

Accounting for Context: Understanding the Experiences of Racially and Ethnically Diverse Boys to Inform Gender Transformative Healthy Relationships Promotion Programming

By Caroline Claussen

Adolescence represents a prime opportunity to promote attitudes and behaviours that prevent domestic violence across the life span, in part due to the gender role intensification that occurs during this developmental period.¹ For adolescent boys, this often means increased pressure to conform to stereotypical masculine gender role norms – such as aggression, hypersexuality, and restrictive emotionality– that are more likely to support gender inequality and violence.² Gender transformative prevention programs have been noted as a promising approach to engaging adolescent boys in masculinity issues and promoting healthy and positive constructs of masculinity during this critical developmental period.³ Gender transformative programs, according to Gupta “...seek to transform gender roles and create more gender equitable relationships”.⁴ As such, gender transformative programs for adolescent boys play an important role in supporting healthy relationships and preventing adult domestic violence before it starts.⁵

Gender transformative prevention programming, however, exists within a variety of structural and social contexts which have not been substantially considered in prior research on prevention programming.⁶ As such, scholars have called for the use of an intersectional lens within the

¹ Crooks, C.V., Wolfe, D.A., Hughes, R., Jaffe, P.G., & Chiodo, D. (2008). Development, evaluation and national implementation of a school-based program to reduce violence and related risk behaviors: Lessons from the Fourth R. *IPC Review*, 2, 109-135; Lundgren, R., & Amin, A. (2015). Addressing intimate partner violence and sexual violence among adolescents: Emerging evidence of effectiveness. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(1Suppl), S42-S50.

² Schalet, A.T., Santelli, J.S., Russell, S.T., Halpern, C.T., Miller, S.A., Pickering, S.S., ...Hoenig, J.M. (2014). Invited commentary: Broadening the evidence for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and education in the United States. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43, 1595-1610. DOI:10.1007/s10964-014-0178-8

³ Exner-Cortens, D. (2019). Preventing gender-based violence: The health perspective. 2018/2019 Annual Report for Public Health Agency of Canada. Calgary, AB: Author.

⁴ Gupta, G.R. (2000). Gender, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS: The what, the why, and they how. *Can HIV AIDS Policy Law Review*, 5, 86-93.

⁵ Exner-Cortens, D., Wright, A., Van Bavel, M., Sitter, K.C., Hurlock, D., Carter, R., & Krause, P. (2020). “To be a guy is to be human”: Outcomes of the WiseGuyz program through photo-based evaluation. *Health Promotion Practice*, XX(X), 1-11. doi: 10.1177/1524839920976382; Foley, A., Powell-Williams, T., & Davies, K. (2015). Engaging boys in eradicating gender-based violence: A pilot study of a Promundo-adapted program. *Masculinities and Social Change*, 4(1), 26-43; Lundgren, R., & Amin, A. (2015). Addressing intimate partner violence and sexual violence among adolescents: Emerging evidence of effectiveness. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(1Suppl), S42-S50.

⁶ Malhotra, K., Gonzalez-Guarda, R.M., & Mitchell, E.M. (2015). A review of teen dating violence prevention research: What about Hispanic youth? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 16(4), 444-465. DOI: 10.1177/1524838014537903; White, J.W. (2009). A gendered approach to adolescent dating violence: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(1), 1-15.

development of prevention programs.⁷ An intersectional lens is one that takes into account the ways masculinity is intertwined with other significant social identities, such as race and class.⁸ Researchers have suggested that models of adolescent intimate partner and sexual violence prevention should incorporate lessons from critical studies and research on intersectionality;⁹ yet, despite these calls, there is limited Canadian research on primary prevention education for adolescents that accounts for cultural and contextual factors and addresses multiple lines of social differences, such as race and class, in relation to gender and healthy relationships.¹⁰

Dr. Caroline Claussen, postdoctoral scholar with [HOPELab](#) and Dr. Deiner Exner-Cortens in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary, is leading a project that will address this noted gap in the literature. Her project explores the lived experiences of boys who are positioned at specific intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity, in order to understand how their experiences can inform gender transformative healthy relationships programming. The project also seeks to identify the ways that differences in social position and power between facilitators and young men impacts curriculum delivery. Research questions guiding the project include:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of boys who are positioned at specific intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, and how do their experiences effect (potential) engagement in gender-transformative healthy relationships programming?

Research Question 2: How does a facilitator's own positionality influence delivery of gender-transformative healthy relationships programming?

Research Question 3: In what ways do current gender-transformative healthy relationship programming for boys incorporate intersectionality into the curriculum?

Research Question 4: How can understanding the experiences of boys positioned at specific intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity inform future gender-transformative healthy relationships program design?

Findings from the interviews (both with boys and with facilitators) will be used to conduct a curriculum review of 3-5 gender-transformative healthy relationship programs that specifically target adolescent boys. Results from the curriculum review will be used to generate

⁷ Dworkin, S.L., Fleming, P.J., & Colvin, C.J. (2015). The promises and limitations of gender transformative health programming with men: Critical reflections from the field. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 17(2), 128-143;

⁸ Shields, S.A. (2008). Gender: An intersectionality perspective. *Sex Roles*, 59(5-6), 301-311; Siltanen, J., & Doucet, A. (2017). *Gender relations in Canada: Intersectionalities and social change*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

⁹ Malhotra, K., Gonzalez-Guarda, R.M., & Mitchell, E.M. (2015). A review of teen dating violence prevention research: What about Hispanic youth? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 16(4), 444-465. DOI: 10.1177/1524838014537903; Schalet, A.T., Santelli, J.S., Russell, S.T., Halpern, C.T., Miller, S.A., Pickering, S.S., ...Hoenig, J.M. (2014). Invited commentary: Broadening the evidence for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and education in the United States. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43, 1595-1610. DOI:10.1007/s10964-014-0178-8; White, J.W. (2009). A gendered approach to adolescent dating violence: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(1), 1-15.

¹⁰ Malhotra, K., Gonzalez-Guarda, R.M., & Mitchell, E.M. (2015). A review of teen dating violence prevention research: What about Hispanic youth? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 16(4), 444-465. DOI: 10.1177/1524838014537903; White, J.W. (2009). A gendered approach to adolescent dating violence: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(1), 1-15.

considerations and recommendations for the design and implementation of gender-transformative healthy relationship programming.

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