


Addressing men's violence against women and girls

Evidence and ideas for
communicating with men



**“It makes you feel accountable
for making a lasting change.”**

Content warning

As with all of our work, this report discusses sensitive and challenging topics. Please consider your wellbeing and read at your own pace.

Summary

From this report, you will learn:

- what we know about men’s feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about gender equality, masculinity and men’s violence against women and girls, incorporating new research and existing sources
- how we can use strategic communications, or ‘values-based framing’, to tell compelling stories with effective messages that can expand understanding; inspire narrative change; shift attitudes; and make ending men’s violence against women and girls feel personally relevant to men
- the key communication challenges we face, and some practical tips for what does and doesn’t work – we have summarised some of these on the next page.

Recommendations at a glance

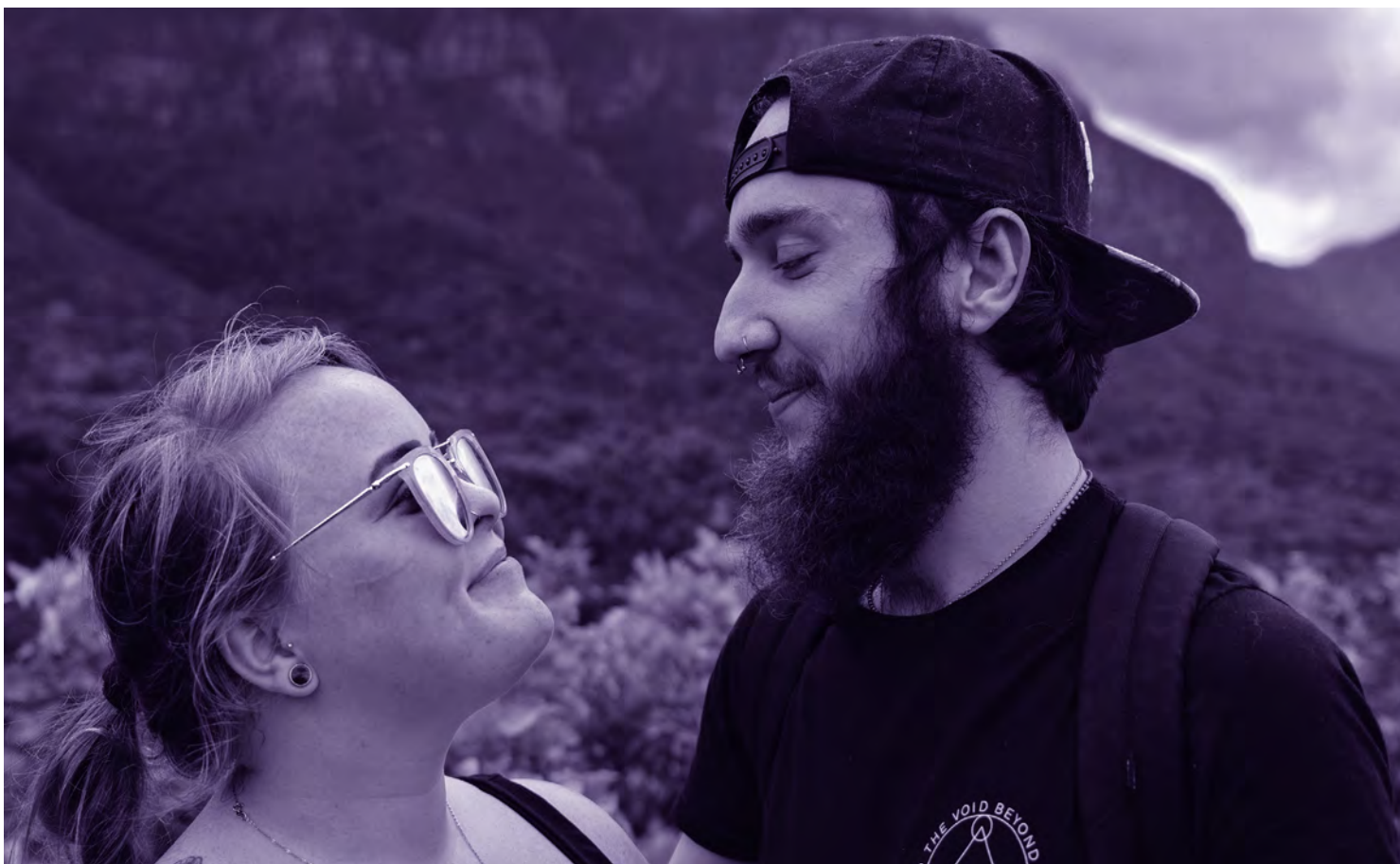
In this research, we've focused on men who have a 'conflicted' mindset when it comes to women's equality. They believe in equality generally but do not often think, discuss, or act on women's equality issues.

We can make the issue of men's violence against women and girls feel deeply, personally relevant to this group of men. How? By taking a multi-pronged approach, which combines appeals to personal wellbeing, responsible masculinity, and larger principles of equality and justice – all rooted in local Scottish realities. Below are some of our key recommendations.

- **Start by engaging people's compassionate values**, particularly respect and fairness, to help them see equality issues from a different perspective.
- **There are contradictory ideas of strength and vulnerability**, so show what a flexible vision of masculinity looks like – with individuality and freedom sitting at ease with one another, as well as strength and sensitivity.
- **Frame gender equality as something that benefits everyone**, with effective messaging that includes examples from family life, community life, and friendship.

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- **Link individual stories to structural causes and solutions**, while acknowledging people's roles in change – especially men's own roles as part of the solution – and give examples. These can include examples of relatable men already taking a stand against violence in their own lives.
- **Instead of talking about 'protecting women', talk about partnership, mutual care, and respect.** By focusing on creating communities where everyone has equal access to safety and power, we can build genuine **mutual care and respect** through collective action that addresses the structural causes of men's violence against women and girls and gives everyone real agency over their own wellbeing.
- **Clarify the links between gender inequality and men's violence against women and girls.** Use examples of sexist behaviours – for example, catcalling, groping, aggressive flirting, and dominant or controlling behaviour. These behaviours sit between actions that might be condoned by some, such as sexist jokes, and ones that are deemed totally unacceptable, such as rape.



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The challenge

Background

Positive changes in policy and public attitudes

Over the last 40 years, public perceptions of men's violence against women and girls have changed drastically. Decades of feminist activism and survivor-led organising have increased recognition of men's violence against women and girls as a systemic issue and garnered the political will to make legislative changes.

For example, there has been a shift in how domestic abuse is treated – from a 'private matter' to a public equalities issue – and more recent achievements include:

- a bill scrapping the 'not proven' verdict in sexual violence cases
- Scottish Acts of Parliament updating domestic violence law
- the recent conclusion of a 2021 Scottish Government review into funding for prevention of and responses to violence against women that acknowledged historical failings and made stretching recommendations for future progress.

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The momentum of the last few years has influenced public perceptions of men's violence against women and girls. There have been large increases in the number of Scottish young people who recognise and think negatively about street harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence, and controlling behaviour in relationships.

However, much of this increase is down to girls' opinions changing, whereas fewer boys than girls recognise violence against women and the harm it causes. More work is needed to address the power structures that enable men's violence, and to increase understanding that these crimes are the results of gender inequality – especially among men and boys. The shift from treating domestic abuse as a 'private matter' to treating it as a public equality issue demonstrates how collective feminist action can challenge the structures and systems that enable this violence – but there is still much to do.

More work is needed to address the power structures that enable men's violence

A 'crisis' in masculinity?

In recent decades, understandings of womanhood have expanded and flourished, encouraging women's participation and growth in society. Alongside this, there has been an increasing awareness that rigid 'traditional' and increasingly obsolete notions of masculinity are harmful – but there has been little to take their place. Indeed, some blame greater gender equality for creating a 'crisis' in masculinity.

With an absence of positive role models of masculinity to replace outdated ones, especially among young men, there has been a worrying resurgence in propaganda that idolises violent and abusive men. High-profile examples include President Donald Trump's promotion of sexual violence, former prime minister Boris Johnson's misogynistic comments about women, and the output of Andrew Tate – a man who enjoys support from large numbers of young men despite his misogynistic views and forthcoming trial for trafficking women for sexual exploitation. Attitudinal research shows a new trend of younger adults beginning to hold more regressive views, which is part of a concerning wider picture across the UK and other nations.

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A new communications approach

Why we need a new approach

To end men's violence against women and girls, we need to involve men in solutions. But too often, the way we talk about this violence elicits resistance, a backlash, and even abuse. Discussing men's violence against women and girls is a complex and sensitive process. The way we describe and explain it can either increase understanding and inspire support for change or reinforce negative beliefs and create hostility to our cause.

To effectively engage men in Scotland, we need to understand what shapes their current attitudes about masculinity, gender equality, and violence. From there, we can identify and test more powerful ways of communicating that tap into the positive beliefs men already hold, leading to more productive conversations.

This work focuses on 'movable' men who have a 'conflicted' mindset when it comes to women's equality. They are men who believe in equality generally but do not often think, discuss, or act on women's equality issues. They agree with the statement "I support equality for women, but I'm concerned that men will lose out".

Discussing men's violence against women and girls is a complex and sensitive process

A photograph of two men sitting at a wooden table outdoors, engaged in conversation. The man on the right, wearing glasses and a striped shirt, is gesturing with his hand. The man on the left is listening. There are small white bowls on the table. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a body of water.

The solution: strategic communications

Strategic communications is a powerful approach to long-term social change that's rooted in evidence from cognitive science about how humans really think, process information, and form opinions.

When we talk about any issue, we never communicate in a vacuum. Everyone makes sense of the world through their own beliefs, knowledge, and experiences, and every word we say triggers conscious and unconscious associations, values, and biases. These influence how people respond to our messages – people won't necessarily understand what we tell them in the ways we think they will.

Through strategic communications, we can test to see what messaging is effective in changing hearts and minds.

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Limitations of conventional communications techniques

The conventional way for communicators to challenge misinformation is through ‘myth-busting’: giving in-depth factual analysis countering incorrect pieces of information. This approach relies on an audience agreeing “I was wrong”, accepting the new ‘truth’, and updating their knowledge. But this isn’t how our brains work (Fazio et al., 2015).

The Government Communication Service (2022) outlined how opinions are formed on the basis of:

- underlying, often unconsciously held values and beliefs about social issues
- dominant narratives reflected in the world around us
- whether a person trusts or believes the messenger and the communication channel

People often reject information that does not align with their existing knowledge and understanding

Crucially, people assess new information based on how compatible it is with their existing knowledge – whether it ‘makes sense’ to them. They assess whether it fits with the personal and social mental shortcuts we all use to make sense of the world and make decisions. People often reject information that does not align with their existing knowledge and understanding, no matter how strong the evidence (Ecker et al., 2022).

We can strengthen people’s belief in misinformation (a myth) simply by repeating it. So, in referring to it, even to refute it, we fail to counter its power. Repetition increases belief in misinformation as well as facts (Ecker et al., 2022), creating a phenomenon known as ‘illusory truth’ or ‘false truth’ (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). Ecker et al. also found that ‘illusory truth’ can persist for months after people are first exposed to misinformation.

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This is regardless of a person's cognitive ability, and can occur despite contradictory advice from an accurate source or accurate prior knowledge. We see this in climate change scepticism – people continue to rely on repeated misinformation no matter how much expert advice and scientific knowledge is available.

Even simply negating an assertion – for example, “the woman is not lying” – makes people more likely to recall the opposite. Studies show that negative sentences are more difficult to process than affirmative sentences (Kaup & Dudschig, 2020). People don't process the 'not', and a mental connection is made between 'the woman' and 'lying'. A famous example of this is former US president Richard Nixon declaring “I am not a crook”.

Studies show that negative sentences are more difficult to process than affirmative sentences



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How strategic communications works

Used correctly, strategic communications can be used to promote the ‘truth’ and achieve narrative change – that is, long-term changes in how people perceive important social issues, and, ultimately, in the way we act. Strategic communications combine research on what and how we think about social issues and why, with values-based framing that, over time and with repetition, can influence this thinking.

Every word we use evokes ideas – associations, biases, deeper beliefs, and values. Strategic communications work with these understandings, intentionally framing social issues to give people new perspectives. This powerful approach to long-term social change is rooted in evidence from cognitive science about how humans think and form opinion – how our minds actually work.

