



Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#), HC 91

Tuesday 5 July 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 5 July 2016.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Rebecca Asher](#)
- [Great Initiative](#)
- [University of Lancashire](#)

Watch the meeting – [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#)

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Angela Crawley; Mims Davies; Mrs Flick Drummond; Gill Furniss; Jess Phillips

Questions 209–237

Witness[es]: **Rebecca Asher**, author, **David Brockway**, Project Manager, Great Men, and **Professor Nicky Stanley**, Professor of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire, gave evidence.

Q209 Chair: Good morning and welcome to what is our fourth evidence session of this really important inquiry into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Can I start by thanking our witnesses on behalf of the whole Committee for taking the time to be with us today? We know it takes an incredible amount of time to prepare for an evidence session like this and then to come in and give up a morning, so thank you for that. You will know that the structure is that colleagues have got a number of questions they would like to get through, and we have got just over an hour to be able to question you on this important area. Before we move on to those questions, could I just ask each of you to introduce yourself and the organisation that you have come from, maybe starting with Rebecca?

Rebecca Asher: Thanks very much, and thanks for inviting me also. My name is Rebecca Asher. I am a writer and a researcher specialising in gender and equality issues. I have just published my second book, *Man Up: Boys, Men and Breaking the Male Rules*, in which I examine the gender stereotypes that boys and men live with and the detrimental effect that this has on their own wellbeing and on their attitude and behaviour towards girls and women.

David Brockway: My name is David Brockway. I work for a charity called the Great Initiative. Within the charity I manage our schools workshop project, called the Great

Men project. We run participatory PSHE workshops with boys in secondary schools around London and some of the rest of the UK—where we can reach. We have been running for three years now, and in that time we have worked with 3,000 to 4,000 students. We tackle issues around the underlying stereotypes that promote sexist and gender-based violence and negative behaviour. When we work in schools, we work with all the boys in the year group in a preventative approach, so we are not doing targeted work; we are helping all boys understand the issues that underpin some of the behaviours that their peers exhibit and that they may come across during their school and adult life.

Professor Stanley: I am Nicky Stanley. I am professor of social work at the University of Central Lancashire, where I am also co-director of the Connect Centre, which undertakes international research aimed at the prevention of violence and abuse. I am here because I am regularly involved in research that looks at children and young people's experience of domestic abuse and violence in their own relationships as well as their parents' relationships. Recently I have been involved in a couple of studies that I think are relevant to this Committee. One was a large-scale European study, the STIR study, which you have probably heard about a bit already. In particular I was involved in that study in looking at boys' use of pornography, and how it related to their use of violence and abuse. I have also recently completed a review of the evidence on preventative interventions in domestic abuse for children and young people, so I am quite up to date on prevention in that area.

Q210 Gill Furniss: It is really good to meet you all. I just wanted to kick off and obviously thank you all for coming here. Why is it important that this inquiry should focus on the position of boys and young men, and clearly not so much on girls and young women?

Rebecca Asher: It is important to focus on boys and young men partly because we want to stop them becoming perpetrators. Simply, we want to prevent that from happening in the first place. Instead, more positively than that, we want them to become advocates for equality, consent and respect, and be part of that push for a better society in that sense. This will make life better for girls and women, because they are not victims of this violence and this harassment, but also make life better for these boys and men too. What these boys and men are doing is not coming from a happy place. They have something to gain from being better people with healthier attitudes towards girls and women than they have at the moment.

We need the focus because we need to understand why they are doing this. What is happening that is bringing about this behaviour in the first place? My strong view is that it is bound up with gender and notions of masculinity. That is where it comes from. We need to change the culture that legitimises this and make boys and men feel empowered to resist these forces and to create change themselves.

David Brockway: I would echo a lot of those points and start by saying that gender-based or sexual harassment and violence is a men's problem. It is not a women's problem. You need to look at the perpetrators, who overwhelmingly are men and boys. At the same time, to also echo what Rebecca said and follow the core principle of our work, that is not to put blame on all boys. That is only going to lead to a negative place.

It is part of a larger problem of masculinity. You cannot separate the abuse and violence and the language that is part of this whole problem without linking it to the fact that it is

part of the male identity. Believing that one needs to be tough and being told that “boys will be boys” or, “Chin up, son,” is only one part of this. It is the left hand, and the right hand is the abuse, verbal and physical, that women and girls get.

Focusing on the position of boys and young men, from working in schools at a very grassroots level I have seen examples of the larger problem; I have said this is a men’s issue. One school I went to last year, and I will be visiting again shortly, said that for the last six years they have been working with their girls on combatting sexual harassment and on body positivity. I said, “What have you been doing with the boys?” and they said, “Nothing; they just watch a video.” What is the point of getting girls to feel more empowered and self-confident if the people who are stopping them feeling empowered and knocking their confidence are being told, “You get to watch a video”? At the same time, the boys also saw that the girls were “getting” to go to a workshop: “Why do the girls get to do this? Why do the girls get to do that?”. They feel that they are being ignored on the issue. Whether they realise that is because it is a difficult issue that people do not know how to tackle, or whether it is just because they see boys and girls as different and that, if girls get something, boys should get it too, is complex; it is down to the individuals.

But I really feel that this is something that as a culture, as a country, we are treating as a women’s issue—as a girls’ issue—and it is just not. I am a man working in gender equality. I have gone to many events where I am the only man round the table, and here it is again. We need to look at this very differently.

Q211 Chair: Some of our members are detained elsewhere, or else you would not feel that you were the only man round the table. We have men round the table too. But your point is very well made. Nicky, did you want to add anything?

Professor Stanley: I can give some evidence to support the points that have been made already. Picking up David’s point around boys being overwhelming the perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment, in our European STIR study, in the English sample of 724 14- to 17-year olds, 41% of girls, compared with 14% of boys, said they had experienced sexual coercion or violence. 22% of boys participating, compared with 6% of girls, reported that they had perpetrated sexual coercion and abuse. You can see immediately in those figures the disparity between the genders. Girls consistently—and these are girls who are predominantly in heterosexual relationships—reported more negative and severe impacts of all forms of abuse and violence than boys. Not only are boys the perpetrators but the impact on girls is particularly severe and enduring.

