mental wellbeing community for all 10-25 year olds which offers free online counselling and support. This website has been approved for use by the local authority.

YoungMinds text line - https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/youngminds-textline/

Childline 1-2-1 Counsellor Chat - https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

**If you have any questions**

If you have questions, there will be time before the group starts, and after the group finishes, for you to ask them. If you have any questions outside of those times, you, or your teacher, can email me at mburgess@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

**If you have any concerns or complaints**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the researcher or your involvement in this study, you can contact Paru Jeram, the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Quality Assurance Officer using this email address - pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

Thank you for reading,

Matthew Burgess

**Appendix L**

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

## PARENT/CARER INFORMATION SHEET (first young person)

**Research Title: An Exploration of Masculinity as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Behaviours in Secondary School Boys**

### Who is doing the research?

My name is Matthew Burgess. I am a trainee Educational Psychologist in my second year of study. I am writing this research as part of my course. Dr Judith Mortell, a practising Educational Psychologist, will be supervising the research.

### What are the aims of the research?

This research aims to find out about how teenage boys seek support from other people when they are facing emotional difficulties.

### Who can take part in this research?

Males between 14 and 18 years of age**.** This study was advertised in your son's school, and he agreed to participate. He will now be asked to find approximately 6 others who may want to participate in the study.

### Why is my son being invited to participate?

He has seen or heard about the advertised study in school and has agreed to participate.

### What will my son be required to do?

Your son will be asked to join a small group of other boys at school to talk about how and when they seek support when they are facing emotional difficulties. I will be asking some questions and listening to their conversation. I will also make be making an audio recording of the conversation, which I will then type up. Once this has been typed up, I will then delete the audio recording. The group will last around one hour.

### Does my son have to take part?

It is completely up to your son whether they want to take part in the research. If he decides to take part, then changes his mind before meeting with the group, that is also fine.

If, during the group conversation, your son decides that he wants to leave, he can. After the group session ends, he will then be able to decide on the following:

1. He is happy for everything said so far to still be included in the study.
2. He does not want any direct quotes from what he has said to be included in the study.
3. He does not want any of the conversation included in the study. If he chooses option 3, the recording of the conversation will be deleted.

**Will anyone know what has been said in the groups?**

When the study is written up, some of what people have said in the groups will be used in quotes in the study. The study will be seen by my supervisor and those that mark it. It may also be published in a journal, where other professionals might read it.

Your son's name and the school he goes to will not be written in the study, so people reading it will not know who said a quote. There is a chance that if people who were in their group read it, they might remember who said a quote.

If anything is said in the group that makes the researcher feel that a young person could be at risk, this information will be passed on to the school's safeguarding lead, and may be shared with their parent/carer.

**Who has approved this research?**

This research has been approved by Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and Kent Educational Psychology Service.

**What do I do if my son faces emotional difficulties after the group?**

Your son can speak to the designated member of staff in school. If they would rather speak to somebody outside of school, the following organisations can support you.

www.Kooth.com - an online mental wellbeing community for all young people aged 10-25, which offers free online counselling and support. This website has been approved for use by the local authority.

YoungMinds text line - https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/youngminds-textline/

Childline 1-2-1 Counsellor Chat - https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

**If you have any questions**

If you have any questions, you can email me at mburgess@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

**If you have any concerns or complaints**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the researcher or your son's involvement in this study, you can contact Paru Jeram, the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Quality Assurance Officer, using this email address - pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

Thank you for reading,

Matthew Burgess

**Appendix M**

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

## PARENT/CARER INFORMATION SHEET

**Research Title: An Exploration of Masculinity as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Behaviours in Secondary School Boys**

### Who is doing the research?

My name is Matthew Burgess. I am a trainee Educational Psychologist in my second year of study. I am writing this research as part of my course. Dr Judith Mortell, a practising Educational Psychologist, will be supervising the research.

### What are the aims of the research?

This research aims to find out about how teenage boys seek support from other people when they are facing emotional difficulties.

### Who can take part in this research?

Males between 14 and 18 years of age**.** This study was advertised in your son's school, and one of his peers agreed to participate. This person has been asked to invite 6 of his peers to participate in the study.

