



Girls Making History

COMMUNITIES AND CULTURE NETWORK+ FUNDED
RESEARCH PILOT 2013/2014

Helen Thomas, Morag McDermont, Penny Evans,
Dorothy Baker and Roz Hall.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL & KNOWLE WEST MEDIA CENTRE

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from a six month CCN+ funded pilot study led by the Girls Making History project in collaboration with the University of Bristol.

Girls Making History is an ongoing Bristol-based project designed and led, in a co-productive partnership, by Knowle West Media Centre and a group of local young women aged 13-24. The project aims to ask how, by harnessing the expertise of young women's direct experience of violence and coercive control in their relationships, digital tools might raise awareness of the cultural normalisation of partner violence in teenage relationships and social networks. The six month research phase ran from January to June 2014. Though only a short, snap-shot of an ongoing project, this is a welcome space to examine the working of Girls Making History. In addition this was also an opportunity to critically reflect upon how involvement in this co-produced project might support these young women to transform their understanding of their own experience, develop new imagined futures and, on a wider scale, transmit these new ways of understanding externally into their 'real' and 'virtual' communities.

During this pilot study the young women collaborated with engineers, digital experts and artists' in the design of two digital platforms.

In-line with the principles of the project, this research was co-produced with the young women, Knowle West Media Centre staff and researchers collaboratively developing and conducting all elements of the research programme.

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Introduction

Girls Making History (GMH) is an ongoing and integrated part of Knowle West Media Centre's (KWMC) young people's programme. It expressly seeks to challenge the cultural normalisation of exploitative and violent relationships within communities of young women who have experienced violence in their intimate relationships. The project explores ways through which young women can both understand the processes that have led to their isolation and challenge them in ways that can support other teenage girls. Employing a model of co-production which aims for power and responsibility to be shared, the project attempts to diversify power and responsibility by drawing the young women involved in the project into every element of the project's development, maintenance and execution including the research-design.

For the six months of the CCN+ funded pilot study GMH held regular day-long co-designed workshops, a site in which individuals came together as co-investigators and co-creators, aiming to create a space where young women could identify 'this kind of community as a way of beginning to change the other communities they take part in'¹ and through this begin to consider the cultural normalisation of teenage partner violence within their own personal teenage networks. Fourteen young women were involved to a greater and lesser degree, most attending regular workshops and contributing to the ongoing design and execution of both the programme and research. All but two had experienced partner violence either directly or through witnessing it in a childhood home. Through the workshop series the young women, along with the researchers, digital experts and artists', co-designed two digital prototypes that could potentially support teenage girls at risk of, or already in the early stages of abusive relationships.

The project formed a core team which managed the project's practicalities as well as the research design and execution. This included a creative technologist from KWMC, a researcher from the University of Bristol (UoB) with a background in working with young women in community settings, a local young female artist and an open space for any young women from the project who wanted to be involved.

Beyond this GMH took steps to situate itself within the wider local context through a steering group using this as a mechanism to draw in expertise and guidance from academics and the multitude of charities, statutory and third sector organisations working in the arena of domestic violence in the local area, including a minority working specifically with younger women².

The project, in response to the needs of the young women, employed a flexible multi-method approach to the collection of data aiming to allow the co-production of more than just 'propositional

¹ Gatenby, B. & Humphries, M. (2000), February. Feminist participatory action research: Methodological and ethical issues. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 89-105). Pergamon. Pg. 98.

² For example the 16-24 project led by the charity [Survive](#), the Bristol developed [Spiralling Toolkit](#), the [Bristol Ideal](#) school based intervention model and the [CRUSH](#) intervention programme for 13-18 years olds.

forms of knowledge'³. This report draws on these multiple data sources including audio recordings, art works, visual mapping, photography, extensive notes, reflexive diaries and narrative interviews with the young women involved in the project.

Within this report, where direct quotes are used they are drawn from the narrative interviews which occurred in the month following this pilot study. Interviewees have been anonymised and narratives dissected into extractions that ensure anonymity. This is a problematic approach to narrative and we have wrestled with the contradictions of this dissection both in terms of defining representation and the power this imbues 'to hide differences in women's experiences'⁴. However it was collaboratively agreed that, given some of the challenges around anonymity in this project (which are further discussed in this report), it was necessary that we employ this less than perfect approach.

