



Report + Support



Maskulinities Project: Stage 1 review

September 2022

A collaboration between [Report + Support](#), [Community Values Education Programme \(CVEP\)](#), and [Warwick Students' Union \(SU\)](#).

Funded by the [Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning \(IATL\)](#) and [Warwick Students' Union \(SU\)](#).



Image 1. Sample of responses to an anonymous activity from our workshops (see page 3). Participants were asked to anonymously write onto post-it notes 'one thing all men should know' and 'one thing you are afraid to talk about'. Responses include: 'Sexism is men's problem' and that men should not 'be scared of having these conversations'.

Summary

The Maskulinites project is part of a wider programme of activities at the University of Warwick to tackle sexual misconduct, harassment, and discrimination. In our experience, male students can be less likely to engage with activities and resources offered by the University and focusing on prevention. We aimed to explore the reasons why, while encouraging increased responsibility and more meaningful engagement going forward.

Research indicates that men's groups can have a significant positive impact on male conduct and men's wellbeing. We worked with male members of student sports clubs specifically. Sports teams can be vectors of problematic male norms and harmful social norms, but they are also some of the most responsive student communities, and sportspeople are often seen as student leaders at Warwick.

A series of co-creation workshops, with 56 male students, found that participants were grateful for the opportunity for open discussion, and to unpick their role as potential active agents in cultural change. Male students valued support to reflexively engage with their role and conduct as men in relation to issues of sexism, gender-based violence and homophobia.

Stage 2 of this project will build on initial findings, with the aim of developing a programme of support and education tailored to men, complimenting existing activities and resources open to all students.

Workshop structure

Co-creation workshops were intended as an initial preliminary research stage. We wanted to assess students' existing understandings of masculinity and evaluate approaches to engaging male students at Warwick. We also recognised that students need to be included in developing resources and interventions which meaningfully address the problems and anxieties they see in their communities.

Workshops followed a prearranged structure:

Activity 1: Icebreaker – Participants were asked to introduce themselves (name, sports club, etc.) and to name a sports personality they looked up to and why.

Activity 2: Large group discussion – Participants were invited to discuss their local understandings of masculinity as a group (e.g. positives vs negatives, perceived stereotypes, etc.).

Activity 3: Small group discussion – Participants were asked to split into small groups and discuss their understanding of the causes behind gender-based violence, sexism, and homophobia.

Activity 4: Large group discussion – Participants were invited to reflect on local practical steps they could take to address some of the problems they had identified.

Activity 5: Anonymous questions – Participants were asked to write down on post-it notes the answers to the following questions: a) What is one thing all men should know? b) What are you afraid to talk about? Post-it notes were then collected and read out loud (without attribution).

Stage 1 – Initial outcomes

- **There were issues relating definitions of masculinities to students' own experiences:** Participants were keen to identify and celebrate positive aspects of masculinity, particularly comradery, whilst also open to acknowledging their negative dimensions and stereotypes, particularly around the idea of male stoicism as a source of strength, weakness, arrogance, narcissism, and insecurity. However, they struggled to articulate how these dominant forms of masculinity affected their own relationships with each other as well as people of other genders.
- **Gender-based violence, sexism and homophobia were seen as someone else's problem:** Participants, including those in mixed-sports teams, implied or directly gestured to the idea that while sexism probably happened at University, and perhaps across different sports teams, it did not seem to happen in their own teams. They struggled to articulate how they as men might benefit from, and passively sustain, gendered hierarchies of power in their communities, especially as sportspeople. They did not always appreciate that even if they were not necessarily perpetrators of gender-based violence, sexism, and homophobia, they may be complicit in performances of gender and male

relationships which perpetuate conditions in which gender-based violence, sexism, and homophobia are enabled. Similarly, most understood sexism and homophobia as operating against an 'other' rather than something that can also be sustained between men.