### Why is my son being invited to participate?

A male aged 14 to 18 saw or heard about the advertised study in school. This person has then invited your son to participate.

### What will my son be required to do?

Your son will be asked to join a small group of other boys at school to talk about how and when they seek support when they are facing emotional difficulties. I will be asking some questions and listening to their conversation. I will also make be making an audio recording of the conversation, which I will then type up. Once this has been typed up, I will then delete the audio recording. The group will last around one hour.

### Does my son have to take part?

It is completely up to your son whether they want to take part in the research. If he decides to take part, then changes his mind before meeting with the group, that is also fine.

If, during the group conversation, your son decides that he wants to leave, he can. After the group session ends, he will then be able to decide on the following:

1. He is happy for everything said so far to still be included in the study.
2. He does not want any direct quotes from what he has said to be included in the study.

3. He does not want any of the conversation included in the study. If he chooses option 3, the recording of the conversation will be deleted.

**Will anyone know what has been said in the groups?**

When the study is written up, some of what people have said in the groups will be used in quotes in the study. The study will be seen by my supervisor and those that mark it. It may also be published in a journal, where other professionals might read it.

Your son's name and the school he goes to will not be written in the study, so people reading it will not know who said a quote. There is a chance that if people who were in their group read it, they might remember who said a quote.

If anything is said in the group that makes the researcher feel that a young person could be at risk, this information will be passed on to the school's safeguarding lead, and may be shared with their parent/carer.

**Who has approved this research?**

This research has been approved by Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and Kent Educational Psychology Service.

**What do I do if my son faces emotional difficulties after the group?**

Your son can speak to the designated member of staff in school. If they would rather speak to somebody outside of school, the following organisations can support you.

- www.Kooth.com - an online mental wellbeing community for all young people aged 10-25, which offers free online counselling and support. This website has been approved for use by the local authority.
- YoungMinds text line - https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/youngminds-textline/
- Childline 1-2-1 Counsellor Chat - https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

**If you have any questions**

If you have any questions, you can email me at mburgess@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

**If you have any concerns or complaints**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the researcher or your son's involvement in this study, you can contact Paru Jeram, the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Quality Assurance Officer, using this email address - pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

Thank you for reading,

Matthew Burgess

# Appendix N

The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

## Participant Consent Form

**Title of research:** An Exploration of Masculinity as a Barrier to Help-Seeking Behaviours in Secondary School Boys

This project is to be completed as part of the Doctorate in Child, Community in Educational Psychology. The findings of this study will be reported as a thesis as part of this course and may later be published in a peer reviewed journal.

**Please put your initials in the boxes if you agree with the below statements**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | |
| 2 | I understand that I have the choice of whether to take part in the study. | |
| 3 | I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researcher will not be shared with others, unless they are concerned that I, or someone else, is at risk of harm, as per safeguarding rules. | |
| 4 | I understand that, as per safeguarding rules, if the researcher is concerned that I am at risk of harm to self and/or others, this will need to be shared with a member of the school's safeguarding team. | |
| 5 | I understand that an audio recording will be taken during the group and agree to this information being held by the researcher and the research supervisor. | |
| 6 | I understand that quotes I say during the groups will be used in publications of the study, but my name will not. | |
| 7 | I understand that despite my name being removed, other people in my group may recognise one of my quotes. | |
| 8 | I agree to take part in the above study | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Participant name: | Date: | Signature: |
| Researcher name: | Date: | Signature: |

**Interview Schedule**

As is common in discursive research, the focus groups will be conducted with the researcher asking few questions and allowing the conversation to be directed by participants. The focus groups aim to provide a space which enables as naturalistic a discussion as possible. Some follow up questions may be used if the conversation moves significantly away from the initial topic, but the researcher aims to give minimal input. An interview schedule with specific questions has therefore not been provided.