From our PEACH review of prevention programmes, we learnt from consultations with international experts in that study that prevention initiatives in schools are increasingly being conceptualised as needing to target boys’ behaviour. There was a very strong view put across from our panel of international experts, picking up on your point, that these interventions need to focus on changing boys’ behaviour and attitudes, rather than simply enabling girls to detect and avoid abuse. However, there was also a strong view from the experts that such initiatives need to avoid blaming or accusing boys, because that is only going to provoke resistance.

Chair: It is important that we have got this as part of our inquiry. Are there any other questions on that or shall we move on to Flick’s line of questioning?

Q212 Mrs Drummond: We have had quite a lot of evidence about PSHE not concentrating on boys, as I think David you just alluded to. To give us a bit more evidence, how much attention is currently paid to boys and young men in teaching about sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools? Is it as dire as we have heard or are things improving?

David Brockway: I can only speak from experience of the schools that I work in, because our reach is only so far. There is a huge a huge variance, I would say. Often when tasked with looking for other ways to work with boys, schools reach out and do come to us, to be perfectly frank, because there are not many others who work with boys. The way in which the work is carried out still has huge variance as well. There is still an attitude when things are done internally and you get the biggest, toughest teacher to shout at the boys, because that will make them think: “We respect him, but he thinks it is bad that we have sexually harassed this girl. We should not do it.” Of course we have just had that point that the punishment and the blame are not going to help.

External organisations make a big difference. I come from that as one, but the point is that it is not just that we have experience and expertise focused on a specific area but that boys find it easier to open up to people who are not teachers who they have to meet every day. It is quite hard for a boy to admit something that is perhaps shaming or quite vulnerable to someone they see often.

In terms of the lack of provision, we get invited into schools. We do not push a sell. We tend to get invited by schools that either have huge problems or that are really progressive and see the importance of tackling these issues. In the ones with the huge problems, it tends to be the case that no work has been done with the boys and so the problem has escalated. However, with those who are looking into the issue already and understand the importance of working with the boys, we find the boys understand some of the issues already. They are very prepared to talk about them. The difference is palpable, because the work has started already. But they are in a minority, for sure.

Q213 Mrs Drummond: At which age do you think we should start talking about it—which age at school?

David Brockway: We start with 12-year-olds—12 to 13, Year 8, is our youngest group. Interestingly we apply the same methodology for a Year 8 group as we would for a Sixth Form group. The reactions are often similar, but their ability and their experience means they interpret the topics differently. We work on a preventative approach, so it helps to tackle the issues before the boys have experienced them. But of course, with a lack of experience, it also means that the boys do not necessarily have the ability to frame what we are discussing in a real-world environment.

I do think you need to start at a younger age and that also it differs hugely on the personal experience of the boys. Working with a 12 or 13-year-old group, there are some who will giggle the moment that we say the word “vagina” or something like that, and they struggle. There are other boys who have been sexually active and exposed to pornography and violent incidents from the age of 10. In the schools that I work in, that is not abnormal. It is difficult to say an age but I say, if you are aiming for a preventative approach, at least 12 years old.

Professor Stanley: I do think that David's intervention is quite unusual in the UK. Most of the work to date that targets young men and boys has been delivered to university students. I do not know if you have had any evidence about bystander programmes. You have had some evidence about bystander programmes. A number of those have been delivered to university students, both in North America and here. They have specifically targeted young men and lads' culture. You will have heard about some that are specifically focusing on young men in their first year at university and aiming to use the power of peer attitudes and values to challenge that sort of behaviour in undergraduates. There is an example written up from the US of the Coaching Boys into Men programme, which is delivered by sports coaches to younger boys. Interestingly when they tried to translate that programme from the US to India, there were problems with moving it across continents.

Chair: We are going to come on to some of that more detailed questioning a bit later on.

Rebecca Asher: I think you two are the experts in this. I would just add a couple of points, if I may. You alluded earlier to this resistance among young men, certainly by the time that they are of university age, to these workshops, which they see by that point as a group telling off and also as a ticking-the-box exercise on the part of the university. The very strong message coming through is that it needs to start much earlier and to be for everybody. Echoing a point that David made earlier, these boys want to talk and they want to feel supported. They feel at a loss too. This sexualised, pornified culture is not one big thumbs up for them. It is difficult for them to negotiate this, and they feel oppressed by it too in different ways. They feel oppressed and they suffer from this culture as well. They want to be able to talk about that and talk about their concerns, and it is really important that they have the space to do that.

Obviously, the older boys get, the more you might want to work with them in separate groups, talk to them about pornography and all the rest of it. However, you can start from an incredibly young age, as I think Big Talk Education, the organisation that you have spoken to, do with children of both sexes about very basic concepts of respect, empathy, decent behaviour and all the rest of it, which are the building blocks to a more detailed and targeted approach later on.

Q214 Mrs Drummond: Okay. That is great; that is a start. Particularly regarding the attention focusing on boys and young men, is there anything else you would recommend that we should put in the report that you have not mentioned?

Rebecca Asher: You will have heard this from everybody, but there is an absolute fundamental importance of PSHE and sex and relationships education being compulsory across all schools and starting from an early age. Also important is a whole-school approach, where the whole school has a common set of values and this is seen in the staff, in interactions with parents, pupils and all the rest of it. It is not an add-on on a wet Wednesday afternoon but something that absolutely comes from the heart of the school and is seen in all school practice, and the curriculum and the rest of it.