In short, this involves:

- developing narratives that frame the facts using people’s intrinsic values (things that are valuable in themselves, such as people’s own compassionate, moral values about what is right and wrong – more about this below)
- locating the issue within the wider structural and cultural context
- telling an alternative story to avoid reinforcing misconceptions and false assumptions

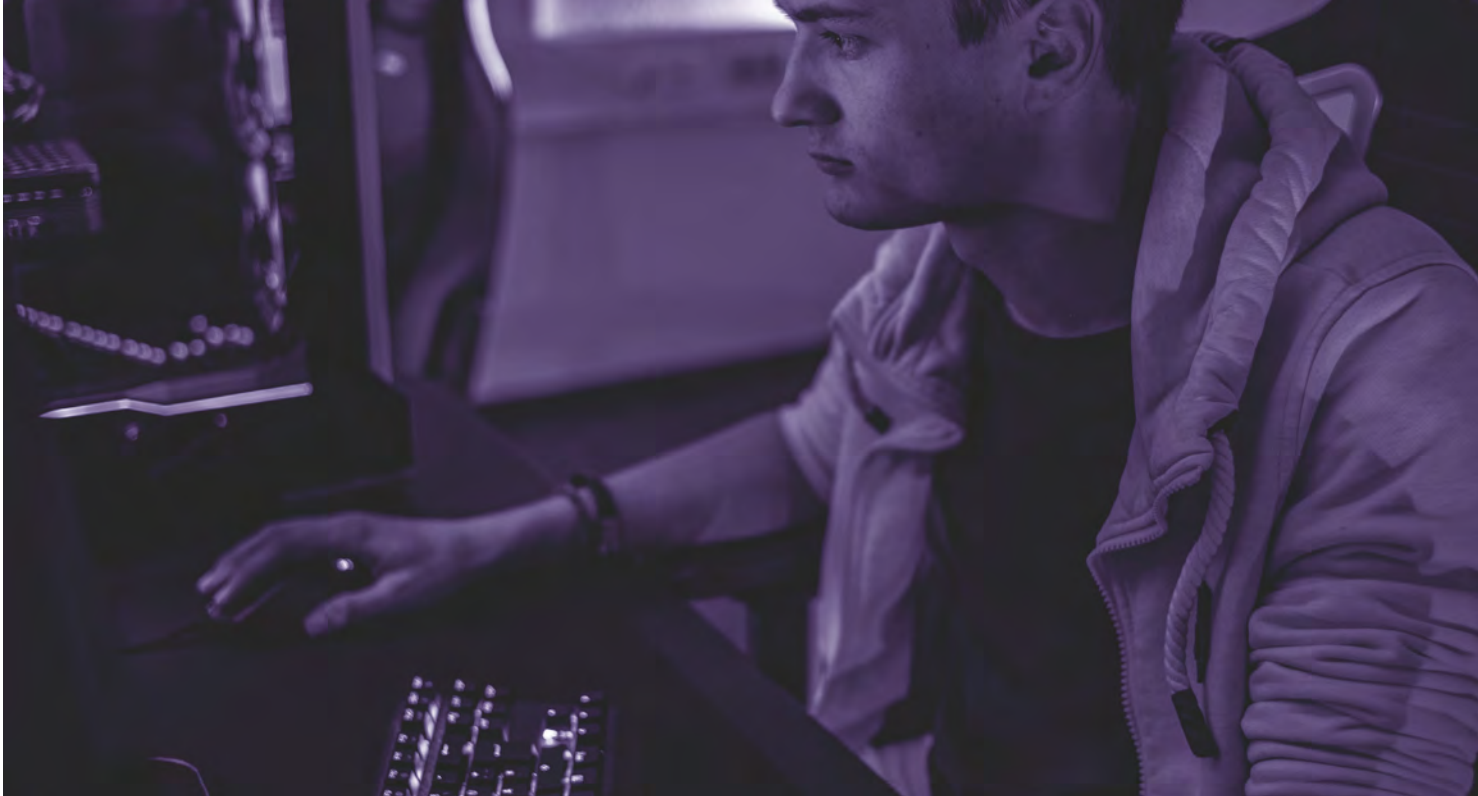
Every word we use evokes ideas – associations, biases, deeper beliefs and values

Frames and framing

Frames are essentially stories – clusters of ideas, words, images, values, and associations – that humans hold and use, usually subconsciously, as mental shortcuts to make sense of the world (Goffman, 1974). These frames are drawn from the cultural context in which we live and work, our upbringing, the people around us, and the media we consume.

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All communication is framed. If we don't set a deliberate frame, audiences will default to dominant frames



How an issue is framed affects how an audience thinks, feels, and acts (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997). Frames are activated and reinforced by images and language.

All communication is framed. If we don't set a deliberate frame, audiences will default to dominant frames: the commonly held views that are often rooted in the unequal status quo. These frames perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions, and power structures that amplify existing disadvantage (Lakoff, 2004).

When a new frame is used, repeated, and reinforced over time, it ultimately leads to narrative change; as mentioned above, this is an alteration in the way issues are perceived by large sections of the public and how they subsequently act. An example is the discussion around gay rights, which shifted from a focus on criminality and abnormality in the 1960s to one of equality and love.

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A key element of framing is the question of where a problem's primary causes and solutions are perceived to come from.

Episodic framing: this means that the causes of problems, and the solutions to them, lie within individuals – a person's actions and choices cause a problem and it is up to them to solve it.

Thematic framing: social structures create and perpetuate problems and also provide the solutions.

For example, Crisis looked at the relationship between [how people frame the causes of homelessness](#) in their own minds and their support for different solutions.

The public overwhelmingly views individual decision-making as the main cause of homelessness – and this is backed up by how the media talk about it.

This frame tends to assign blame for homelessness to individual people by assuming that 'personal failings', such as addictions, poor mental health, or calculated decisions, have led them into homelessness. Not surprisingly, many people therefore think that, as people have caused their own problems, they ought to take responsibility for resolving them, and that any societal or public policy response should be direct remedial services for individuals, such as clean beds and hot meals. This is how episodic framing works.

But evidence shows that homelessness is mainly the result of problems in the social structure, such as a lack of affordable housing, low wages, discrimination, and cuts to welfare programmes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). This analysis – or thematic framing – leads to a very different set of public policy solutions, such as better long-term affordable housing.

**A key element of framing is the question
of where a problem's primary causes and
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Research has found that people are more likely to see a social issue as needing a structural resolution if coverage is more thematic and contextual (Iyengar, 1991). But the dominant narratives in the media and in public discourse use episodic framing, as consistently found in extensive work by Equally Ours and others on the framing of social issues (CPS & Equally Ours, 2024a).

In the case of men's violence against women and girls, perpetrators are often described as 'monsters', 'bad apples', or 'sick' – this is episodic framing, where perpetrators are presented as individuals who are 'not normal' or exceptions to the rule.

The result of this is that we view the primary solutions as individual – it's for individual women to keep themselves safe from men's violence, and society's role is limited to taking action against individual perpetrators after violence has happened.

Instead, we can use thematic framing and portray men's violence against women and girls as being committed by ordinary men from all walks of life who are a product of a wider culture or system. This expands the range of solutions to include structural and cultural change to prevent this violence (in addition to criminal justice responses for men who commit violence against women and girls).



People are more likely to see a social issue as needing a structural resolution if coverage is more thematic and contextual

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Values

All frames are underpinned by values – these are deeply held belief systems and guiding principles that occur within all societies.

Many human values recur consistently across countries and cultures in different formations; they are the bedrock of society. Shalom H. Schwartz mapped the human values of over 300 countries (Schwartz, 2006) to produce a system that now underpins the European and World values surveys (see europeanvaluesstudy.eu and worldvaluessurvey.org respectively).

Key areas of the values map work across a spectrum of intrinsic and extrinsic values. Intrinsic values are those that have natural meaning, and examples include freedom, honesty, loyalty, responsibility, equality, and social justice. With extrinsic values, something external is required for worth, and they include success, material wealth, social power, a good image, and popularity.

**People are more likely to see a social issue
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How values work

All people hold, and are motivated by, all of these values to differing degrees at different times. The values are activated or suppressed by what we're exposed to in the world around us: social norms, our peer groups, advertising, the media, political campaigns, and pop culture.

People's consciously expressed views can be genuinely held and yet still different from these deep-seated, unconscious values and views. It is often these deep-seated values that actually drive actions and decisions (Common Cause, 2010).

The more often a value is activated, the stronger it becomes, as with a muscle that is exercised (Lakoff, 2004). People can be unaware of this happening as it occurs at a subconscious level.

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A photograph of two men in an outdoor setting. The man on the left is wearing a dark cap, glasses, and a dark t-shirt with a backpack. The man on the right is wearing glasses and a light-colored button-down shirt. They are both smiling and appear to be in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing some foliage and a building.

Appealing to intrinsic values strengthens support for positive social change

Extrinsic/intrinsic values and framing

Frames and narratives that appeal to extrinsic values, which often focus on individual success and status, strengthen support for keeping things the way they are, for policies that reflect societal biases or dominant narratives, or for stories and messages that are based on misinformation.

Intrinsic values are inherently compassionate and community-focused. Examples include freedom, honesty, loyalty, responsibility, equality, justice, and social justice – things that are of value in themselves. Frames and narratives that appeal to intrinsic values strengthen support for positive social change: they support people to root their opinions on social issues in these inner beliefs (Common Cause, 2010; Snow et al., 1986). Appealing to intrinsic values strengthens support for positive social change.

Values-based framing is used to help support accurate, evidence-based information and narratives. We do this by adding intrinsic values such as freedom, responsibility, equality, and social justice to our facts and stories. For example, adding the value of freedom to a message – by including perspectives such as ‘being raped can destroy a victim’s world, taking away their freedom, trust, and safety for the rest of their life’ – is shown to strengthen the value of freedom in people’s minds and increase their connection to, and support for, progressive narratives (CPS & Equally Ours, 2024b).

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A person is more likely to hear and accept facts that don't align with their existing, inaccurate knowledge and beliefs if those facts are framed with values

Using values in communications

We don't have to explicitly name values to activate them. Talking about common behaviours, attitudes, institutions, or people that exhibit or exemplify a particular value can be more effective. For example, the message, 'we all want to do the right thing' can evoke the value of social justice.

A person is more likely to hear and accept facts that don't align with their existing, inaccurate knowledge and beliefs if those facts are framed with values.

Metaphors

Metaphors can be a powerful way to convey an alternative narrative. They draw on an audience's common reference points and are highly visual, help get across complex information quickly, and stick in people's minds.

But metaphors can be problematic from a framing perspective. If we use them unthinkingly rather than consciously, they can have unintended – negative – consequences by reinforcing unhelpful current beliefs (Lakoff, 2004). Many well-known frames are encapsulated in metaphors that get in the way of progress on social justice – for example, 'tighten our belts' and 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' both suggest that individual people are to blame for their circumstances and put the emphasis on individuals taking action independently (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011).

In the context of men's violence against women and girls, an example of this issue with metaphors is that researchers found that hunter/prey terms such as 'predatory', 'savage', or 'on the prowl' increased support among young men for misconceptions and assumptions about rape (Bock & Burkley, 2019). This may be because the terms created a connection to extrinsic social order values such as power, the harmful dominant narrative that 'men will be men', and notions of 'animal instincts', rather than criminal behaviour underlying rape.

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Over 40% of the British public are unclear or conflicted about a range of social issues

The alternative narrative

Over 40% of the British public are unclear or conflicted about a range of social issues, and evidence indicates that this proportion is growing rapidly (Equality and Diversity Forum, 2012). Using strategic communications to demonstrate the importance of social issues such as men's violence against women and girls can influence this large group, and allow them to consider the possibility of changing their views and their actions.

The way we discuss and publicise social issues matters, because, as indicated above, it influences public opinion. Public opinion, in turn, influences and justifies policy decisions. By repeating and reinforcing new frames over time, at scale, strategic communications lead to narrative change: an alteration in the way an issue is perceived by large sections of the public. That change influences how people act, and what we do about social issues.

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For example, in Ireland's 2018 campaign to legalise abortion, campaigners strategically framed their message around 3 key concepts: care, compassion, and change (O'Shaughnessy, 2021). Rather than focusing on individual rights or choice, or how refusal of the right to abortion access was about maintaining the patriarchy, they emphasised how allowing abortion access enabled healthcare and compassion in women's own communities. By framing abortion access through these widely held values, and positioning legal reform as an act of collective care by a compassionate society, the campaign helped shift public understanding. This resulted in 66.4% of voters supporting the removal of Ireland's abortion ban.