- **Safe spaces must be provided to discuss these issues:** These strengths and weaknesses point towards the need for an environment where male students are empowered to reflect on their conduct and the conduct of their teams without fearing that doing so undermines their sense of self. Particularly, they need to be enabled to identify the ways in which patriarchal dominant masculine values harm themselves, men in their communities, and people of other genders, in an environment that is non-judgemental and supportive.
- **Initiatives should also be peer-led and horizontal:** Participants indicated that facilitating a peer-led conversation was itself a valuable contribution, but it was also felt that more space needed to be provided for the development, implementation, and review of strategies. We aim to sustain a dialogue and a space for male students to discuss issues they and their communities face, but also to contribute to solutions to tackle them. The sensitivity with which participants were beginning to think of practical measures to contribute to the University's commitment to tackling these issues should be embraced and supported.
- **Accountability must be central to the project:** The project's emphasis on engaging male students is a valuable opportunity but also presents challenges. It has the potential to: emphasise individual empowerment rather than addressing structural factors that underpin patriarchy; be seen as a form of misappropriation; be seen as a form of male performance, to absolve themselves from any potential active or passive involvement in gender-based violence, sexism and homophobia. The project going forwards must ensure it is accountable to people of other genders in the community. Part of this process might include peer-monitoring or steering groups.
- **Participation must be extended to different groups:** Participants who registered identified as male, nearly four-fifths as heterosexual, a single percent as transgender, and seventy percent were white, with the majority of others Asian and of mixed ethnicity. Most were undergraduate students. Of those who attended, there was good representation across subject disciplines, with a slightly higher concentration of mathematics and engineering students. At least one member attended from half of the roughly 60 eligible sports teams (men's and mixed). Whilst we were satisfied with the turnout, we appreciate that more work needs to be done to include a more diverse group of students, especially those who are less likely to engage with these conversations in the first place.
- **Language must be inclusive:** The project has consulted on the use of language to identify participants with a masculine-centred experience of gender. After consultation, it was agreed the project should shift from using 'male and male-identifying' to 'ALL men', using all-caps to implicitly indicate the project's interest in a broad definition of masculinity. Language is ever-evolving, particularly in relation to gender, and continued reflection, consultation and engagement with changes in language are crucial to maintaining a project that breaks down barriers.
- **Opportunities for international collaboration and sharing practice should be encouraged:** Efforts should be made to situate the Maskulinites project within other men's groups initiatives at universities and within allyship schemes. We have already learned a great deal from our discussions with Monash University's Masculinities programme initiative. Possible collaborations might take the

form of sharing practice and reflections, or shared resources and a collaborative bibliography of practice.

Stage 2 – Next steps

We will start Stage 2 of the project in autumn 2022. Building on what we have learned so far, we will continue to engage with men at Warwick and expand the project to include six men's sports clubs initially, equating to approx. 650 students. To help us deliver our workshops, we have recruited seven peer-facilitators from the pool of participants who engaged in Stage 1. Moving forward, we aim to expand the programme of activities to a larger number of sports clubs and, eventually, to the wider male student population.

Feedback

Anonymous feedback: "Superb presentation of the co-creation workshops, really felt welcoming and a place to be able to discuss these issues. Thought the structure worked well, moving from defining masculinity to discussing GBV, sexism and homophobia. Even from this co-creation, I feel I would be more comfortable discussing these issues with teammates, which can only be positive when the scheme is introduced in full. It was good to discuss how changes can be actioned, considering the group of people that were part of the co-creation workshop may not be the ones that need to be reached first."

We remain open to feedback, thoughts, contributions or questions on an ongoing basis, from participants in workshops and from others who are not involved. We particularly want to encourage women and people of other genders to comment on our work. Suggestions for resources, literature, or recommendations of other similar reports would also be greatly appreciated. Please fill out our anonymous feedback form, or contact reportandsupport@warwick.ac.uk / CVEP@warwick.ac.uk.