Teaching children about gender is incredibly important as well, so that they understand that they do have choices as individuals and there are not set characteristics or ways of being because you are a boy or because you are a girl that are absolutely set in stone and you cannot deviate from. You do have choices. When the boys and young men that I

spoke to—it sounds crazy in a way—realised this, it was a light-bulb moment for them: they could be a different person and that was okay. They were capable of being that and they had a right to be that. That was an important point of recognition for them. There are also issues around the public sector equality duty and all the rest of it, but I do not know whether you want to get into this level of detail at this point or wait.

Chair: No, we will probably come on to that a little bit later.

Professor Stanley: I wanted to say that one of the reasons why schools struggle to address these issues is because of the lack of support services available for young people who do disclose harassment or abuse. Schools are anxious that, if they start to deliver teaching on these issues, students will start to disclose and they will be left holding a can of worms that they really do not know how to manage. I do not think that prevention efforts in schools are sufficient.

There also have to be services that are there to respond when young people do disclose that “this happened to me”. That might mean schools making good links with counselling or domestic violence services outside school, or it might mean specific training for school counsellors or school nurses. But it is difficult to expect schools to deliver prevention initiatives without the knowledge that there are also support services there if students do disclose.

Q215 Mrs Drummond: David, I am sure you have got lots to add to that.

David Brockway: Well, a little bit. Statutory PSHE is a basic and it is all-encompassing. It has to happen. It is a must. Linked to that is that boys really enjoy PSHE. One of the reasons why is they are allowed to be wrong. That links to the state of our whole education system. It is so attainment based. Part of our workshops is not just looking at the harassment side of this negative masculinity but also mental health pressures.

You are probably all aware of suicide being an epidemic in the UK for men. It starts at school and the boys are aware of it. The most rewarding part of a lot of our workshops for them is that we tell them they are allowed to be themselves. We stress from the start there are no wrong answers; there are no silly questions. We always get told by teachers that we manage to do really well with difficult students, because for the first time they are in a classroom where if they put their hand up and say something that they think is going to be disruptive, we say, “That is a great point, thank you. Let’s discuss that.” All of a sudden these disruptive students are being given credit.

This is a huge problem—and part of the reason why we have the sexual harassment and violence—because in the UK, as is the case globally, girls are outperforming boys in every level of education. The boys are aware of this, and like any child they crave positivity—they want to be praised. But they are not getting it so much from their grades, and the girls are. As a boy, where can you get that positivity? Where can you get some props? It is from the other boys. You start being disruptive because you cannot get the attainment. You are not getting a well done or a gold star from the teacher, but you are getting a pat on the back from a boy.

What is the best way that you can be disruptive and get credit from other boys? It is by disrupting the girls. When a girl is getting great grades and being told off, there is a

reason why boys are shouting stuff like—excuse my language—“Sit down, you slag.” It sounds shocking—well, you may not find it shocking after being in this inquiry for so long—but that stuff happens all the time. I have had teachers tell me that if they had to stop a lesson every time something like that happened, they would not have time to teach.

Again, the boys are feeling the pressure of being told to attain and to succeed, and they are going into a workforce where the jobs that traditionally cater to boys are declining, and it is getting worse and worse. We talk a lot about things like skills-based stuff, as we move away from educational, arts-based things and on to skills for boys. PSHE should be considered as important as that, if we are talking about apprenticeships and all that sort of stuff. PSHE should be treated in the same way. It is a basic that we should educate children about things as important as consent, respecting relationships, drugs, alcohol etc., but that has another benefit for those young people and the wider community, and it is mad that we are not trying to utilise that.

The other thing is I could train some male MPs on how to address these issues. We are increasing our training for corporates, and again we do not just work in schools as a charity. I have said this is a men’s issue and it is something that still is ignored: corporate spaces, male teachers and so forth. When it is addressed, men are seen as these benevolent people who have decided, “Oh, there is this women’s issue and I need to pay attention to it. Aren’t I great?” That is the most basic part of being a decent person. We need to treat this with more respect and we need to push that up the agenda.

As a man—this is the thing that men often do not speak about, because men have to be right—we do not get it. We have our white privileges, we have our male privilege, and men need to be able to say that. It is a huge part of my life that I can say I do not understand the issues that women face, because I never claim to. I have not walked in someone else’s shoes. But I have the empathy to try. That is really lacking in the higher up part of how we deal with this problem. You can pass that on to your colleagues.

Mrs Drummond: That sounds like a good idea.

Q216 Jess Phillips: You all seem to be talking about older boys. Lots of the stuff we have heard around PSHE, across the piece, is about it starting sooner and it being age appropriate from the age of four, if not even sooner. I wonder if you feel that some of what you are talking about could be done in primary school as well.

Professor Stanley: There is already quite a lot of practice in terms of delivering this sort of preventative work to primary school children. What there is not as yet is really any evidence for its impact or effectiveness. I am looking to do some work on that, because the body of evidence as a whole suggests that starting earlier with these preventive initiatives would be worthwhile and that attitudes are quite entrenched—

Jess Phillips: Gender attitudes as opposed to talking about rape, for example.

Professor Stanley: Yes, gender attitudes and attitudes to sexual behaviour are quite entrenched by the time young people get to adolescence. There is a good argument for starting earlier. What we do not know as yet is how effective that is. We need research evidence to back that up.

Q217 Jess Phillips: At my son's school, his friends have been talking since they were about eight—he is 11—about how girls are “hot” and what they want to do to them. They are eight.

Professor Stanley: It is interesting to think about where they are getting that language from.

Jess Phillips: Not my son, I hasten to add.

Q218 Mims Davies: First of all, I think we need to clone David. We would save ourselves a lot of hassle. Just picking up on the gender norms that we are seeing in school, there is an area that perhaps Rebecca would want to come into on this one. To what extent do you think that schools perpetuate those gender stereotypes? How does this affect the levels of sexual harassment? I think the Chair and other members of the Committee have been really quite surprised at how old-fashioned, for want of a better phrase, schooling and stereotypes have been accentuated and allowed to continue.