This strategic framing helped transform the narrative from one of individual morality to one of healthcare and compassion, allowing voters to connect the issue to their existing values around caring for others in their community. The campaign showed how strategic communications can effectively shift deeply held beliefs by connecting to fundamental shared values.

We can do the same with men's violence against women and girls. We can create a new narrative that is informed by experts, utilises our knowledge of how the human brain works, and is evidenced to show shifts in thinking. Repeating this alternative narrative will strengthen it in people's minds and eventually replace existing false beliefs.

**We can create a new narrative that is informed
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Our research

Zero Tolerance and White Ribbon Scotland partnered to find the best way to talk to men about men's violence against women and girls and engage them in work to prevent it.

Zero Tolerance are Scotland's primary prevention experts on ending men's violence against women and girls.

White Ribbon Scotland encourage and support men to stand up to violence against women.

Aims

We commissioned Equally Ours to research how to influence men's attitudes on gender equality and violence against women, using strategic communications techniques.

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The work focuses on ‘movable’ men who have a ‘conflicted’ mindset when it comes to women’s equality. While they believe in equality generally, they do not often think, discuss, or act on women’s equality issues, and they agree with the statement “I support equality for women, but I’m concerned that men will lose out”.

This project did not aim to find ways of engaging men with stronger beliefs, either for or against women’s equality, or perpetrators.

Working from feminist understandings that embed non-violence, equality, and respect, the project produced high-quality research and developed values-based messages so that men in Scotland can:

- better understand the link between gender inequality and men’s violence against women and girls
- understand that gender equality benefits everyone, and support it
- understand their role in ending violence against women and girls



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Research methodology

The new research summarised in this report is a combination of the following:

Literature review

An extensive literature review examined current evidence on men's beliefs, attitudes, values, and feelings about masculinity and gender equality, focusing particularly on Scotland. It explored how men reason about the causes of violence against women and girls, and identified promising ways to engage men in Scotland in efforts to end it.

Gap analysis

The gap analysis explored the differences between the dominant views held by the public – in this case, specifically men in Scotland – and experts in relation to understanding, beliefs, and values regarding gender equality and violence against women and girls. It was used to identify the key framing challenges and prioritise which issues to develop into test messages.

Qualitative research

A representative sample of 24 men in Scotland, all of whom had a 'conflicted' mindset, took part in an online community exercise lasting 6 days, sharing their attitudes to masculinity and gender, gender equality, and violence against women and girls. From there, 8 participants took part in more detailed interviews, before reviewing 3 framing messages for meaning and impact.

Quantitative research

The team surveyed a representative sample of 1,000 men aged 16 to 45 in Scotland. A control group of 250 men rated their agreement with a range of attitudinal statements. Alongside that, the test group of 750 viewed messaging designed using narrative reframing and strategic communications techniques to create more accurate understanding of and support for the issues. They then rated their agreement with the range of attitudinal statements.

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Limitations of this research

This research on how to talk about men's violence against women and girls is innovative, but its scope had limitations, such as how far we could go in terms of intersectionality. We looked at attitudes towards women as a whole group, rather than exploring attitudes to different groups of women. We were unable to examine how women's other demographic characteristics would affect the attitudes of this group of men – for example, to see how misogyny interacts with racism and ableism.

We looked at attitudes towards women as a whole group, rather than exploring attitudes to different groups of women

We weren't able to delve into how attitudes may vary depending on the form of violence, which is important as some groups are more vulnerable to certain forms of men's violence against women and girls.

Budget restrictions meant the research could test only a limited number of prioritised frames and messages in both the qualitative and quantitative phases. This and the relatively small sample size meant that the quantitative research could only indicate what might shift attitudes. However, there was enough of a change in attitudes among participants to suggest that the approach and messages used were indeed effective. Taken together with evidence from the literature review and from projects on other social justice issues, the research provides a solid base of evidence for applying the approach when communicating with men and boys.

Insights into men's attitudes about masculinity, gender equality, and violence

This section contains the wealth of insights from our research, including the range of men's attitudes on masculinity and gender roles, gender equality, and men's violence against women and girls. It also sets out our key findings, from the extensive literature review and original research with the public, on how to effectively support men to broaden their understanding and encourage them to adopt more progressive views.

As stated at the start of the report, this research and the findings in this report focus on a 'movable' group of men who have a conflicted mindset, and on how to engage with them.

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What men currently think

The literature review (to be published) found that men's beliefs about masculinity and gender equality are complex, varied, and influenced by local contexts and intersecting identities. Although patriarchal beliefs that associate masculinity with dominance still exist, there are signs of change, particularly among younger men with higher levels of education.

In Scotland, dominant norms of masculinity linking manhood to violence, sexual conquest, and rigid gender roles are still widespread, especially in areas of high deprivation. However, despite cultural pressures, some men say they want more equal relationships.

Many Scottish men see women's actions and inherent male sexuality, rather than perpetrator choice or gender inequality, as the causes of violence against women. Rigid or outdated gender role attitudes, assumptions about male authority, and victim-blaming are used to justify abuse.

Rigid or outdated gender role attitudes, assumptions about male authority, and victim-blaming are used to justify abuse



Continued »

Promising values-based frames

The evidence suggests that values-based frames and messages used to engage men in Scotland in ending violence against women and girls should:

- challenge outdated and rigid gender role attitudes and assumptions about male authority that justify abuse
- draw clear links between casual sexism and more severe forms of abuse, to encourage intervention
- promote empathy for survivors and convey that all sexual activity without consent is assault
- emphasise equality, respect, and non-violence as core values in healthy relationships
- highlight the benefits of gender equality for men's own emotional wellbeing and relationship quality
- appeal to men's identities and aspirations as caring partners and fathers
- offer concrete examples of relatable men already taking a stand against violence in their own lives
- foster a personal, emotional connection to the issue and encourage critical self-reflection on past behaviours
- situate violence prevention within a positive vision of men's role in building a more just, gender-equitable world for all
- tailor messages to resonate with different subgroups of men based on their unique experiences and social locations

Ultimately, the most effective values-based frames and messages will likely be those that connect attempts to end gender-based violence to men's existing positive values and aspirations, while meeting them where they are at in relation to their current beliefs and contexts.

Make the connections clear: Emphasising the links between seemingly harmless sexist jokes and more serious forms of violence could motivate men in Scotland to intervene when they witness such jokes and similar behaviours.

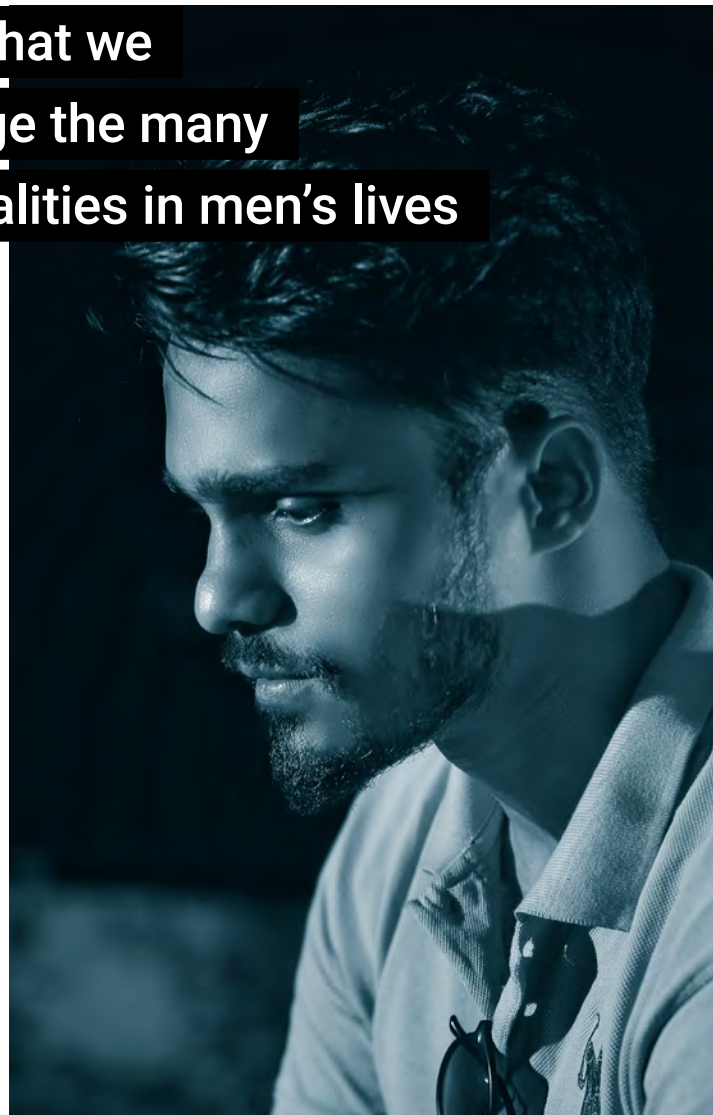
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Personal relevance: Our review of initiatives to involve men in preventing violence against women highlights the importance of making the issue feel personally relevant. Ways of doing this include fostering men's connections to survivor stories, discussing how gender inequality and violence impact their own female loved ones, and positively framing men's role as allies and advocates. Appealing to the stake that men have in building a safer, more just world for all can be motivating for them. Another study found that developing a personal, emotional connection to the issue of violence against women – such as through hearing survivor stories or recognising their own past sexist behaviours – was often a powerful catalyst for engagement.

Recognise the role of trauma and social pressure: Research with marginalised young Scottish men in prison offers valuable insights. Trauma is a key factor shaping their adherence to dominating, homophobic masculinity norms that often underpin violence against women. However, some of these men also express openness to emotionally vulnerable alternatives, hinting at possibilities for change. It's crucial that we acknowledge the many different realities in men's lives – messaging that recognises the complex influences of trauma and social disadvantage, while affirming all men's capacity to embrace healthier, more egalitarian masculinities, could resonate with diverse groups.

Join the dots of how violence negatively affects men: Positioning violence as damaging to men's own relationships and values may resonate more strongly than abstract appeals to end men's violence against women and girls. Highlighting the negative impacts of abuse on families and communities that men care about can make the issue feel more immediately relevant.

**It's crucial that we
acknowledge the many
different realities in men's lives**



Continued »

How violence is normalised

Research with young people in Glasgow identifies some factors that affect how they justify and normalise men's violence to their partners, including:

- rigid gender roles
- male peer group pressure
- assumptions about male authority in relationships
- feelings of ownership of female partners
- victim-blaming attitudes

These findings highlight the importance of framing messages that promote empathy for survivors and challenge rigid beliefs about gender roles.

...men often justified their violence as a way to enforce 'traditional' masculine roles like being the breadwinner and the head of the household

Research with domestic abuse perpetrators in Scotland revealed that men often justified their violence as a way to enforce 'traditional' masculine roles like being the breadwinner and the head of the household. These attitudes were underpinned by implicit theories about male superiority and female subordination. This suggests that frames emphasising equality, respect, and non-violence as core relationship values could be impactful.

Positive role models and men's identity

Positive male role models who are emotionally open and flexible are important as alternatives to dominant forms of masculinity based on physical strength, power, and domination.

Research into online men's communities in the UK shows an emphasis on 'not appearing gay', highlighting the continued influence of homophobia in the policing of men's gender expression.

Continued »



Frames appealing to men's identities as caring fathers and partners could tap into their motivation to be positive role models

A study on a fathers' parenting support group in Scotland found that the intervention being studied helped expand the men's perceptions of masculinity and fatherhood, enabling them to show vulnerability and engage in non-stereotypical gender roles. Frames appealing to men's identities as caring fathers and partners could tap into their motivation to be positive role models.

Be clear and specific

A 2018 survey found that a third of British men held problematic attitudes about what constitutes sexual consent and rape, such as believing that a woman cannot withdraw consent once sex has begun. This highlights a need for clear messages conveying that consent can be revoked at any time and that all sexual activity without consent is assault, regardless of relationship status.

Polarising language, and associations with ideas that right-wing media have portrayed as 'woke', may alienate some men. Instead, messages should emphasise core values of equality and societal benefits, while still clearly condemning extreme misogyny. This approach aligns with the attitudes of many Scottish men who support gender equality in principle but may be wary of divisive rhetoric.