³ Noorani, Tesheen. (2013b) *Productive Margins: Regulating for Engagement Scoping Study: Phase II*.

⁴ Gatenby, B. & Humphries, M. (2000) Op. Cit.

Domestic Violence and Abuse in Teenage Relationships

Violence against women and girls remains a national crisis. In 2009 the NSPCC published a groundbreaking report which, for the first time, documented teenage partner violence in the UK context⁵. The study reported significant numbers of both young men and women perpetrating violent behaviours in their intimate relationships. Young women were shown to be experiencing violence more frequently and conveyed a significantly higher degree of negative impacts on their wellbeing than their male counterparts, with three-quarters of young women reporting experiencing emotional violence, one third reporting sexual violence and one quarter reporting physical violence. There was little distinction between young people aged under sixteen and those over sixteen in their reported experiences of partner violence.

Experiencing partner violence in youth has profound and long reaching negative physical, psychological, and behavioural consequences for afflicted young people with their ability to form healthy, non-violent relationships in the future significantly impaired⁶. The risk of subsequent victimization increases exponentially with the experience of violence in a teenage relationship⁷ but recognising partner violence in young relationships presents a significant problem. Research indicates that teenagers are rarely able to recognise their abusive behaviours in intimate relationships as wrong or take personal responsibility for their actions⁸. Within peer groups, young people have difficulty recognizing physical and sexual violence, often framed it as play-fighting or a joke⁹. In addition there are distinct features to partner violence in teenage communities that can be difficult to identify such as the exertion of dominance through the control of mobile phones¹⁰ and the restriction and/or intrusive monitoring of digital spaces¹¹. Young people also often perceive controlling and jealous behaviours as signs of love¹².

For young people, romantic and intimate relationships often serve as methods of self-identification and esteem¹³ and, within many teenage communities, being in a relationship holds high status and invokes aspirational qualities. Young women with low self-esteem tend to hold relationship status in

⁵ Barter, C *et al.* (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. London: UoB and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

⁶ Whitaker *et al.* (2006). A critical review of interventions for the primary prevention of perpetration of partner violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 11(2), 151-166. Pg. 52.

⁷ Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000a). Extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence. Washington: U.S. Department of Justice.

⁸ Wolfe, D. A. Crooks, C. C. Chiodo, D. & Jaffe, P. (2009a). CHILD MALTREATMENT, BULLYING, GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT, AND ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(1), 21-24. (A)

⁹ Barter, C *et al.* (2009) Op. Cit.

¹⁰ Wood, Marsha, Christine Barter and David Berridge. (2011) Standing on my own two feet': Disadvantaged Teenagers, Intimate Partner Violence and Coercive Control, NSPCC.

¹¹ Barter, C *et al.* (2009) Op. Cit.; Leaper and Kristin Anderson. (1997). "Gender development and heterosexual romantic relationships during adolescence." *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 1997.78: 85-103.

¹² Levy, B. (1990). Abusive teen dating relationship: An emerging issue for the 90s. Response to the Victimization of Women and Children, 13(1), 59.

¹³ Darlington, Richard, Julia Margo, and Sarah Sternberg. (2011), "Teenage girls' self-esteem is more than skin-deep...." DEMOS.

far higher regard than their peers and are even less likely to be able to distinguish any violent behaviours from those typical of a teenage relationship¹⁴. The need to maintain relationship status can override other needs and wants and there is significant evidence that threats to end a relationship is a powerful coercive tactic used in sexual violence against the young women¹⁵. Relationship violence has a direct impact on the self-esteem of young women and low self-esteem itself invokes an increased risk of experiencing partner violence¹⁶ thus fuelling a cycle where self-esteem is continually diminished. Low self-esteem is acknowledged as having a significant impact on the future life opportunities of young women¹⁷.