## Appendix O – Description Level analysis

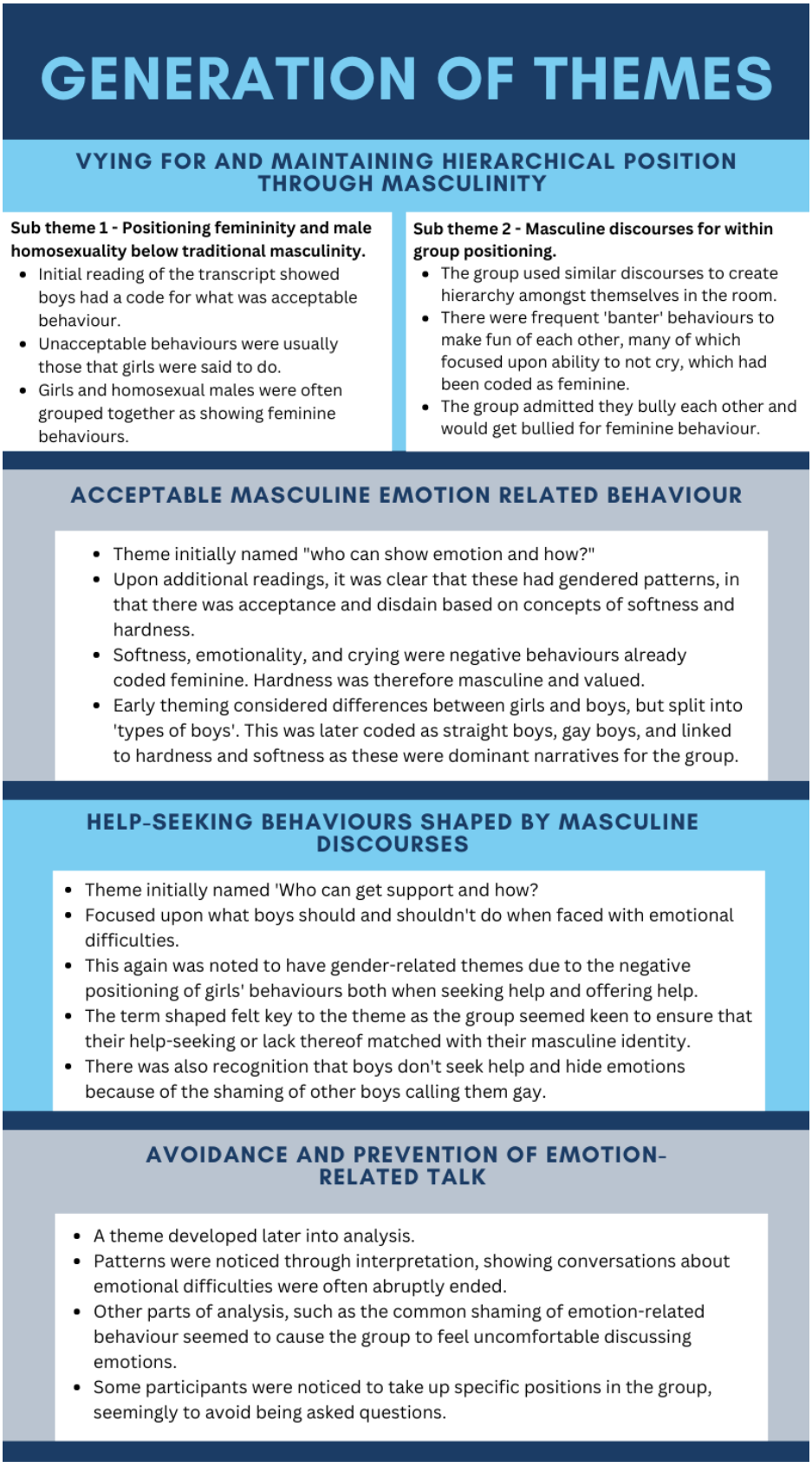
<table>
<tr><th>Quote</th><th>Experiential value of words & grammar</th><th>Relational value of words & grammar</th><th>Expressive value of words & grammar</th><th>Interactional conventions & larger scale structures</th><th>Metaphors & linking of sentences</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Harvey: It’s not wrong is it? I’m just saying I would not like it if, I dunno, to have a gay child, I wouldn’t wanna have a gay son.<br>Elliot: So what would you do?<br>Charlie: Kill ‘em.<br>Tom: Put ‘em up for adoption.<br>Harvey: Naaa, I’m just like.<br>Charlie: Well, it’s hard though.<br>Harvey: I wouldn’t do anything, you can’t do anything.<br>Charlie: How would your dad react if you said you were gay?<br>Harvey: He would faint. He wouldn’t know how to cope with it.<br>Tom: Yeah.<br>Charlie: Every dad, will have questioned it. No dad would cope with it.<br>Harvey: You can’t just disown them or kill 'em or put 'em up for adoption.<br>Elliot: Na, that’s just out of order. Just because of their sexuality?<br>Harvey: You have to support their decision and let it go, innit. You can’t just start… that’s the only thing you’d do.<br>Charlie: I’d be quite scared about that.<br>Harvey: Then you’ve just got two daughters instead of one.</td><td>"No dad would cope with it"<br>Drawing upon experience of relationship and discussion with father.</td><td>"I dunno"<br>Protection of relationship in case group disagrees.</td><td>"You have to support their decision and let it go"<br>Collective 'you' and 'have to', 'let it go'.