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Research on engaging men and boys in the UK recommends using a positive approach focused on showing how men can be part of the solution

Men as part of the solution – at the individual and structural levels

Research on engaging men and boys in the UK recommends using a positive approach focused on showing how men can be part of the solution (individually and structurally); it does so by providing safe spaces for open discussion, recognising differences among men, and sharing relatable examples of men already challenging harmful norms in their own lives. Collaborating with women's organisations is also key to ensuring accountability.

Contextualising violence against women as a product of broader patriarchal structures, while offering a positive vision of men's role in dismantling those structures, can expand understanding – but as indicated above, we need to show and explain this in a clear and relatable way, giving examples.

Other ways to make violence prevention personally relevant include:

- a 'gender-transformative' approach that critically examines not just individual attitudes but also systemic gender inequalities
- positioning gender equality as one of various forms of structural inequality and working on multiple forms of oppression (gender, race, disability), arguing from a position of equal rights for all in society

The audience we're communicating with is unlikely to be familiar with some of this terminology, so it's important to find ways of introducing the concepts in plain English and through examples, values, and metaphors that are more familiar.



Continued »

Framing masculinity

The VicHealth (2020) message guide on framing masculinity, while developed for an Australian audience, provides valuable insights that could be applied to the Scottish context. It is an excellent foundation to inform creative, evidence-based messaging to expand men's understandings of masculinity, gender equality, and violence against women and girls in Scotland. Many of the principles and strategies align with other themes found in the literature review.

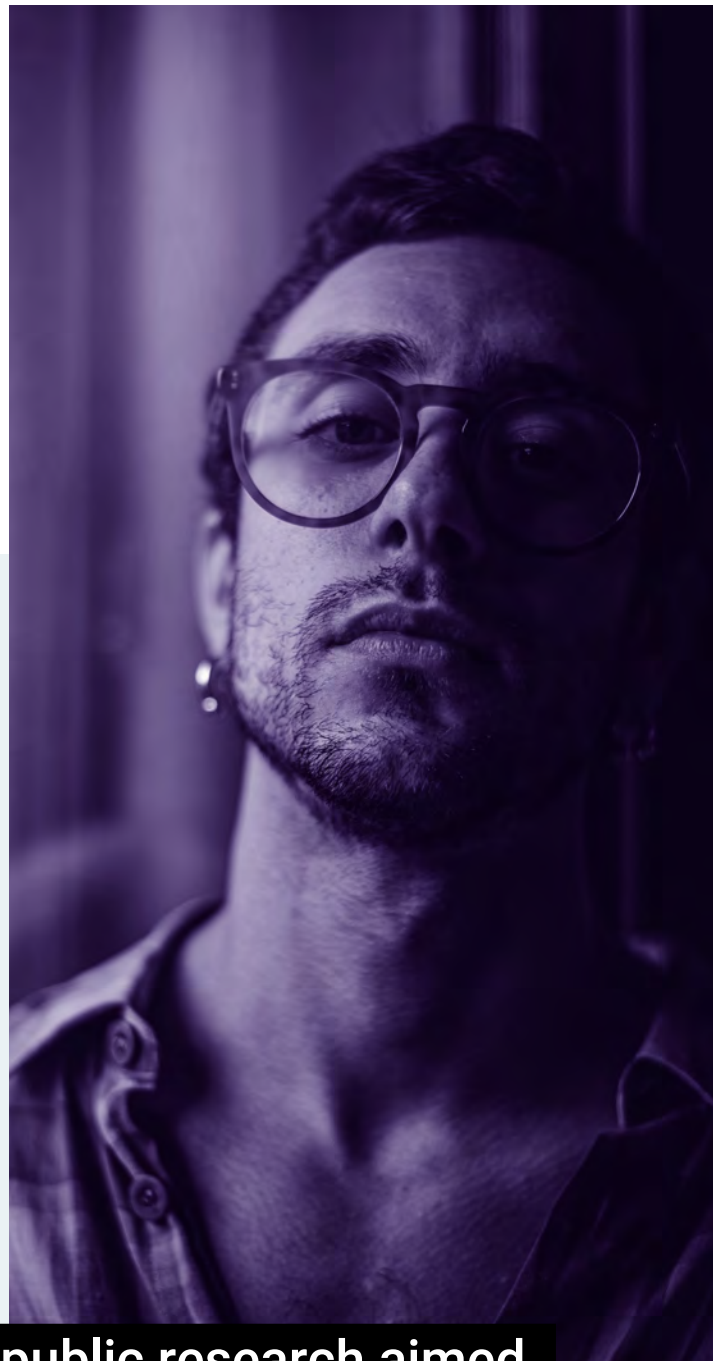
- **Use precise language:** Rather than using vague terms like 'masculinity' or 'toxic masculinity', the guide recommends framing the issue as one of 'outdated masculine stereotypes' or 'rigid gender stereotypes', to help avoid ambiguity and defensiveness.
- **Emphasise shared values:** The research found broad agreement among Australians, including most men, on values like rejecting gender stereotypes, being free to be yourself, and valuing the same positive qualities in all people. Tapping into these shared values could also help make the conversation more resonant and less polarising in Scotland.
- **Focus on solutions and benefits:** Highlighting the benefits to men and society when people are free to be their authentic selves beyond gender constraints; showcasing positive male role models; and emphasising solutions can inspire and mobilise men.
- **Appeal to men's multiple identities:** The research suggests engaging men in their roles as fathers, partners, friends, and community members. In Scotland, messaging could invoke men's desire to be good role models for their children and to build a fairer, safer, more equitable society for all.
- **Use metaphors thoughtfully:** The VicHealth guide found that metaphors like 'masculine stereotypes are like a box' or 'a straitjacket' resonated, conveying how rigid gender expectations constrain men (see also The 'Man Box' study by Heilman et al., 2017 – while testing these metaphors was not a major focus of this study, the report does point to the 'Man Box' framing as a promising way to talk about masculine norms in violence prevention). Similar metaphors and analogies could be tested and deployed in Scotland, or there may be other, similar metaphors that resonate more in the Scottish context.

Continued »

Public research

The public research aimed to understand Scottish men with conflicted views. It explored how to use frames and messaging to move these men away from dominant narratives (widely accepted stories that support the interest of dominant social groups) to align more with expert understanding. It involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that:

- allowed researchers to go beyond surface attitudes and explore deeper beliefs and values around gender equality and men's violence against women and girls
- offered participants a range of methods and spaces to express their views honestly and openly – minimising the impact of social pressure factors (for example, in causing them to sanitise their answers to appear more socially acceptable in the eyes of others)
- gave the researchers and participants the time and space to think about, explore, and discuss challenging issues within a safe and containing environment
- offered some space for dialogue and sharing of ideas between participants more publicly without them slipping into 'group-think'
- enabled testing of participants' responses to messaging designed by Equally Ours based on all available evidence



**The public research aimed
to understand Scottish men
with conflicted views**

Continued »

Qualitative research – the method

The team recruited 24 men in Scotland, all of whom had been born and brought up in the country. This group were a balanced and representative sample of the Scottish population across age, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability, social grade, and location.

Each had a 'conflicted' mindset – agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement "I support equality for women, but I'm concerned that men will lose out".

All participants took part in an online community exercise lasting 6 days. Over this time they were asked to share:

- their attitudes to masculinity and gender
- their attitudes to gender equality
- their attitudes to violence against women and girls
- responses to 11 message elements around these topics

They spent between 20 minutes and 2 hours per day on the tasks.

From the findings at this stage, the researchers identified 4 attitudinal typologies to take forward to the next stage and to guide the analysis and reporting. These 4 typologies (Men's Men, Apprentices, Sensitive Men, and Lost Men) are summarised below.

Eight participants were selected to take part in more detailed qualitative work, via hour-long individual online interviews. The sample for this stage was based around the attitudinal typologies. People in the Lost segment were not interviewed during this stage as their position appeared somewhat fixed and they gave very full answers in stage 1.

Each had a 'conflicted' mindset – agreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement "I support equality for women, but I'm concerned men will lose out"

Continued »

Four typologies

Feelings about masculinity, gender equality, and violence against women and girls varied quite a lot between the segments. Here is a summary of what shaped and characterised men's views in each of the groupings.

Men's Men

Age: 25+

Family: in relationships, with young families

Occupation: physical labour or engineering
– jobs where physical strength is valued

Hobbies: sport, DIY

Personality: warm, modest, and sincere in their manner

Anxiety: unsure how to be a good man in today's world

Pressure/conflict: dealing with internalised pressures – to be the best partner, dad, son, colleague, friend – worrying that the world does not value men, so they hang on tightly to their role as family protector

Thoughts on gender equality: view themselves as a protector, a role model, someone who would never hurt women – but are happy to take on what might be seen as 'more traditionally feminine' tasks at home; pro-equality, but might consider porn or sexist jokes okay, and can still see women as weaker

Role model: Idris Elba

Reason for selecting the role model: influential, down to earth, low key, has inner strength, good manners, goodness and authenticity, reconciling strength and sensitivity effortlessly



“Everyone has a moral obligation to try [to] at least help. You can have influence over the situation by reporting it. You never know, it might save someone's life.”

(Man's Man)

Continued »

Men's Men continued

Thoughts on masculinity: They want to integrate their traditional values with their feminine side and restore their status. They also feel sadness at their losses – youth, friendships, status of men in the eyes of society. They're often advocates of men's mental health, and find that connecting with feelings can be liberating, but typically in a safe space with other guys.

Framing for Men's Men

- **Make them feel they are in the majority:** Frame gender equality as something that everyone can get on board with.
- **Avoid militant or defensive language and/or suggesting a minority, radical, or fringe viewpoint:** Both will cause them to shut down and bury any progressive opinions they hold privately.
- **Reframe violence to open up broader thinking about what harms women:** Men's Men related better than others to the 'slippery slope' metaphor that was tested, highlighting their willingness to think about how apparently less harmful behaviours are connected with more harmful ones.

Do:

- **acknowledge their existing support** for gender equality and the effort they have made to challenge gender roles
- continue to **challenge gender roles gently**, support them and nudge them forward
- redefine and clarify a modern masculinity with a balance of **strength and sensitivity** – that should be easier not harder to achieve than the old ways of being a man
- support them on their journey to **greater emotional openness**

Don't:

- dismiss gender roles outright
- **add more pressure** or demand to their lives/goad them into new ways of being
- **underplay or dismiss the advances** in gender equality that have already been made
- accuse them of being **part of the problem** when it comes to violence against women and girls (they need to feel they are an active part of the solution)
- use **militant or dogmatic language** that makes them feel attacked – e.g. the term 'toxic' or suggestions that men are intolerant or 'dinosaurs'

Continued »

Men's Men continued**Do:**

- reassure them that there is goodness within their masculinity
- make them feel that they are **in the majority** when supporting gender equality
- reinforce that gender equality brings **harmony to the home** and improves their **mental health** (and frame this as a primary, direct benefit)
- frame gender equality predominantly as a **universal human value** that's not just about gender
- make concrete the idea that a kinder world can protect their families
- offer them **ways to be a good role model** around equality – to nurture themselves as well as younger men in their lives
- focus communication around **teamwork and equality in the home** and community
- offer structure and **ideas on how they might call out** inequality and violence against women and girls
- offer **evidence-based** statements
- frame facts and evidence with intrinsic values, or offer messages that combine intrinsic values and facts/evidence
- encourage them to **think more broadly** about what is harmful to women
- make them feel like an active part of the solution

Don't:

- overtly frame gender equality or violence against women and girls in terms of **structural theory**
- use **facts/evidence without values framing**, because people will interpret 'naked numbers' through their own world views and existing understanding

Continued »

Apprentices

Age: 16-18

Family: single, often living with parents

Occupation: apprenticeships, training, or college

Personality: hardworking, sincere, polite

Anxiety: unsure how to behave towards women – they fear getting it wrong, causing offence, or patronising or unwittingly dominating them

Pressure/conflict: confused and intimidated by what adult masculinity may involve for them

Thoughts on gender equality: made anxious by media portrayals of feminism, 'man-haters', or technical talk of systemic sexism – they fear that work opportunities will be taken away from them

Role model: Conor McGregor, Gordon Ramsay, and potentially Andrew Tate

Reason for selecting the role model: tough men who don't take any nonsense and don't have to struggle as they do

Thoughts on masculinity: look up to 'traditional men' and protector stereotypes but are concerned about the demands of masculinity

Framing for Apprentices

- **Make the connections clear and real:** Men in this group struggle to link masculinity with gender equality and violence against women and girls, mainly because they lack the life experience to make these connections spontaneously. Make these links for them to shift their understanding. We achieved this through reviewing the framing messages with them in the depth interviews, and giving them the opportunity to discuss and rethink their beliefs.