Rebecca Asher: That is right. Before you even get into gender stereotyping, which absolutely follows on from it, schools make a distinction between boys and girls all the time. They separate them out all the time. The problem is that it is woven into the logistical life of the school. It is often not even noticed in the school anymore. I am thinking of things such as splitting up for sports, for classroom tasks, lining up in the playground before you go into school—things like that—and uniform, obviously, before you even get into the subjects that children may or may not be encouraged into.

The logistical organisation around the school is often built around the two sexes. Children learn from that that sex as a classification matters to adults and that the two sexes are different. Of course, they are different biologically. But in many ways, why should there be any difference at all? You then perpetuate gender stereotypes off the back of that. We know that the more gender-stereotyped the beliefs of male adolescents, the more likely they are to practise sexual coercion. You can definitely begin to join the dots between the separation of the sexes, more stereotyped views and the sexual coercion that you are discussing in this inquiry.

We may not think that lining up children in girl lines and boy lines in school is a big issue. When you begin to look at it in the round and the way that that begins to embed ideas about girls and boys as different and all the rest of it, it really does matter. Schools need to take it more seriously than they do.

There is also the kind of casual gender stereotyping that you get in the classroom. Boys do not read, or if they do read they need to read books about football, or boys are incredibly active so they need to be running around all the time, as if girls can just sit there for hours on end on the carpet not doing anything—they are incredibly different. We know from OECD research that teachers mark boys' work more harshly, even if the work is of the same standard. They also expect them to be more badly behaved. Obviously if you expect that and your antennae are up for it, you pounce on it and remark on it in a way that you may not with girls. That in itself encourages bad behaviour.

There are all sorts of subtle and not so subtle ways in which gender stereotypes are being perpetuated in school. It is this coming together of children into school, who will all come, pretty much inevitably I think, from backgrounds where gender stereotypes will be

perpetuated in some way or another, because we all as adults do it, whether we think we do or not, I have discovered along the way with my research. Then in with peers, you reinforce that behaviour. Peers reinforce that gender-stereotyped behaviour and aggravate it in that way. Then overlaying that is the school and practices within the school. It is a real hotbed for gender stereotyping.

Q219 Mims Davies: I had a couple of schoolgirl constituents join me yesterday for a tech and STEM event. They were in Year 10 and they had had to make a point about having an opportunity to continue down the STEM line. Why do you think children are divided up? Is that for ease of logistics or is it people still presuming that what was good for them as young girls or boys is suitable for the young girls and boys coming through?

Rebecca Asher: A lot of it is benign logistical stuff, in a way. It is very easy to say, “You girls go and bring me the paper, and the boys bring me the felt tips,” or incredibly basic dividing up like that. The Institute of Physics and all the rest of it have done an awful lot of research on the underlying prejudices and assumptions that people have about the subjects that children should be steered into. Girls doing STEM is a classic example. But also a classic example is: why are boys not doing subjects that might put them in touch with their feelings more than they are encouraged to do? Why are they not being encouraged into the caring profession? That is a burgeoning field at a time when more traditional masculine or male jobs are declining. There need to be real shifts in attitudes there as well. The girls in STEM is incredibly important, but so is what we are thinking about boys and their futures.

Q220 Mims Davies: If this is benignly done, why does it lead to more potential sexual harassment in schools?

Rebecca Asher: You begin to set up boys and girls as opposites. You embed more rigid and polarised views about what girls and boys might be. As David has pointed to, if you are setting girls up as well behaved, compliant, keeping their heads down, doing the work and all the rest of it, you are setting boys up as the outcasts, if you like. There is this dynamic that has been described by academics as contra-power: as boys wanting to get their own back on girls, essentially. They want to show them who is boss, and if they cannot do that in the classroom or in front of the teacher or in a maths test or a spelling test or whatever, they are jolly well going to do it in the playground, in the corridors, in the lockers and all the rest of it. It is going to happen somewhere.

Q221 Mims Davies: Would you agree that it is a power issue, even at that age, for girls and boys?

David Brockway: Yes, but whether the boys are aware that it is a power issue is an interesting point. Are they actively saying, “This is something that leads me to have power,” or is it just something that comes around inevitably? It is definitely part of all of the building blocks of the gender creation. As Rebecca said, if you start creating girls to be seen in one way, the opposite gets encouraged in the boys. We do see that.

For instance I have just come from a workshop this morning and it is the second day in a row I have been working at this school. A lot of the boys had some confused ideas about sexual assault. Interestingly when they brought up the example of male rape in prison, they all understood that was to do with power. Largely it appeared because they had been

watching lots of TV shows about prison. But they understand that, and it is this idea of, “You do that to dominate someone. That is what you do.” That is a very distressing example of how it is exemplified, but boys understand those notions of power.

Can I add a point here? The atmosphere of acceptability, if teachers are promoting gendered language and either turn a blind eye or say, “Boys will be boys,” can encourage this behaviour. Regarding how schools perpetuate the stereotype and the effect it has on levels of sexual harassment, pupils can feel very ignored or not taken seriously if teachers have those attitudes, or any staff, especially if it comes through the language. This goes back to Rebecca’s point about those little stereotypes of how girls get the paper, boys get the felt tips. That can quickly spread to, “I need some strong boys to move these desks for me.” It is everyday language. We can understand where it comes from and it is hard to get out of the habit.

But if that turns into girls crying and boys taking the piss, they will be like, “Do not be nasty to her; she is being a girl; she is being sensitive.” That might seem in some ways to be a positive, because you are encouraging someone to have their emotions on display, but: first, you have said it to the girls, not the boys; secondly, when someone does have a complaint and is taking it forward, that can lead to possibly a teacher but definitely male pupils, boys, thinking of these girls as emotional. They have taken a cue from an authority figure. We find that all the time. If the boys display a controversial opinion—which they do, to test us—and they see us not combatting it, they will take that as our sign of complicity with that opinion. It is really important for teachers to be very aware of this.

I was going to come on to this later but I will just make a quick point on it now. We cannot underestimate the impact of the internet.

Chair: Can I pause you on that? I am conscious of the time. We will come on to that a little later, if that is alright.