<br>Expression of certainty and disappointment.</td><td>"I dunno"<br>Dysfluency.<br>Pausing and questioning the view in case the discourse is rejected by the group.</td><td>"Let it go"<br>Mourning the loss of something valuable (their child's heterosexuality).</td></tr>
<tr><td>"Kill 'em"<br>"Put 'em up for adoption".<br>Experience of acceptability of statements of dislike against gay males.</td><td>"Na, that’s just out of order. Just because of their sexuality?"<br>Agreement with disagreement. Perhaps awaiting opposition to previous group views of "kill 'em", to align with less harsh views.</td><td>"Well, it's hard though"<br>Agreement and empathy.</td><td rowspan="3">"It's not wrong, but…"<br>Use of a disclaimer. I don't have a problem with gay people I just don't want a gay son.</td><td>"I wouldn’t… you can’t…"<br>Linking of 'I' with collective 'you'.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">"You can't do anything".<br>Beliefs around potential consequence of doing 'something' in reaction to having a gay son.</td><td>"Then you’ve just got two daughters instead of one."<br>Use of humour following disagreement between group.</td><td rowspan="2">"I'd be quite scared about that."<br>Expression of worry and social identity. Someone who also does not like the idea of having ga children.</td><td>"You can’t just disown them or kill 'em or…"<br>Linking back to previous claims made by others.</td></tr>
<tr><td>"I'd be quite scared about that"<br>Alignment with most of group. Worry about the situation accepted whilst disownment not.</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