**“As a man
you’ve got to
protect the women
in your life no
matter what.”
(Apprentice)**

Continued »

Apprentice continued

Do:

- place respect for others at the core of gender equality
- provide a real, relatable vision of masculinity that embraces equality
- show them that masculinity can take many forms and does not have to be stereotypical or intimidating
- adopt a 'ways to live' approach – how to become your best and true self without recourse to outdated masculine tropes
- present a vision of the adult world where gender equality benefits all (including them) – allay fears that they will lose out
- clarify what gender equality means
- present gender equality as a way to strengthen not weaken romantic relationships
- offer ways to support them in calling out disrespectful behaviour
- clarify the connections between different types of violence against women and girls
- reassure them about their agency in the world – adopting a mindset of gender equality and calling out violence against women and girls is a choice, and one to be commended

Don't:

- reference dogma or theory
- only correct them without offering positive guidance
- rely on family dynamics as a template for gender relations – this offers them little sense of agency right now, or casts them in a fantasised role of protector
- be vague or uncertain about the future – avoid playing on their fears
- base communication on pressures they currently feel – they are more worried about the future than the present
- present men's violence against women and girls episodically, as something others, i.e. 'monsters' or criminals, do

Continued »

Sensitive Men

Age: 19–25

Occupation: studying or starting white-collar jobs

Hobbies: creative: music, baking, and fashion;
friends; media and culture

Personality: socially aware

Anxiety: They think “I’ll be cancelled for being myself” and are worried about how they will be ‘allowed’ to behave as workers or partners. They’re distracted, nervous, and self-doubting, and avoid issues by intellectualising, moralising, observing, and giving short responses.

Pressure/conflict: an underlying fear of saying too much or giving something away in a judgemental culture

Thoughts on gender equality: believe in equality and diversity


Role model: Stormzy, Harry Styles

Reason for selecting the role model: manners, integrity, empathy, kindness, diversity, freedom of expression

Thoughts on masculinity: value the ability to show their feelings and feminine side

Framing for Sensitive Men

- **Make them feel part of the debate:** Keep them emotionally engaged by avoiding speech that sounds abstract, theoretical, or political.
- **Tap into engagement with mental health:** Men in this group are highly engaged with the idea of mental health and so this area becomes a powerful hook for persuasion.



“There are so many varying expectations on men now that it can definitely be hard to strike a balance at times.”
(Sensitive Man)

Continued »

Sensitive Men continued

- **Give concrete examples of ways to think and act:** Men in this group responded empathically and creatively to these examples, such as considering what it feels like as a woman to walk down a street at night or building confidence to call out disrespectful behaviour.

Do:

- support them to create a new and healthier idea of masculinity
- reassure them that they are thinking along the right lines
- reassure them that **being kind and thoughtful is a valid way** to be a man
- credit them for their supportive attitude to gender equality
- **encourage dialogue and exploration** around gender equality – their views and beliefs can make a positive contribution
- try to **reconcile how they feel and how they want to appear** to others – that it is fine to be in their own skin
- offer examples of how gender equality benefits them directly
- include concrete examples of how everyday actions can cause harm, building on their empathy and curiosity
- include **concrete examples of how to act** in the presence of questionable behaviour, and remind them of how calling it out benefits all (including the perpetrator)

Don't:

- **play to a social justice/theory narrative** or use abstract/ political language – they buy into this willingly and understand systemic power relations, but focusing on that here leads to intellectualisation and emotional disconnection
- **play on their fears around attitudes** in the wider world or being ostracised – keep the focus on personal emotional truths

Continued »

Lost Men

Age: around 35–45

Personality: introverted, reflective, emotional, compassionate – not fully engaged with the outside world

Anxiety: feel fragile and not heard or seen

Pressure/conflict: They think that “We live in a brutal and hostile world”. There was a sense of having suffered or seen women suffer. They feel a limited sense of agency and aren’t sure what they have to offer.

Opinions on gender equality: They are ‘anti-woke’, anti-trans, defensive of gender binaries, and paranoid about what they hear in the media. They hate being spoken down to and feel a deep hatred for violent men out there in the world.

Opinions on masculinity: They cling to ‘traditional’ views of masculinity (but do they really believe them?). They feel that women undervalue them, do not listen, dismiss them, won’t hear their ideas, or won’t allow them to be themselves.

Framing for Lost Men

This group of men were not interviewed in the second stage of the research as their positions on the topics discussed were somewhat fixed, and they had already given very full answers in stage 1. However, there were still some clear steers on how to frame communications with this group.

- **Talk about equality in terms of what’s fair:** Provide a vision of fairness in which equality is fair to – and benefits – everyone.



“Nowadays men have things done to them and are not heard. The expectation by some is that men have an easy life; this is certainly not the case, but there is an assumption that we have everything good.”
(Lost Man)

Continued »

Lost Men continued

- **Show how the world could be better and safer:** It's hard to argue against a world that's becoming better and safer for women.
- **Keep it simple:** Communications with this group need to be straightforward, because they'll pick holes in more sophisticated arguments or facts. Focus on lived experience and make it emotional, personal, and relevant.

Do:

- present a **vision of fairness** – where equality is fair to all and benefits all (though not all will believe the claim that 'a rising tide lifts all boats')
- present a vision of the world becoming a **better and safer place for women** (a moral absolute that can't be argued with)
- present gender equality as a stabilising not a disruptive force
- try to harness their sensitivity and empathy
- **validate** them and give them a sense of **being heard**
- make communication positive and hopeful
- make communication **simple, emotional, personal, and relevant** – focus on lived experience

Don't:

- focus on **their own mental health struggles** – this turns their attention inwards and blocks engagement with gender equality/ violence against women and girls
- complicate matters with **sophisticated ideas or facts** – they will pick holes in anything but the most straightforward communication
- focus on **what it means to be a man** these days – masculinity and gender are sore topics
- lecture or patronise them
- introduce **political or theoretical content**, especially language they might consider 'woke' (as framed by right-wing commentators)
- **reference culture wars** – the voices on both sides of the argument agitate them
- **make them the focus** of your communication strategy – they are the hardest group to reach

Continued »



**The quantitative research involved
a representative sample of 1,000 men
aged 16 to 45 in Scotland**

Quantitative research – the method

The quantitative public research involved a representative sample of 1,000 men aged 16 to 45 in Scotland. A control group of 250 men rated their agreement with a range of attitudinal statements to establish the baseline of views.

The remaining 750 men formed the test group and saw 3 accompanying messages about gender, equality, and men's violence against women and girls, before seeing and rating the attitudinal statement questions related to that message. Equally Ours, Zero Tolerance, and White Ribbon Scotland designed these messages, using narrative reframing and strategic communications techniques. The messages and related statements are given in full below.

The control group and the test group were matched in terms of their age, job role, where they live, educational attainment, and religion. There are no significant differences between the 2 groups' demographic profiles.

Continued »

The attitudinal statements were presented in pairs, with one statement to reflect commonly held unhelpful and inaccurate views about the issues (the Dominant view) and one to reflect the alternative view that we would want people to support, or move closer to supporting (the Expert view). Men could select any point between the 2 statements, to reflect which felt closest to their opinion. In the analysis, the answers were grouped into 3 segments: 0–3 = Dominant view, 4–6 = Middle view, 7–10 = Expert view.

The order in which the statement pairs were presented was rotated to avoid bias, and to avoid the possibility of participants seeing a pattern, for example choosing the Expert view each time because it always came 2nd in the pair.

To ensure consistency in the analysis, the statement pairs that were rotated have since been adjusted so that the strongest agreement with Dominant view = 0 and the strongest agreement with Expert view = 10.

The order in which the messages were shown was rotated, so 250 saw the gender message first, 250 saw the equality message first, and 250 saw the violence against women and girls message first. This was to avoid any potential bias or order effect in the exposure to the messages.

Messages and statements used in the quantitative phase

Message 1: Gender

We all want to be free to be ourselves. To be healthy, and the partner, friend, or parent we really want to be.

But what we learn about being a man, how we're expected to be, and how we think we should be restricts us. And it can pressure us to behave in harmful ways, to ourselves and those we care about. Things like drinking too much, bottling up stress, and not asking for help when we need it. And we're sometimes told we should be vulnerable and strong at the same time, which can be confusing.

But as many of us now know, there are so many different ways of being a man, of loving the people in our lives and of being strong. Being free to talk about what's on our mind and how we feel, being true to who we are, and having each other's backs. Building equal relationships and standing up for what's fair and right. This is freedom and growth, and it's a good way for us all to live.

Continued »

Message 2: Equality

Most of us agree that equality between men and women is a good thing. It's freeing for everyone and means we can be who we want to be. For men, that could mean a role model for boys to look up to, a good friend when your mate's down, or a parent who tucks their kids in at night. At home, it means being a team and sharing the load – the good and the bad.

We've taken strides towards equality in Scotland, but we could go further still. For example, women often get paid less than men for the same work, and men are only given 2 weeks' paternity leave.

That equality is good for us is backed up by evidence, too – people in equal relationships are happier at home and work, and equality improves men's mental health and makes for healthier and safer communities for us all.

Equality goes hand in hand with respect, and we all have a part to play in achieving it. It lifts us all up and helps us to be our best selves.

Message 3: Violence against women and girls

We all want to live freely, to be equal and to feel safe. And most of us want that for each other, too.

But the way we often think about men and women and the relationship between them can lead men to disrespect and harm women. Seemingly harmless things like telling a sexist joke and catcalling. And things like restricting who a partner sees, pressuring a woman to have sex, and hitting a woman. All these actions spring from the same place: a lack of equality between men and women.

None of us want women to be harmed. And what harms women harms us all and pulls us down. That's why equality is so important. It goes hand in hand with respect and frees us to be the best version of ourselves.

By doing the right thing, like respecting women and refusing to go along with it or calling it out when a pal is disrespectful, men can be a positive role model to the men and boys in their lives, and help to build healthier, more equal communities.

Continued »

Attitudinal statements

Participants saw the following statements, listed here in order of effectiveness (more about this below).

Gender

- Male strength is about both physical strength and emotional sensitivity.
- Although there are differences between men and women, a relationship between a man and a woman can be completely equal.
- We learn our gender roles through our experiences in life.
- I think men today are able to be who or what they want to be.

Equality

- Gender equality is relevant to me.
- Gender equality benefits men and women equally.
- I'm motivated to do something about gender inequality.
- Men and boys rarely lose out when women and girls have equality.
- We still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality in Scotland.

Violence against women and girls

- I have a role to play in ending violence against women and girls.
- Making sexist comments or telling sexist jokes is harmful to women.
- Disrespectful behaviour is rooted in inequality and makes other violence more likely.
- Men's violence against women and girls is caused by inequality between men and women in society.

Continued »

Findings

Comparison between the control and test groups showed that seeing the 3 messages increased support for the Expert views in most of the related statements, and decreased support for both the Dominant and Middle views.

The shifts in support were small (which was expected because participants were only shown 3 reframed messages before being shown the related attitude statements) but sufficient to provide proof of concept.

Statements that work

Eight statements showed a positive shift of 5% or more in the test group. This was either a **reduction** in agreement with the **Dominant** view, or an **increase** in agreement with the **Expert** view. These statements were:

Gender

- Although there are differences between men and women, a relationship between a man and woman can be completely equal.
- Male strength is about both physical strength and emotional sensitivity.

Equality

- Gender equality is relevant to me.
- I'm motivated to do something about gender inequality.
- Men and boys rarely lose out when women and girls have equality.

Violence against women and girls

- I have a role to play in ending violence against women and girls.
- Disrespectful behaviour is rooted in inequality and makes other violence more likely.
- Making sexist comments or telling sexist jokes is harmful to women.

These statements all performed well regardless of when they were shown in the survey (whether they were seen after reading the first message, or after subsequent messages), suggesting that they are strong enough to work without the cumulative effect of reading more than one message.