Q222 Mims Davies: The next point was really about picking up those everyday sexism double standards that are allowed in schools. David, you have given us some examples about how it could be tackled effectively, in terms of incidents within classes, where things seen as acceptable for girls or boys to get away with are put into those stereotypical places. Do you think there is a significant issue that then leads to this sexual coercion and the incidents that we are getting in schools that need to be tackled? You touched on the internet, so there are obviously some outside influences that are coming into schools and being allowed.

Professor Stanley: It is a complex picture, isn’t it? It is not a straight line from having separate changing rooms in schools for girls and boys to some boys perpetrating sexual harassment and coercion. We have to remember that not all boys behave like this. There is a whole nexus of things going on that mean that boys end up behaving in an abusive way. Gender stereotyping is part of that and unpins it all, and those struggles for power underpin it all. But there are other things going on as well, and particularly the sorts of households boys may have grown up in, where abusive behaviour may be well established. Maybe it is not just their parents but their grandparents before them. Maybe the community they live in is quite a violent and abusive community, and on their way to school they are exposed to quite a lot of violence and abuse in their neighbourhoods. It is complicated.

Q223 Mims Davies: The converse would be true. Perhaps boys are aware that is not tolerated at home and feel powerless in the stereotypical school situation, where it is being allowed, to stand up for girls. I think “gay” has been used as an offensive term for understanding other people’s feelings. I accept the point, professor, but it seems there is a tsunami going the other way as well that boys have to try to negotiate through. I wonder if David or Rebecca can also add to that.

Rebecca Asher: Just to pick up on the point you are making there, the use of the word “gay” tells us about the very strong policing of supposedly acceptable masculine behaviours among boy peer groups and how pervasive and effective that is as a policing mechanism. It has been called by an American academic “fag discourse”. I suppose we would call it here “gay discourse”, but somebody described that use of the word “gay” to me as: if you are accused of being gay by somebody else, it is almost like a warning shot to you to get back in your box, get back in the man box, and behave like a man should behave. As we say that, we might be thinking in our minds about secondary school children, but it starts much earlier than that: in the toys that you choose in choosing time in primary school or the games that you choose to play in the playground. It starts there—it starts before there. It starts as soon as kids are born. We absolutely need to be getting in as early as possible to prevent that from unravelling and getting worse. Simple, palatable messages about respect, empathy, consent and all the rest of it at the earlier stages, and just being who you want to be at the very earliest stages, are incredibly important, and not soft—it is important.

Q224 Angela Crawley: Rebecca has slightly answered my question, but it was around how much of a role you felt PSHE delivery in schools in the later years could start to challenge some of that. On the point around the outside factors of marketing, children’s toys, elements of the media in general and language, is there a place for something within teacher training, like David said, around getting teachers to challenge their everyday language and unconscious bias in these areas, rather than simply challenging the behaviours further on?

David Brockway: That is hugely important. One of my recommendations is that the way in which we approach teacher training should include a huge element on gender and sexism. This country has been very successful with tackling racism and homophobia in schools, but a lot of teachers feel that sexism has fallen by the wayside as a result—that we have not kept up with that. As we have proven that we can do it with other things, there is no reason that we cannot. Actually, there is a reason: sexism is about 3,000 years old, so it is quite ingrained. But I think it can be challenged.

Q225 Jess Phillips: We will move on to the internet and some of the things that you wanted to talk about earlier. First of all, we want to talk about the effect of pornography. We have heard again and again in this Committee about the effect of pornography, but usually from the point of view of the girls. What measures would be more effective in countering the impact of pornography on boys and young men?

Professor Stanley: Certainly pornography—and you have heard all of this before, so I will not go into a lot of depth—is an issue for boys. Our STIR study found that regular viewing of online pornography for boys was very much higher than it was for girls. It is a boys’ issue. We also found an association between regular viewing of pornography and coercive and abusive sexual behaviour. There is an association there; we do not know which way the influence goes, but there is certainly a strong association.

Young people of this generation are more media literate than any generation before. My kids can deconstruct a TV advert quicker than you can blink. That media literacy has to be harnessed by schools to the task of really taking a critical approach to pornography. Pornography is an enormous, multi-million dollar industry. We are not going to remove it like that, and the internet means that it is readily available not just on computers but on your mobile phone.

For me the answer is schools and teachers need to be skilled and confident—going back to the previous question, teacher education is absolutely essential—in encouraging kids to approach pornography critically, to recognise the misogynistic and sexist values inherent in pornography, and to recognise that it is not realistic. You will have heard about the recent NSPCC study on pornography. Worryingly, over half the boys they interviewed thought that pornography was realistic. Recognising that pornography is a fantasy world, not real life, is enormously important in promoting a critical approach to pornography.

David Brockway: I would echo most of that. We see it all the time for boys. Again on that realism fact, when we tell them it is not real, there is a palpable sense of relief. There is a lot there on the content and the positivity, but then there is rolling it out and getting it to people. On that, it is difficult to talk about. I have been talking to boys about this for long enough that I have heard it all from them and so I am kind of immune. But for teachers especially, I can imagine if a child you have been working with for a long time suddenly starts talking to you about these things, it is not easy. It is not easy for the boys either to have to tell that to a teacher they are going to see the next day. Again, external provision can be really helpful here.

I also think we need help for parents in understanding what is going on and what their children might be seeing, and help for them in being able to prevent this. I know internet censorship and the rest of it is immensely difficult.

Jess Phillips: Sod internet censorship, and people who moan about it.

David Brockway: Yes. I do not want to worry anyone that that is where I am going. If an adult watches pornographic material with a child, that is a form of child abuse. Our failure to protect children from accessing it or seeing it should be treated more seriously. I am not saying it is the same but—

Q226 Jess Phillips: There has been much debate in the Committee about a stop when they get on to it—the idea that one would have to put credit card details in. Do you think that would make a difference?