## Appendix P – Interpretation level analysis

| Quote | Meaning of utterance | Local coherence | Intragroup power relations | Institutional and societal power relations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Researcher:** You said something, like, for some people you wouldn't be surprised if you saw them crying.<br>**Harvey:** Yeah. Because they're not masculine.<br>**Researcher:** Well, Ok. What about, what is it about these people? Who are these people that you think would be crying more?<br>**Harvey:** The soft ones. They're all like fragile. If you dig them in the arm, they get all sensitive and don't like you anymore, or something like that. So, if you did something like that to Elliot, if you dig him in the arm a bit too hard he gets a bit emotional, but if you did it to Tom Smith then he's gonna start running away crying and stuff like that, innit?<br>**Elliot:** I just get more angry.<br>**Tom:** It's like appearance as well though, innit.<br>**Harvey:** it's like about…<br>**Charlie:** What about appearance?<br>**Harvey:** Well look at Noah, like, look how small and skinny he is. | "Because they're not masculine."<br>People who cry are not masculine. | "I just get more angry."<br>Elliot recognises the claim as a negative and defends against it. | "if you did something like that to Elliot, if you dig him in the arm a bit too hard he gets a bit emotional."<br>Elliot is being stated as emotional and therefore not masculine. This makes him seem lesser in the group. Harvey appears to hold more power in the group as there is little challenge from others about this. | "They're all like fragile. If you dig them in the arm, they get all sensitive and don't like you anymore, or something like that".<br>Societally, people who show 'fragility' and 'sensitivity' are not |
| | "The soft ones. They're all like fragile."<br>People who are not masculine are soft. | Agreement amongst 3 members of the group making sense of how 'soft' people appear different to masculine people. | "If you did something like that to Elliot, if you dig him in the arm a bit too hard he gets a bit emotional".<br>Claim against Tom's masculinity, again goes unchallenged. | "We joke about shit like that, but think about it."<br>Getting called gay is a joke and a negative. Harvey recognises the negative impact calling each other gay has on their emotional expression. Homosexuality is an undesirable characteristic/identity. |
| | "If you dig them in the arm, they get all sensitive and don't like you anymore, or something like that"<br>Sensitivity may be a negative trait. | Agreement amongst the group that crying would mean you get called gay. | "I just get more angry."<br>Upon suggestion he cries, Elliot suggests he actually gets angry, perhaps a more masculine emotion that would restore his status in the group. | "They [girls] cry and then they all get little hugs."<br>*Puts on feminine voice* "Ohhhh are you ok?"<br>"take as long as you need" and that shit."<br>Girls' emotional behaviours are discussed negatively. Girls are made fun of for the way they manage their emotions and support each other. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tom:** If we go to the toilet and cry, what would happen?<br>**Harvey:** Get called gay.<br>**Elliot:** Gay.<br>**Charlie:** Gay.<br>**Harvey:** We joke about shit like that, but think about it.<br>**Tom:** and then what happens if a girl goes to the toilet and cries?<br>**Harvey:** They cry and then they all get little hugs.<br>**Tom:** *Puts on feminine voice* “Ohhhh are you ok?”<br>**Charlie:** “take as long as you need” and that shit.<br>**Harvey:** You gotta think about it like that. | "It’s like appearance as well though, innit"<br>Some people 'look' less masculine and 'soft'. | | | |
| | Being small and skinny equates to less masculinity. | | | |
| | **Harvey:** Get called gay.<br>**Elliot:** Gay.<br>**Charlie:** Gay.<br>In the wider peer group, crying equates to homosexuality. | | | |
| | We joke about shit like that, but think about it.<br>"You gotta think about it like that."<br>Calling each other names for crying requires reflection because of the impact it might be having on the group. | | | |

## Appendix Q – Generation of themes



## Appendix R – Reflexive Accounts

### Social Location and Emotional Responses to Respondents

Social Location

Similarly to all participants, I am white, male, and grew up in a very nearby location to their school. Though I do not know their class for certain, their school is in an area of deprivation, meaning there may have been an assumption they have also grown up in a working-class household.

Though these factors do not guarantee sameness, I found myself reading the transcript and seeing my own teenage voice in many of the discourses the group used. Homophobia and displaying of toughness were common experiences for myself and my peer group throughout secondary school, alongside the social consequences of sadness or crying. Each of these factors may have influenced how I interpreted the data, particularly in cases where discourses appeared similar to my own experience of either using or being subjected to them previously.

Emotional Response

It was evident throughout analysis that the content of the data brought out many emotional responses. Some of these related to homophobic and anti-feminine comments that I now see as harmful. When of a similar age to participants, however, I had little awareness of its potential wider impact. Through this lens, some of the groups' comments were difficult to hear and read. I had assumed, given the social progress in the area, that using sexuality-related comments to disparage others was a relic of the past. Recognising it still continues was challenging.

Additionally, having experienced mental health difficulties and heard many comments relating to “I had no idea” and “you’ve been hiding that well” show that perhaps I too experience the lack of emotional expression and ability to seek help that affects many males. I have also lost male friends to suicide, which is one of the key reasons I am drawn towards this research topic. Recognising that certain members of the group were happy to admit bullying others because of their emotional expression, therefore elicited certain emotions. The negative comments occasionally made, and how the participants using these comments seemed to have the most social dominance in the group, was also difficult to hear.

These emotional responses may therefore have had an impact upon my interpretation. I made my best attempts not to name particular participants who I felt engaged in these narratives most frequently, but I recognise this, amongst many of the factors below may have altered what I thought and wrote in the findings.