Continued »

Hardest beliefs to shift

The statements where there was the most agreement with the Dominant view, and where men in the test and control groups had similarly high levels of agreement with the Dominant view currently, were:

- I think that men today are often expected to act in certain ways.
- Gender equality has largely been achieved in Scotland.
- Men's violence against women and girls is caused by the behaviour of individual men.

This suggests that the messages read by the test group did not shift opinions here, and that these are therefore the areas where it may be generally harder to shift opinion.

Demographic differences

Age was the factor most likely to be linked to differing opinions among men. All the men in the sample were 16–45, but within this range we saw differences between younger and older men.

However, it was inconsistent – sometimes over-35s were more likely to agree with the Expert view, sometimes under-25s were more likely to do so. In other words, there was a mixed picture, and it is not true to say that either the younger or the older men in the sample held more generally progressive views.

Continued »

A photograph of three men walking away from the camera on a city street. The man in the center is wearing a dark t-shirt and a fedora. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored jacket. The man on the right is wearing a denim shirt. The background shows city buildings and trees. The image has a purple tint.

Summary of men's views

Here we summarise the key findings about Scottish men's attitudes and feelings towards violence against women and girls, gender equality, and masculinity. These views shape the framing strategy and recommendations that follow.

1. Strong, vulnerable, either, or both?

Scottish men are becoming less bound to rigid or 'traditional' gender roles and readier to embrace more 'traditionally feminine' traits and activities, such as greater openness and richer engagement in family life.

However, there is still a strong desire to display strength, which is typically manifested in giving the appearance of 'holding it all together'. This creates powerful internal pressures and a reluctance to show vulnerability, which participants realised could be detrimental to their own mental health and that of those around them.

Continued »

While more progressive men recognise that it is possible for a man to be strong and vulnerable, these are typically seen as 2 modes of being to be switched between, rather than existing simultaneously.

“Men are expected to be many different things to different individuals. You are expected to be able to adapt to a quickly evolving social space whilst still maintaining a robust and consistent persona.” (Man's Man)

2. Moving away from the idea of 'protection'

The need to be strong also manifests as a desire to protect women. While this does not mean being spontaneously aggressive, it is considered a physical power, held only by men and ready to be unleashed when needed.

As the role of the provider becomes less relevant (due to greater equality in the workplace), it seems that the 'protector' role has become even more important. In younger audiences, this is even more of a fantasy (as there is often no-one in their lives who they feel they can protect in this way right now).

“It is very important for a man to be strong and to protect his family. It feels natural to want to protect your loved ones.” (Sensitive Man)

3. Fairness and fears

The audience supports gender equality in principle – it's a natural extension of the values of fairness and respect that sit at the heart of Scottish life.

However, consideration of the topic is beset by fears, based more on personal insecurities than on real experiences. These include worries among young audiences about future employment opportunities, and concerns among older ones about the erosion of men's status in society.

“Certain positive discrimination quotas in jobs can mean companies need to hit certain targets, which often means less roles for men.” (Apprentice)

4. Men with no voice?

Harsh voices in the media (especially social media) are driving a perception that men have no voice and are not allowed to discuss gender equality or issues affecting women's wellbeing and safety. This can result in disengagement with the issues or, among more traditionally minded men, a temptation to join the opposite side of the argument and fight back.

Continued »

Gender is rarely discussed at home or with friends – even among liberals – and banter often takes the place of heartfelt discussion. These trends drive a deep resistance to politicised or dogmatic language around gender equality and men's violence against women and girls.

“I don't like Andrew Tate but you can see why some guys listen to him. At least he's talking about it.” (Apprentice)

5. Benefits of gender equality for men?

Just as audiences find it hard to find concrete examples of how gender equality harms them, they are typically unable to identify reasons why it directly benefits them.

Those with partners and families are able to connect with the idea of equality benefiting the women in their lives and hence benefiting them, though this is only felt subconsciously and as a secondary effect. Those without partners are even more unlikely to see how gender equality benefits them.

Even when men enthusiastically support gender equality at a political level, they rarely feel any tangible benefits at a personal, emotional level.

“If my partner was actively pushing for equality and she gained out of it, then naturally I would gain out of it because we're a couple. She's going to be happier, you're going to be happier, everybody's going to be happier.” (Man's Man)

6. Unjustifiable and justifiable

Violence against women and girls is seen as a dangerous and thorny topic and most men are quick to distance themselves from it. Typically, men's violence against women and girls is polarised into 2 areas:

- physical and sexual violence (and psychological cruelty)
- everyday, morally ambiguous activities (telling sexist jokes, casual sexism, using pornography)

Men typically demonise the former and find justifications for the latter (and resist considering it as violence).

“Women make a choice to do pornography if that's how they want to make a living.” (Apprentice)

Continued »



...participants expressed that tension and anxiety had been lifted as a result of participating in the conversation

7. Conversation is crucial

In spite of these defences, it was apparent that participation in this research made participants think more deeply, broadly, and empathetically about gender equality and men's violence against women and girls.

Exposure to different points of view, considering sympathetically worded messaging, and being heard without judgement allowed participants to engage with the topics and access the parts of their mind that believe deeply in equality, fairness, empathy, and non-violence, and to set aside the fears and anxieties that create barriers to engagement.

In many cases, men experienced proper engagement with discussions of gender equality and men's violence against women and girls as a relief – participants expressed that tension and anxiety had been lifted as a result of participating in the conversation and having the time, space, and opportunity to explore and challenge their own attitudes and beliefs. This highlights the importance of conversation.

Continued »

“Thank you for letting me be part of this research because I found it nice being on the other side of the gender, masculinity, cultural wars conversation other than just being on the receiving end to actually get to put my opinions out. Though I did find it a bit challenging because I’ve never had to actually give my opinions on these things much.” (Sensitive Man)

8. Redefining strength and gender roles

Framing communication in terms of flexibility of gender roles validates the changes that Scottish men have made, and helps to reconcile the apparent contradictions between strength and vulnerability.

This means redefining strength to include vulnerability. By focusing on interpersonal relationships and mutual support, rather than on ego ideals and a protector mindset, it is possible to offer audiences concrete examples of how the process of challenging traditional masculine norms leads to a happier, healthier life.

Participants were clearly relieved at the suggestion that flexible gender roles do not have to compromise their strength and integrity. However, this framing strategy is typically understood in the context of men's own mental health, and does not necessarily lead them towards any further consideration of gender equality or men's violence against women and girls.

“...being open and vulnerable is a different way of being a man as opposed to the typical ancient stereotype whereby the man cannot be open and vulnerable and speak of how they feel. It perhaps makes you more of a man for having the courage to be open and honest on how you feel.” (Man's Man)

9. Gender equality benefits everyone

By framing gender equality as something that benefits everyone, it is possible to strengthen men's connection to it and move them away from beliefs like “gender equality offers no real drawbacks for me, but no real benefits”. It also allays the nebulous fears of reduced opportunities and reduced status for men.

The messaging explored here works particularly well because it frames gender equality using examples from family life, community life, and friendship, thus playing on the rich emotional values of relational harmony, being a role model, and respect for others. This helps audiences reimagine gender equality as something that benefits them directly – something that can be brought into and nourishes their personal lives.

Continued »

Offering examples of how gender inequality harms both men and women in the workplace helps overturn the preconception that gender equality only benefits women. These examples also create a sense of threat from gender inequality, where previously it was gender equality that felt threatening.

“Equality is a win–win, it builds healthy, strong relationships, and being a positive role model to young males can lead to change.” (Man’s Man)

10. Respect and responsibility

Framing men's violence against women and girls as a product of gender inequality is challenging, but possible. Men can be encouraged to accept responsibility for helping to end this violence, but it is essential to offer concrete examples of:

- (i) how different manifestations of men's violence against women and girls are connected
- (ii) what men can do to challenge this violence

Communicating in terms of structural inequality or theory/ideology is liable to result in disengagement or the ‘othering’ of violence and violent men.

Again, respect is a fundamental concept here. Disrespect is both familiar and repellent, and visible in behaviours such as groping, aggressive flirting, and catcalling (which help to fill the space between seemingly innocuous acts such as sexist jokes, and more serious acts of violence). And by framing the bad behaviour observed in friends and colleagues as ‘disrespectful’, audiences are given the sense of agency required to call it out and hence contribute actively to gender equality.

“You can only achieve equality if you respect each other.” (Man’s Man)



Framing strategy

Shaped by the insights gained through this research, our framing strategy sets out what we want to achieve through strategic communications and how we can change the narrative.

It centres on communicating the truth in a compelling way – without directly engaging with or countering false stories or myths.

This type of strategy (known as ‘proactive promotion’) involves drawing on the strategic communications techniques developed from our understanding of cognitive science. We need to use a range of channels to present information in a way that’s easy to understand and recall, and which strengthens the connection between the truth and the audience’s intrinsic values.

As indicated above, the goal of proactive promotion is not to directly counter myths, but to consistently communicate an accurate and coherent alternative story, based on the Expert view, that extends or deepens public understanding of and support for the truth and builds resilience to false information.

Continued »

Values

Values that are widely held in Scotland include choice, autonomy, and freedom; respect; care; 'mature love'; friendship; equality; and social justice, and we can bring these to mind when talking about violence against women and girls, and gender inequality.

The research, and other work on equality, shows that appealing to the following widely held values can be a powerful 'way in' to helping people see these issues from a different perspective:

- **respect and fairness:** mention these as the universal human values underpinning gender equality and the goal of ending men's violence against women and girls
- **self-direction (choice, autonomy, freedom):** emphasise that choosing not to be restricted by rigid gender norms or roles is empowering
- **equality and choice:** in the case of gender, talk about these together (gender equality = greater freedom to be who you want to be and not confined by rigid gender roles)
- **equality, respect, and non-violence:** present these as core values in healthy relationships, and present equality as enriching rather than threatening relationships
- **equality and social justice:** talk about these as community responsibilities – not just women's issues
- **care, love, honesty, and friendship:** appeal to men's identities and aspirations as good partners and parents
- **mature love, responsibility, and social justice:** connect ending men's violence against women and girls to men's existing values around caring relationships, responsible fatherhood, and social justice to make it feel personally relevant and motivating
- **safety:** motivate men by emphasising their stake in building a safer, more just world for all – and consider appealing to 'humanity' more broadly, as this can be motivating rather than isolating

Continued »



Expanding understanding

- **We need to expand understanding of the social construction of gender roles.** This includes painting a vision of healthy masculinity, highlighting the benefits to men for their emotional, mental and physical health, and for their roles as partner, father, brother, son, friend, community member.
- Be careful not to inadvertently reinforce the 'man as protector and provider' frame as it comes from rigid, traditional masculinity and gender inequality.
- Use **concrete and relatable examples to show what 'healthy masculinity' looks like** (including of men who have

done it). We can create an emotional connection, relevance, and motivation, to encourage men to change and be part of the solution.

- **Link individual actions to systems.** When we talk about individual actions or situations, we need to link these to the **systems** that shape their circumstances, and expand understanding of the relationship between masculinity, gender inequality, and men's violence against women and girls.
- **Make clear connections highlighting the link between casual sexism and more serious forms of violence** – the [continuum of violence](#).
- **Highlight the benefits of gender equality to everyone**, and position gender equality and non-violence as part of the broader social justice agenda, giving men a positive role to play.

We can create an emotional connection, relevance, and motivation, to encourage men to change

Continued »

Things to try:

- **Talk about masculinity being adaptable**, more expansive, and open to change (rather than socially constructed), as a helpful entry point.
- **Explain how masculine norms can restrain, limit, and pressurise men** ('Man Box' – see more on metaphors, below). This may harm their health (e.g. through risky drinking, violence, not asking for help, not going to the GP), and their relationships and roles as partner, father, etc. Talk about the exhaustion and loneliness of being a 'man'.
- **Acknowledge the particular challenges men – particularly young men – face**, such as material hardship, and feeling you have to 'get it right' from the start and can't make mistakes as you learn – for example, using the wrong language or not understanding why something is sexist.
- **Emphasise the benefits of more fluid gender roles and of gender equality** for mental, physical, and emotional health, wellbeing, and relationships, for all genders. These include greater emotional freedom and intimacy, autonomy, financial independence, authenticity, commitment, and relationship fulfilment. These are positive growth/positive evolutions of masculinity – a freer and more expansive notion of relationships and intimacy, which alleviates burdens and restrictions. And it is the bedrock of a just and compassionate society.