David Brockway: No. They all know how. The kids that I work with, some of them as young as 13 years old, they have got it on their phones. They have got it somewhere. It is a mystery to me that it is an industry that makes money, because all the kids are telling me that they just find it for free. You can google it, turn off an image thing. They can see enough of it. Gail Dines has done a lot of work on pornography I am very grateful for because I have just copied a lot of what she said. She has got a lot of research here. Please stop me if this is going off the point.

When I mentioned the internet I was not talking about pornography but the other negative influences that can be found there. Are you familiar with the case of Elliot Rodger, who

carried out the Santa Barbara massacre in the US? He was a UK born male in his early 20s, I believe, at this point. He had been in a lot of online chat rooms and various different fora where he had been exposed to very misogynistic ideas about women—this idea of gaming and pickup artists. You will be familiar with those there have been petitions to prevent entering the UK in the past year.

This is why the issue of the internet is important to me, because the traditional sexist bully in school is very easy to pick out. But the quiet boy who sits in the corner not saying anything, gets good grades but thinks that all women are scum because they do not talk to him, when the internet has promised him that if he is nice to them he will get a date, is equally dangerous. That is why our workshops work with all boys. When you work with the targeted boys, you might be working with the ones who are lashing out, but so often those boys have got obvious reasons for what they do. However, there is a generation of lonely, perceptibly nice young boys who are spending a lot of time with their computer. They might not be watching violent porn, but they might be reading someone who says, “As a man, you are owed sex, and if you are nice to girls, you should get it. If you do not, that is their fault.” That really worries me, because we are seeing this anti-feminist backlash, which has got nothing to do with feminism. There was never a feminist push on this, but I will not go into it in too much detail because there is so much evidence on it.

Q227 Jess Phillips: I think it is safe to say we all know that feminist backlash from the internet. I think we have all felt it. I suppose another one of the areas that we always come up against in this is efficacy in what works and what does not. Which projects or schemes are there that we know have evidence of success of working with young boys and sexual harassment?

Professor Stanley: Just coming back to the point about teacher education, I have colleagues in Australia who I know have developed modules for teacher education programmes that are about skilling teachers up to do this sort of work. Those programmes have been evaluated and have been found to be effective. In terms of interventions that have shown success in addressing sexual harassment, there is good evidence for the effectiveness of a bystander programme delivered at the University of Texas. That was evaluated by Coker and colleagues, and they found that, three years in, the programme was having a positive effect on rates of both victimisation and perpetration. Victimisation was 11% lower and perpetration was 19% lower compared with universities where these programmes were not running. There is evidence for programmes making a difference. However, a lot of that still comes from North America.

Jess Phillips: Okay. Is there anything else?

Rebecca Asher: I would just make a couple of points. First, we talked about the technological approaches. I think you were understandably pessimistic about that, and I would definitely, on the whole, share that. I wonder whether one point at which it might be effective is for younger children who stumble across pornography by googling. For example, a friend of a friend of mine said that her son googled “biggest bum in the world”, because he is five and that is what five-year olds do. It might be effective in blocking that kind of venturing into the world of pornography.

The other thing is we were talking earlier about how the whole world needs to change, in a way. It is not just something that schools can do; it is not just something that parents can

do. It is in the media, our general culture and all the rest of it. However, there is a role for schools and parents to work together and for schools to support parents. Parents are flailing here. They have never found it comfortable talking to their children about sex, and most parents do not. Now they are in a world where it is often so very different from the world that they were growing up in, they are flailing. If they can be brought into the conversation and work in partnership with the schools on this, at least you are able to have a two-pronged approach. You might not be able to solve the world, but the pair of you can work in partnership.

Professor Stanley: That is one way that the internet has made a big difference. It has, in a sense, created or widened the gulf in these matters between children and their parents, because often parents do not have the online competence and mastery that their children have. That leaves them feeling even less empowered in these realms than they might have been before.

Q228 Jess Phillips: A lot of the sexist conversations that young men have online—I have been privy to many—are not understandable to people from a different generation. There is stuff about manga, gaming—it is over-sexualised, over-stylised. Most parents would just think it was nonsense, but it is absolutely dangerous.

David Brockway: This is the last point. We do not understand this because, as you point out, the language seems different, because it is something that we can see separately. But we have got to put ourselves in the mindset of someone who has grown up knowing nothing else: the internet being so pervasive that it is always there. I am 27, so when I was the age of boys that I am working with, it was this thing that had just come about. Already for me I am out of date with these boys. It is a very hard mindset to adopt.

Q229 Chair: Just before I bring Mims in, who wants to ask a supplementary, there may be some young men listening to this debate today who may not find it easy to appear to be characterised as complicit in this sort of thinking. Do you think we have to be slightly careful that, whilst we know there are widespread problems with sexual harassment in schools, there are many boys who do not want to be complicit in this, and are not complicit in it? It can feel from some of this debate that this applies to everybody.

Professor Stanley: Yes. We are talking about a minority. The fact that lots of boys do have positive, respectful attitudes is something that can be worked with. Positive attitudes in the peer group are a terrific tool with which you can work to change attitudes among those boys whose attitudes are more negative, because the power of the peer group is very great. Interventions like bystander programmes are trying to harness the power of the many to address the attitudes of a minority.

David Brockway: I would absolutely second that. Our approach in our workshop is positive peer learning—that boys help each other get the answers. We will not dictate anything to them. We let them dig down themselves, which is a long and difficult process, which is why we have to spend the amount of time we do.

I genuinely believe that the majority of boys out there are not sexist people that carry out this harassment. But it is important to understand that a lot of the language, which may not seem damaging to young people, has a huge impact. We have got loads of boys who will argue against other boys in their class about their attitudes and their behaviours. But

then when we ask them, “Is it okay to call a girl a slut?” they will say, “Not if it is just an insult, but if she has slept with two guys, then yes.” Those boys do not consider themselves to be perpetrating the violence, because they are not, and they do not seem to be perpetrating the harassment because they are not doing it actively. But it is still part of an issue, so there is a lot to learn, and more importantly unlearn, about behaviours there.