**Academic and personal biographies**

Academic Biography

I have researched masculinity previously for an MSc qualification, and it has become a significant area of interest. I have therefore been reading about gender theory since around 2016 and have a stronger understanding of, and interest in, some theories than others. As is likely clear from this thesis, I have read much of Raewynn Connell’s work and am interested by her theory relating to masculine hierarchies. It is therefore recognised that when I analysed data from this study, there is a possibility that I saw the language through the lens of the theories I have closely

studied. This may have impacted how I saw many of the discourses as actions to gain power amongst peers.

I have also taken a keen interest in critical psychology over a similar period of time, making the work of Ian Parker, Isaac Prillentensky, Erica Burman, and others initially of great interest. In trying to understand their ideas, it became a requirement to better understand the work of Marx, Engels, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Foucalt, and others. Though there is no doubt that this reading has been of value to my understanding of masculinity and other social phenomena, it will undoubtedly have shaped how I research. Critical psychology literature considers itself of emancipatory value and against positivistic, supposedly value-free research. This may have impacted my choice of language throughout, as well as my selection of epistemology and ontology.

Personal Biography

I am white, male, and grew up in a working-class household in South-East England. Though this financial position improved through my childhood and adolescence, I have always lived in an area of significant deprivation. My peers were of a similar background. Given that the research took place in a school near to where I live, I may have related myself to the participants closely and this may have affected how significantly I interpreted their words through a prism of my own experience.

Gender will undoubtedly have been a factor in my interpretations. I do not consider myself to have been bullied throughout school, but there are certainly periods of my childhood which were affected by hierarchies of boys who cared little for my wellbeing when making my life more difficult. I then enacted this upon others and

appreciated the social gains I got for fighting, making fun of others, or boasting sexual prowess. These experiences are likely to have coloured how I interpreted the group's words. Having only lived as a boy and mostly focused upon masculinity theory, there is also a possibility that my lens is to code certain acts as masculine behaviours when they are purely human behaviours.

## Institutional and interpersonal contexts

Philosophical choices have been discussed above and below, so this section will focus upon political and institutional contexts.

Political contexts are likely to have impacted my thinking. Gender is currently a hot topic politically due to the constant political narrative around transgender people in the UK. This is not to say that I agree with all suggestions around this issue, but I am concerned about the narrative that gives hard lines of what gender is and should be. When added to the worrying statistics around sexual harassment of girls in schools, it may have impacted my interpretation when participants used discourses around what boys and girls do. This was particularly so when some stereotypes of women's emotional behaviours came through in the data.

Additionally, there is much discussion around 'online alpha males' currently, particularly Andrew Tate. Tate makes misogynistic comments regularly online and is well respected by a large amount of adolescent males. I am concerned about the impact of Andrew's Tate's narratives and how these may influence how young people think about emotions and help-seeking behaviour.

Institutional context is slightly more challenging to discuss. This thesis is written partially for a doctorate in Educational Psychology, so this will have impacted some

of the literature I read, and some of the sections I wrote. Additionally, my university, Tavistock & Portman is likely to have impacted my perceptions of Educational Psychology and what research within the field is there to achieve. The university is well-known for its psychoanalytic leanings, and though it is not an area I explored thoroughly, this may have impacted my thinking and interpretations at points.

**Ontological and Epistemological Conceptions of Subjects and Subjectivities**

This study adopted a social constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology. Social constructionist epistemology will have impacted the interpretation of the data, as I have frequently discussed how the discourses may fit in with broader societal narratives and the purpose of the language to construct power. Relativist ontology will have also impacted interpretation as none of the analysis contained considerations of material realities of any of the participants. Through other positions, there would likely have been further considerations to potentials of truth, causal mechanisms, and the evidencing of hypotheses.

## Appendix S - Titles of papers included from second literature search

| Title of paper | Reference |
|---|---|
| A Brief Sports-Based Mental Health Literacy Program for Male Adolescents: A Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial | Liddle et al. (2019) |
| Understandings of mental health and support for Black male adolescents living in the UK | Meechan et al. (2021) |
| Facilitating factors for seeking help for mental health problems among Norwegian adolescent males: A focus group interview study | Slotte et al. (2022) |
| Youth sport as a context for supporting mental health: Adolescent male perspectives | Swann et al. (2018) |