Talk about masculinity being adaptable, more expansive, and open to change

- **Bring these benefits to life through concrete, relatable, and compelling examples and stories.** Explore different ways of being a man ('positive masculinity'), underpinned by respect and equality (and non-violence), such as being a healthy man, loving father, caring partner, friend, community member, role model.
- **Reframe emotional openness and vulnerability** as positive and courageous.
- **Engage with men's multiple identities** – highlighting the power or oppression they experience at the intersections of gender with other characteristics, such as class, race, sexuality, and disability.

Continued »

- **Make explicit the link between forms of masculinity and gender equality** – for example, being a more engaged partner/father, resolving conflicts collaboratively, sharing power, etc. This helps men to see how shifting masculinity norms is integral to achieving equal, respectful relationships. And it frames equality as enhancing men's wellbeing rather than as creating a loss for men.
- **Expand understanding of the causes of men's violence against women and girls** (i.e. gender inequality and men's choices, rather than something innate in how men and women behave). Explain how rigid gender roles, male dominance in relationships and society, and disrespect towards women create the conditions for violence.
- **Make explicit the link between casual sexism and physical and emotional abuse** (i.e. that casual sexism enables more extreme abuse) to motivate men to intervene when they witness such behaviours.
- **Frame the prevention of men's violence against women and girls as part of a broader agenda for equality and justice to make it more relevant to men, highlighting that all men have a stake in ending violence.** They can do this as part of building healthier, more equal communities, and they can use their influence (in families and with peers) to be agents of positive change. This is about men's role in building a more just, gender-equitable world for all – about being a 'role model'.
- **Make the importance of gender equality** and ending men's violence against women and girls feel personal, deeply relevant, and motivating.
- **Use precise language**, like 'outdated gender stereotypes'.



Continued »

Full recommendations

Drawing on all the resources and evidence in this report, the first list below highlights and explains some ideas to try out, while the second list summarises some problematic approaches to avoid and what to do instead.

Try these approaches...

- 1 Start by engaging people's compassionate values. Connecting with people's compassionate, or 'intrinsic', values can help increase support for our campaigning issues, particularly among people who might not be predisposed to agree with us in the first place. Appeal to people's sense of right and wrong and raise these powerful values to help them see equality issues from a different perspective:
 - **respect and fairness:** mention these as the universal human values underpinning gender equality and the goal of ending men's violence against women and girls
 - **self-direction (choice, autonomy, freedom):** emphasise that choosing not to be restricted by rigid gender norms or roles is empowering
 - **equality and choice:** in the case of gender, talk about these together (gender equality = greater freedom to be who you want to be and not be confined by rigid gender roles)
 - **equality, respect, and non-violence:** present these as core values in healthy relationships, and present equality as enriching rather than threatening relationships
 - **equality and social justice:** talk about these as community responsibilities – not just women's issues
 - **care, love, honesty, and friendship:** appeal to men's identities and aspirations as good partners and parents
 - **mature love, responsibility, and social justice:** connect ending men's violence against women and girls to men's existing values around caring relationships, responsible fatherhood, and social justice to make it feel personally relevant and motivating
 - **safety:** motivate men by emphasising their stake in building a safer, more just world for all – and consider appealing to 'humanity' more broadly, as this can be motivating rather than isolating

Continued »

“I’m the father of a daughter who’s 12. I want her to grow up in a world where she is treated equally to men. I’ve also got a young son who I would want to grow up to be mindful of the fact that there is no inequality between the genders.” (Man’s Man)

2 Portray a flexible vision of masculinity, with individuality and freedom sitting at ease with one another, as well as strength and sensitivity.

Framing communication in terms of flexible gender roles helps to validate the changes that Scottish men have already made, and to reconcile the contradictions between strength and vulnerability. This means redefining strength to include vulnerability.

But while many men are prepared to think differently about gender roles, we need to be strategic in our communications. Our priority is addressing men’s violence and promoting gender equality within an inclusive framework that recognises and respects all gender identities. This means avoiding getting sidelined into discussion about gender that will result in strengthening people’s beliefs about gender binaries – a concept many people are wedded to. Different messaging and techniques are needed to shift people’s thinking around gender identity, and we welcome further evidence and guidance to achieve this.

“Both genders are equally competent at various roles.” (Apprentice)

“People are changing, a role shouldn’t be restricted solely to a gender.” (Man’s Man)

3 Show how gender equality directly benefits men (and everyone). Men struggle to find concrete examples of how gender equality harms them, but they’re also typically unable to identify why it directly benefits them.

Even when men enthusiastically support gender equality at a political level, they rarely feel any tangible benefits at a personal, emotional level.

We can fill this void by framing gender equality as something that benefits everyone, with effective messaging that includes examples from family life, community life, and friendship – for example, harmony within the home, strengthening romantic relationships, offering a feeling of personal goodness and wellbeing, and making the world a better and safer place for all.

“It doesn’t mean men lose out but when we talk about gender equality it’s always about how we as a society can help women.” (Apprentice)

Continued »

4 Link individual stories to structural causes and solutions. Individual stories – often appearing as ‘case studies’ – are vital, but we need to be explicit about the wider social structures behind them, to avoid them being seen as one-offs.

When people read an individual's story, they'll think about individual solutions, not wider structural changes. Be clear that structures have been built or designed in a particular way, therefore they can be changed.

“If men think that women are the ‘weaker sex’ they will gradually start to try [to] control every single detail in the woman's life, which can then quickly lead to violence if the woman doesn't listen to what their partner wants them to do. This could be things like dressing or going on a night out.” (Sensitive Man)

5 Acknowledge individual agency. The ‘conflicted’ segment of the public – those who agree with both positive and negative messages about equality – believe really strongly in individual agency.

They believe that problems are caused by the bad behaviour of individual people. They think that people shape their own circumstances, are responsible for their own choices and actions, and therefore are responsible for making change happen.

We do need to communicate the structural nature of inequality to them, but we also have to acknowledge individual agency at the same time – without this, messages don't ring true and are often rejected outright.

“Men are often treated like perpetrators of abuse even when nothing had happened. I know women obviously felt repressed for a long time, but that is by no fault of the modern man.” (Lost Man)

6 Move from protection to partnership. Scottish men are beginning to challenge rigid gender roles, but many continue to prioritise displays of strength. This notion is deeply embedded in hyper-masculinity, stereotypical gender roles, and unequal gendered power dynamics – all of which lead to structural gender inequality. This connection between strength and power needs to be examined and challenged for genuine equality to be achieved.

This means moving beyond individual acts of protection – like a man walking women home at night – to addressing why streets aren't safe for everyone in the first place.

Continued »

By focusing on creating communities where everyone has equal access to safety and power, we can build genuine mutual care and respect – not through protective power dynamics, but through collective action that addresses root causes and gives everyone real agency over their own wellbeing.

“You can only achieve equality if you respect each other.” (Man's Man)

7 Portray the audience as part of the solution. Rather than portraying men as part of the problem, you can present the process of challenging their own prejudices and shortcomings as a solution. Focus on what men can do right – this can help them understand what they're doing wrong.

Show how supporting gender equality, taking action towards ending men's violence against women and girls, and acting as role models for gender equality are choices over which they have real agency. This taps into the value of self-direction described above.

“I could maybe be a little bit more vocal in social situations with other male colleagues or friends, maybe picking them up for slightly more derogatory comments or treatments that maybe I'd allowed to go past as just banter or fun previously.” (Man's Man)

8 Foster a sense of – and opportunities for – dialogue and conversation around topics of masculinity, gender equality, and men's violence against women and girls. There was value and power in men taking part in this project, where they had a chance to explore and discuss issues without fear of judgement or of saying the wrong thing, and to see different perspectives.

“I learned that I probably care a lot more about equality than I realised. It was more just a subconscious thought before, whereas this sort of forced me to think of it.” (Man's Man)

By focusing on creating communities where everyone has equal access to safety and power, we can build genuine mutual care and respect

Continued »

9

Give examples. Framing men's violence against women and girls as a product of gender inequality is challenging, but possible. Men can be encouraged to accept responsibility for helping to end this violence, but it is essential to offer concrete examples of what men can do and explain how different manifestations of men's violence against women and girls are connected.

"I think I'll definitely go away from this more mindful of the inequalities of men and women. It will change the way I act, it will change the way I speak." (Apprentice)

10

Tap into the fundamental value of respect. Disrespect is both familiar and repellent, and visible in behaviours such as groping, aggressive flirting, and catcalling (which help to fill the space between seemingly innocuous acts such as sexist jokes, and more serious acts of violence).

By framing the 'bad' behaviour observed in friends and colleagues as 'disrespectful', audiences are given the sense of agency required to call it out and therefore contribute actively to gender equality. Give concrete examples of relatable men already taking a stand against violence in their own lives.

"I believe respecting and valuing all women, but particularly those close to me, is of the highest importance." (Sensitive Man)

11

Clarify the links between gender inequality and men's violence against women and girls using examples of sexist behaviours – for example, catcalling, groping, aggressive flirting, and dominant or controlling behaviour.

These behaviours sit between actions that might be condoned by some (such as using pornography, making sexist jokes, buying sex) and ones that are deemed totally unacceptable (physical violence, sexual violence, controlling finances or freedoms). Focusing on 'intermediate' acts of violence against women helps audiences conceptualise a spectrum of violent actions.

"In regard to sexist jokes, it's been good to look into how they could be really harmful and I think I've got a better picture now because it does influence impressionable people and that promotes harm and violence towards the other genders as well." (Sensitive Man)

Continued »

12 Situate the issues in relatable social spheres. Talk about families, friend groups, and workplaces. By focusing on interpersonal relationships and mutual support, it is possible to offer audiences concrete examples of how the process of challenging traditional masculine norms leads to a happier, healthier life.

“My wife, I’ve got a good job, sort of, in my life, but she is a nurse and deals with people’s life at the end of the day and mental health and stuff like that, and she’s massively underpaid compared to what I do, and I fully believe a large part of that is because she’s a female and I’m a male, so that is a big problem.” (Man’s Man)

13 Offer encouragement and guidance on calling out unacceptable behaviour. Examples of what this looks like and how to do it are especially helpful.

“You can be a good friend by bettering their behaviour. Correcting someone is a sign of respect for them, and they will thank you for it. I would like to know if I had said something wrong.” (Sensitive Man)

14 Use a relatable ‘way in’ to talking about violence. Research shows that people very often take ‘violence’ literally to mean physical violence – and only physical violence. It can be very difficult to persuade audiences to consider other abusive actions as violence. Begin by talking about the terms ‘abusive’ or ‘harmful’, which are better understood, and build up from there.

The potential impact of leading with the word ‘violence’ is that we lose people before we’ve had chance to explain more – their understanding of what it means is narrow and the conversation could easily get bogged down in debate about definitions.

“It’s a joke. Not reality. So if you’re having a laugh with mates, it doesn’t then affect some random woman.” (Apprentice)

15 Promote empathy for survivors. Foster a personal, emotional connection to the issue and encourage critical self-reflection on past behaviours, in a safe and non-judgemental setting. We can also situate violence prevention within a positive vision of men’s role in building a more just, gender-equitable world for everyone.

“This topic resonates with me deeply due to personal experience of this. I don’t want to go into details but I would always be concerned and help where I could in life. We all have a duty to keep women and each other safe, from creatures out there that hurt women or kids.” (Lost Man)

Continued »

16 Use a tested metaphor. Metaphors help people understand how things work or happen, by relating an issue they don't understand to something familiar. Many metaphors have been tested in research on social justice and equality issues. Here are some metaphors worth trying.

Inequality as 'running up escalators going down':

- In other Equally Ours research, this metaphor was most successful in moving people's understanding of inequality in a more structural direction.
- Describe an unequal society as one where some people have a mix of escalators in their path, while others have only down escalators, and constantly have to run up them to get where they want to go.

Men as restricted or limited by the 'Man Box':

- The VicHealth guide explored in the literature review found that metaphors such as "masculine stereotypes are like a box" resonated, conveying how men can be constrained by rigid gender expectations.

The 'pressure' of outdated models of masculinity:

- While many men believe in equality, they feel pressure to uphold aspects of traditional masculinity.
- But use this metaphor carefully, as communications that lead with current pressures can sidetrack men into focusing on the things that are currently causing them stress.