Q230 Mims Davies: I just want to remind colleagues that there is an Internet Matters event today in Room 12 from three until five with ISPs. We can speak to those people who are very much giving the opportunity to digital natives coming through. I was interested in David’s point about what people are reading and seeing on the internet. There are sites for girls about being thin, what you can eat, what is attractive and how you should be portraying yourself as a young person. Obviously there is quite a lot of press and media pressure to look a certain way and act a certain way, and programmes on TV that are very sexualised, which, through the internet, younger kids can look at no problem. Some of them, I would say, are on the verge of pornographic—what is being allowed on reality TV, for example. The point I am wondering about is parents feeling it is okay for kids to be on the internet for three or four hours, thinking that it is a learning or safe space. But they would not allow them to be on a street corner or down the precinct at certain ages, believing that they are associating with the right people. Is there an element of parental control in that parents are just not understanding what they are associating with online?

David Brockway: From the boys that I work with, it would seem so. They seem to have pretty free rein. I could not speak for parents. But if you have a smartphone, you have more power in your pocket than the rest of our generations have ever experienced, put together, from our childhoods. You cannot control what is in a kid’s pocket. At home maybe, but it is not very easy.

Rebecca Asher: That is right, and the parents I spoke to who have thought hardest about this seem to have come to the position that they are not necessarily going to be able to protect their kids from this stuff, and the best thing that they can do is arm them to be able to negotiate it in as sensible and level-headed and rounded a way as possible, rather than blocking what they were going to see or restricting access. It was more about arming them for what they were inevitably going to encounter.

Q231 Mims Davies: Do you think that most parents would not want to police three or four hours on the internet? If you were being allowed to go out at a certain age for that length of time, most people would want to know who you were with and what you were doing.

Rebecca Asher: Yes. This is going to be from memory, but I think Ofcom research shows that children spend up to eight hours on screens. Is that right? Do you know? I am going to really caution that.

Q232 Mims Davies: Let us take that away and we will look at that.

Rebecca Asher: I can send the link for that.

Professor Stanley: But that is all screens?

Rebecca Asher: Yes, that is all screens.

Chair: I am keen for us to turn our minds to recommendations now. We have touched on this a little bit through the discussion. Can I hand that over to Gill?

Q233 Gill Furniss: Thank you for that. It has been a very good debate: wide-ranging and all sorts of things. It shows the difficulties of it. I have been asked to ask you what recommendations you would like to see this Committee make, but also I wanted to mention a few bits that have concerned me in the past, particularly around the age that we start some sort of intervention. It does seem that waiting until 16, 17, 18, 19, even 12, could be too late. Some of the things you said related to boys' self-esteem. You were saying that they were getting back at girls because girls are cleverer than them or are getting more praise in the classroom. Personally I have concerns about the way our children transition from primary school to secondary school. I do feel sometimes, as parents as well, we have cast them adrift into a big place where parents are not there at the school gates anymore, where you have got all the hormonal things as well. What are your views on that, and could you build that into any recommendations for this Committee?

Rebecca Asher: We have already touched on PSHE—well, more than touched on it. We have gone into it, and I am sure that you will have that from everybody. I know we are pushing at an open door as far as this Committee is concerned. That may well be where you can do some of that transition work. The grading of the subjects that you are talking to children about, and the way in which you talk to them, can be done in a very nuanced and appropriate way. You are not throwing them into the secondary school pool but being slightly warmer and gentler than that.

Also I mentioned before in passing the public sector equality duty. The duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment or victimisation needs to be taken more seriously. We can and should be holding schools to greater account on this. It should be included in Ofsted's assessment criteria, and it is puzzling really that sexist bullying is not included alongside racist, disablist and homophobic bullying in the Ofsted criteria. In holding schools to account for this, if they realise that they are going to be measured by it, they are bound to take it much more seriously. It is the same with PSHE. If it is statutory, you will put more time into it, it will have greater status and there will be more funding for it and so on.

I cannot emphasise enough, as we have also already said, that this is not an add-on. It is about a common set of values that run through the school and that make themselves apparent in the everyday life of the school. You may well have equality champions in the school, and that can be very useful in terms of a co-ordinating role and making sure that everything is being done as it should be. But it absolutely needs to be in the life and soul of the schools as well.

That then links into initial teacher training and also teaching assistant training on things like unconscious bias, sexism and all the rest of it. It should not just be a sheep dip thing that teachers go through when they are being trained but constantly monitored and part of the everyday monitoring of them in the classroom, along with everything else that they do. For me, those are the main points.

Professor Stanley: I think we are all agreed on the importance of statutory PSHE. Making PSHE statutory is a message from Government that will in itself impact on values and attitudes. It is not just about making schools do it. It is also about contributing to the

national discussion about these issues and making it clear that this is not just an add-on that schools can do if they have got enough time—that this is an important part of life that everybody has to engage with and that these values are important.

We have got an example from Australia, where the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children included a commitment to introduce respectful relationship education in schools and there was funding attached to the plan. As a result, there has been an enormous amount of prevention activity in Australian schools, because there was a national plan there and there was funding attached to it, which made for implementation. Having it up there at the top level really does make a difference to what you get in the way of implementation.

Another important point is in the past a lot of initiatives in the area of young people's sexuality have been top down. Top-down initiatives do not sit well with young people themselves. It is enormously important that young people themselves have a voice in what sort of education they should be having on this and what sort of support services would work for them. When you consult young people about support services, there are real concerns about confidentiality—about not being observed by their peers accessing supportive services. It is really important that young people themselves are consulted and have a voice in developing both preventive and responsive services in this field.

I agree absolutely that teacher education is important and that Ofsted could have a much more substantial role in monitoring progress on this.

David Brockway: I would definitely back statutory PSHE. Ofsted's approach, not just on tackling sexism but on the position of gender in general, is that sexual harassment and violence is not counted as general bullying. It is seen as a different problem; it is not considered just another bit of bad behaviour.

Our general position on education is about attainment. We have said it various ways, but the message at the moment is, "I do not care if you are nice; I just want you to be clever." That is not what I want to send a child to school for, but it is what we send children to school for. They spend a huge amount of time there, and we treat our children as so precious and we care for them so much, and yet we do not care if we are sending our girl into a classroom with a teacher who says stuff like, "Boys will be boys. Do not complain if he lifts your skirt up." We need to have a wider conversation about teacher training, as we have said, but also how it is that we see teaching. We need to elevate that position so it is not something like in the old joke, "I came out of university with a 2.2 so I became a teacher." People have these types of ideas. I knew that from all of my friends at uni. What we can do to raise that position is a big question, but it is an endless debate.

Q234 Chair: Can I just chip in? You have not, as a group, focused on parental engagement in your responses.

David Brockway: Can I make one last point before that? We have had this Committee on sexual harassment and violence, and, as I said, this is a men's issue, so maybe there should be more on masculinity and why that is leading to sexual harassment and violence, and within that an acceptance of the impact of masculinity on people of different ethnicities and cultures. Being a white man is very different from being a black man, wherever you are in the world. We really need to pay attention to that. Especially as someone who does

a lot of work in London, I know that those differences are huge, and to see more focus on masculinity would be really important. Parental engagement—

Rebecca Asher: Do you mean by schools?

Q235 Chair: No, just in terms of recommendations. A lot of the recommendations you have been talking about are what schools can do. Obviously, we are talking about sexual harassment and violence in schools, but parents have huge roles to play in their children's lives, and as schools will always tell you, children are with their parents far more than they are with their school.

Rebecca Asher: Yes. I am very struck by the fact that, when parents first have children, they are given an awful lot of information about all sorts of things to do with health, feeding patterns, how young children sleep and all the rest of it. There is nothing, or very little, on raising children and about gender stereotypes and all of the rest of it. There is a role there for simply information and awareness-raising about the way that gender stereotypes are perpetuated and the kinds of effects that they can have.

It need not be in a dogmatic way, but just some information there. I have still got the birth-to-five-years book that is handed out to every new parent. It has stuff in there about crying, eating, nappy changing and all of the rest of it. It also has things about dealing with tantrums. It does have some behavioural stuff, but it does not have anything about gender stereotyping. It would be so easy just to have a couple of pages on that. Parents are increasingly aware of this and want to talk about it, but perhaps do not know where to go. Something like that would be helpful.

I also think, as I mentioned before, that the more that schools and earlier childcare settings, nurseries and so on, can engage parents and bring them in and talk to them about this stuff as well, the better, so that childcare settings, schools, nurseries, primary schools and secondary schools are all working in partnership with parents on this stuff.

Professor Stanley: It is very difficult for parents, isn't it? I think parents struggle to find the appropriate way to talk to children about sexuality, relationships and positive behaviour in relationships. There are not many handbooks or blueprints available to help parents do that. Most parents have to make it up for themselves. I think parents would welcome and benefit from more support and guidance in that area. If you think about some of the sort of popular TV programmes that have had a big impact on parenting practices in this country, you think of *Supernanny* and the naughty step. Those sorts of messages, delivered to the whole population, can be very effective if done in the right way. Interestingly, the sort of information that has been put out so far has tended to concentrate on younger children, which is the point you are making. I think parents would welcome that sort of information. It is about providing it in an acceptable, usable form and getting it to parents.

Q236 Mims Davies: I wanted to pick up on the comment earlier regarding Ofsted and their safeguarding duty of care. I was quite surprised—I do not necessarily know whether I can speak for other Members—about the relaxed way they seem to take the safeguarding of children in terms of the internet space. It did not seem to be something that they were comfortable with. I wondered if that was something the panel had also picked up on.

Rebecca Asher: I do not know whether I am best qualified to talk about that, I am afraid.

Mims Davies: This is just in terms of PSHE and things that would be potentially picked up through that work.

David Brockway: Is that in terms of Ofsted and internet safeguarding?

Q237 Mims Davies: Yes—just in terms of the safeguarding issues around use of the internet and what children could be seeing or experiencing, which then comes into the classroom and behaviours, and whether Ofsted really has a grip on how to manage that.

David Brockway: I am not sure of Ofsted's position, but I would think a lot of the negative things children are accessing are not within the school environment. Of course we would want child safeguarding to be at a premium in relation to the internet in school. However, I think the harmful things they are accessing would be outside of school, so I do not know whether Ofsted would be best placed to tackle that. Of course, anything they can do would be a positive. But perhaps in relation to Ofsted—not directly related to internet accessibility but perhaps towards teachers and teaching children about internet safety—at school, if you have not been taught already, you get taught how to use a computer and programmes of different sorts. Part of that could very easily include basic internet safety. We have been working on it with preventing extremism and the potential of grooming online for that, and in terms of sexual grooming. Again, we could include something there in relation to pornography and other material like that.

Rebecca Asher: Could I just come back to the point that I was making about screen watching? I have got the statistics in front of me, or part of them, and I can forward you the link with the full report, which is quite interesting. I need to correct myself. The average three- to four-year old in the UK watches 15 hours of television a week, spends seven hours a week on the internet and six hours gaming.

Professor Stanley: That's in a week.

Rebecca Asher: Yes, otherwise they would never get any sleep—multitasking! I shall forward the link to the report, because it goes through various age groups and the different activities, and it is quite an eye-opener. But sorry for the misleading information earlier.

Chair: Thank you very much for that. That is incredibly helpful. We look forward to your follow up note. Thank you so much for such a thought-provoking session this morning. It is important that we do look at the challenges that boys and young men face in this area. You have given us a lot of additional food for thought on that particular aspect of our report. Can I thank you for taking the time to come in today?

Rebecca Asher: Thank you.

David Brockway: Thank you.

Professor Stanley: Thank you.