"The world is dog-eat-dog out there. Many people weaponise their identity for money. On social media they use division politics and world issues against each other to get ahead. Differences between men and women and other groups in society are used to pull at societal strings to highlight our differences when the masses are at each other's throats." (Lost Man)



Continued »

Repeat, repeat, repeat. The more people hear a message, the more likely it is to stick



17 Repeat, repeat, repeat. The more people hear a message, the more it's likely to stick. You might get bored of saying it or hearing it, but keep going – it might be the first time someone else has heard it!

“Because I’m a student I can see this stuff on nights out and stuff like that, so I’ll be a bit more observant now.” (Apprentice)

18 Tailor messages to resonate with different subgroups of men based on their unique experiences and social locations. See the [‘Four typologies’](#) section for specific insights and suggestions.

“Conversations around gender equality can be very emotive and lead to difficult situations. I don’t think equality and feminism as concepts are damaging men, but there are definitely some extreme views which can be portrayed as anti-men and are quite generalising. This is problematic for me as I think it polarises lots of men and women, which isn’t productive.” (Sensitive Man)

Continued »

Things to avoid, and what to do instead...

X Avoid othering. Don't use framing that 'others' men who commit violence against women and girls – for example, describing them as monsters, 'bad apples', and so on – as this individualises the problem and focuses attention on individual behaviour and character.

✓ Instead support men to see the societal, structural issue. We need a societal response – which they can be part of.

“Similar to the incels out there, there are diehard feminists that just want to oppress men.” (Lost Man)

X Avoid 'them' and 'us'. Move away from narratives that unnecessarily divide the world into 'them' and 'us', however tempting and rational it might be to do this when talking about men's violence against women and girls.

✓ Instead, emphasise our audience's compassion by expanding who they think of as their community, and being clear that our solutions are common sense. It's helpful to frame issues as things that affect all of us, or certainly a larger group of people.

“We have been programmed to think that the man is the stronger one and the protector but I don't really buy into that.” (Sensitive Man)

X Avoid myth-busting. Directly debunking false claims often doesn't work, and can backfire. It can even leave people remembering the original claim, the one we're trying to refute, and not our carefully researched explanations as to why it's wrong – they remember the myth, not the busting.

✓ Instead, tell a different story and lead with what's true, not what isn't. And, on this theme...

X Avoid the 'meritocracy myth' of the deserving and undeserving. The belief that we all 'get out what we put in' obscures how inequality really works, and stops us addressing structural barriers.

✓ Instead, provide an alternative narrative, and be careful that the stories and values we're using don't accidentally entrench people's belief in meritocracy.

“At school a lot of teachers prioritise the girls and are quite sexist and blame boys for most things.” (Apprentice)

Continued »

X **Avoid making comparisons.** Comparing current situations, here and now, with things that happen in other places or have happened in the past can prompt people's beliefs that problems have largely been solved, or that the situation in Scotland is 'better' or 'not really that bad' compared with other countries or cultures, and therefore not a concern.

✓ **Instead, talk about what is happening here and now,** explain the issues and their causes, and say what can be done to change things.

"There is this notion that feminism is trying to control men, but there doesn't seem to be any evidence for this. I think it's because men are used to having more control over women, so losing this control can feel like a loss of freedom to them." (Sensitive Man)

X **Avoid fatalistic stories about things that are rigged, broken, or in permanent crisis.** Instead of talking up the scale of the problem we're facing with ever-increasing intensity, we must inspire people with a vision of the better world we could create. Shouting ever louder about how bad things are often makes people bury their heads in the sand, thinking there's nothing we can do about it and that problems are inevitable, not fixable.

✓ **Instead, we must remind people of the better world we're striving for,** and be clear that this really is achievable. It helps to recognise where progress on gender equality has already been made and how that happened – show the difference men can make when they support action and change.

"I think I'll definitely go away from this more mindful of the inequalities of men and women. It will change the way I act, it will change the way I speak." (Apprentice)

X **Avoid numbers without context or explanation.** Numbers and statistics are great for helping to tell a story and show the scale of problems – but they should support your story and not be the story by themselves. On their own, numbers don't change people's minds or appeal to their values or emotions.

✓ **Instead, frame numbers with context, explanation, stories, and values** to help people understand what they mean (or else they'll interpret them through their own existing beliefs).

"Certain positive discrimination quotas in jobs can mean companies need to hit certain targets, which often means less roles for men." (Apprentice)

Continued »

...arguments about any social justice issue are easily dismissed if they sound political or divisive

X **Avoid using political concepts or language.** We need to show how and why change involves all of us, so be careful with language that can sound political or radical, as it can make audiences feel marginalised rather than engaged in the solutions. This isn't unique to talking about gender equality, men's violence against women and girls, or masculinity – arguments about any social justice issue are easily dismissed if they sound political or divisive.

To counter and condemn misogynistic extremism, we have to be careful not to use language or terminology that could be seen as overtly political. These arguments may alienate some men in our target audience of the persuadable/conflicted middle, who can also be drawn to divisive 'anti-woke' rhetoric. We need to be careful not to reinforce these polarising associations.

✓ **Instead, emphasise core values of equality and societal benefits** in your messaging, while still clearly condemning extreme misogyny. This approach aligns with the attitudes of many Scottish men, who support gender equality in principle but may be wary of divisive rhetoric.

"I am able to ignore all the woke nonsense, state my opinions amongst friends, despite the fact that some opinions, i.e. pronouns, etc., have to be adhered to in a workplace." (Lost Man)

X **Avoid using complex arguments and concepts.** Jargon, complicated concepts, or language that's rooted in theory or dogma might make sense to us, but arguments based on these won't engage conflicted audiences and are another barrier to changing beliefs.

Communicating using theoretical terms of structural inequality or theory/ideology is likely to result in disengagement or 'othering' of violence and violent men.

✓ **Instead, use simple, relatable examples** and plain English that can bring structural inequalities to life.

"Feminism and equality are good things but there are some people who go too far with the things they say and make it out to be that women are superior to men instead of gaining equality. This then makes men lash out and lose some respect for women." (Apprentice)

Continued »

X **Avoid lecturing or patronising.** Whatever the issue, and however passionate we are about it, nobody likes being talked down to. Telling someone they're wrong doesn't make them think we're right. Adopting a patronising, aggressive, judgemental, or inflexible tone is more likely to turn people against what we're saying, not improve their understanding or engagement.

"I think it's got to be done hand in hand, and I think there's got to be a real sense of not squashing men's views because obviously there's a clear mental health pandemic going on with males at the moment, and I think more and more that males feel scared to voice their opinion in society, being scared of offending someone or feeling 'Can I actually say this? Am I able to say this?' It then could be a slippery slope in terms of men speaking about key issues that they already struggle with, to talk about in terms of men's mental health and wellbeing." (Lost Man)

The hardest to change

Some of the dominant, unhelpful views revealed in this research are widely held and deeply entrenched – but that doesn't mean we can't change them or shouldn't try.

The most 'stuck' dominant view of men's violence against women and girls is consistent with deep-rooted dominant narratives across a number of social justice issues – that the problem is caused by individuals.

It's commonly believed that men's violence against women and girls is caused by the choices of individual men. This leads to a focus on individual causes of social problems, driving support for individual solutions rather than awareness of structural causes and solutions.

Ways to deal with this include:

- consistently and frequently repeating your alternative narrative on structural causes and solutions – people often believe the messages they hear most
- stop using or bringing to mind frames that reinforce the idea of individual causes and solutions – 'bad apples', othering, monsterring, 'predatory' men, and so on.

The idea that gender equality has largely been achieved in Scotland is also consistent with deep-rooted dominant narratives across many social justice issues – the sense that 'things are better than they were', or that 'we [the UK, Scotland, etc.] are better than other countries', and so on means that it's easier to dismiss what's happening here and now.

Continued »

Ways to deal with this include:

- using facts framed by value statements
- **giving relatable examples of problems and why they matter**, along with concrete solutions and who's responsible for making the change happen – show that change is possible and avoid triggering fatalism
- **taking a no-blame approach** when we talk about what still needs to change in Scotland – recognising the progress that's been made but also that there is still a long way to go
- **showing what we're for, not what we're against** (successful movements unite people with a common aspiration)

“Let's maybe give ourselves a bit of credit for the work that's been done to date as opposed to just constantly bashing ourselves!” (Man's Man)

We can shift these entrenched beliefs and narratives if all of us who are working on social justice and equality issues take the same approach: prompting people's intrinsic, compassionate values and making clear links between individual actions and structural change.



The idea that gender equality has largely been achieved in Scotland is also consistent with deep-rooted dominant narratives across many social justice issues

Continued »

A photograph of a man in a dark t-shirt, pointing his right hand towards the left while holding a clipboard in his left hand. The background is blurred, showing an outdoor setting with trees and a fence. The text 'Next steps' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font.

Next steps

Actioning the recommendations

We've commissioned this research and put together these recommendations because achieving lasting change in how men understand and act on gender inequality and violence against women and girls is key to having healthier relationships, happier lives, and a more equal world.

The research has given us valuable insight into how 'persuadable' men think and feel about these issues, and where we are likely to see success in changing the beliefs and attitudes that may be holding them back.

We now have the insights and strategies to tell a new story of men's violence against women and girls. Put these framing recommendations to use and share them with others. If we all adopt a strategic communications approach, we can tell a compelling and persuasive story that will inspire men to act and help people to recognise the structural causes.

Together, we can end men's violence against women and girls.

Continued »

Future research

This research is groundbreaking and therefore foundational. There is scope for further research and analysis that could provide more depth and breadth, such as exploring how demographic factors affect men's attitudes. We would be delighted to see future research build on our findings, and we have identified some areas of focus:

- **Young people** – future research could look at how these messages work on boys and whether there are specific techniques to influence boys. Do boys still have expectations around rigid, outdated gender roles? Do early experiences and anticipations around dating have an effect?
- **Intersectionality** – how do men's feelings about men's violence against women and girls vary depending on their own protected characteristics or the protected characteristics of women and girls?
- **Demographics** – the quantitative research found that certain age brackets were likely to be linked to specific opinions among men, but this is nuanced and not as simple as younger generations being more likely to agree with the Expert view. The quantitative research found that religious belief, occupation, and education level might also affect views, but differences in ethnicity and place of residence very rarely led to any significant differences in opinions.



**The public research aimed
to understand Scottish men
with conflicted views**

Continued »

- **Different forms of violence** – research may wish to focus on how to improve men's understanding and increase the action they take against particular forms of violence against women and girls, such as commercial sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, or coercive control.
- **Messengers** – there is also work to be done on identifying who would make the most relevant, credible, and relatable messengers or spokespeople on this issue for the 'conflicted/persuadable' group of men. Who would be seen to have the right level of authority and authenticity to talk to different groups of men about violence against women and girls, gender inequality, and masculinity in a way that could help to shift long-standing beliefs?
- **Metaphors** – some potentially helpful metaphors have emerged in the literature, such as the 'Man Box' study (Heilman et al., 2017), but we could make these stronger and more effective by testing them with men and boys in the Scottish context.

Self-care and collective care in research

Feminist researchers, especially those impacted by these topics, may find it difficult to research attitudes on gender and men's violence against women and girls. We want to highlight the importance of self-care and collective care when doing this work. Researchers should strongly consider their windows of tolerance before starting any similar project. Organisations should work with researchers to create a plan and a support system to mitigate stress and enhance wellbeing.

We want to highlight the importance of self-care and collective care when doing this work

Acknowledgements

This research was a collaborative effort, and we'd like to thank the people whose expertise and labour helped us find the best way to talk to men about masculinity, gender equality, and men's violence against women and girls.

Equally Ours for contributing their expertise in strategic communications and taking on this innovative research with us!

The expert group of equality organisations that informed the 'gap analysis' and helped identify the 'expert view'. Thank you to Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre, Engender/EMCC, Rape Crisis Scotland, Shakti Women's Aid, Fife Violence Against Women Partnership, COSLA, Scottish Women's Aid, the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland, Fantanka, and Feniks.

Lotus Research for conducting the qualitative research for this project, including the analysis, and presenting the findings in a comprehensive report.

Paul Brook for translating the findings into the final report and guide.

Moorcroft Market Research for conducting the quantitative research and analysis, and presenting the findings.

The participants who gave their time and shared their thoughts and experiences through our online forum, interviews, and survey.

Zero Tolerance and **White Ribbon Scotland staff** who dedicated time and effort to this project, including its inception and coordination, the literature review, its presentation, and the engagement plan.

Inspiring Scotland who funded this vital work.

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Addressing men's violence against women and girls:
Evidence and ideas for communicating with men

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