There is a growing concern that young people accept partner violence as a relational norm¹⁸. Causally, this is now acknowledged not merely to be the traditionally recognised inter-generational or peer-to-peer transmission of norms but a more virulent form of ‘social contagion’. Beliefs and attitudes justifying relational violence are reiterated through a cyclical conjunction of family and social networks which are then perpetually reinforced by societal level indicators such as the media and popular culture¹⁹. This is particularly evident in online spaces, where a wider peer group are ‘infected’ by the development of a particular set of (highly sexualised) gender norms within sub-sets of their online networks. These norms are eventually enacted in the wider group, for example it is through this process that ‘sexting’ is now reported as a feature of what young people considered ‘healthy’ sexual experimentation within and outside of teenage relationships²⁰. It is important to note that there is a distinct deficit in our understanding of what does and should constitute ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ teenage relationships and experimentation²¹.

Discussions around the wider societal circumstances in which young women form their relationship norms recognise the ways in which discourses of ‘emphasised femininity’ and romantic narratives create societal and individual expectations that young women ‘subsume their own needs and feelings

¹⁴ Barter, C *et al.* (2009) Op. Cit

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ McCarry, M. and O’Connor, K. (2011). Domestic Violence in Filwood: A Pilot Project into Local Perceptions, UoB; Barter, C *et al.* (2009) Op. Cit; Lacasse, A. and Mendelson, M. J. (2007) Sexual coercion among adolescents: victims and perpetrators, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(4), pp424-437.

¹⁷ Orth, U. Robins, R. W. & Widaman, K. F. (2012). Life-span development of self-esteem and its effects on important life outcomes. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 102(6), 1271.

¹⁸ McCarry, M. (2010). Becoming a ‘proper man’: young people’s attitudes about interpersonal violence and perceptions of gender. *Gender and Education*, 22(1), 17-30; McCarry, M. (2005). Conducting social research with young people: Ethical considerations. In *Researching gender violence: Feminist methodology in action*, ed. T. Skinner, M. Hester, and E. Malos, 87-104. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.

¹⁹ Wolfe, D. A. Crooks, C. C. Chiodo, D. & Jaffe, P. (2009a). CHILD MALTREATMENT, BULLYING, GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT, AND ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(1), 21-24. (A)

²⁰ Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey. (2012) *A qualitative study of children, young people and ‘sexting’: a report prepared for the NSPCC*. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, London, UK; Livingstone, S. (2008) Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers’ use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression, *New Media & Society*, 10 (3): 459-477.

²¹ Whitaker *et al.* (2006). A critical review of interventions for the primary prevention of perpetration of partner violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 11(2), 151-166.

for that if their boyfriends'²². This situates young women in a space where they are neither able nor willing to recognise violence in their relationships particularly if overt physical violence is not involved²³. Conditions of heterosexual normativity and representations of woman and girl-hood which are derived from the increasingly mainstreamed 'porno-aesthetic' colonize a collective mentality²⁴ in which girlhood and early womanhood are framed in ways that are near impossible to recognise as we are each, ourselves in their constant reproduction. Young women are offered a restricted arena of sexuality in which any broader sense of 'sexiness' is, through regulatory discourses, equated with deviancy, criminality and victimhood²⁵. If young adulthood is an essential period of role experimentation through which 'adulthood' eventually emerges²⁶ then young women, who are placed under exorbitant pressure to conform to narrow standards of bodily representation and intimate relationship norms, are experimentally stunted²⁷.

Since 2013 there has been a growing clutch of partner violence orientated interventions in the UK aimed specifically at young people - these form a jumble of third sector, public health, statutory provision, criminal justice and social care with a lack of clarity, cohesion and consistency in the approaches employed²⁸. Current research in the UK²⁹ synthesising evidence on preventive interventions - including those related to teenage partner violence - initially report 'limited empirical evaluation' and 'little clarity on the underpinning theoretical assumptions' as endemic across UK youth partner violence interventions. A similar European study (REaDAPt) reports that there is currently no known model of intervention which impacts attitudes or behaviours in relation to teenage partner violence beyond a year³⁰. Further-more, the REaDAPt project offers a stark warning of the risk presented by well-intentioned interventions to 'foster preconceptions about the culpability of victims and the greater danger posed by strangers...leading some young people to be fearful of entering into relationships'³¹, concerns that have been echoed in subsequent studies³². Significantly there is as of yet 'no evidence of any existing interventions or programmes working with

²² Jackson, Sue. (2001), "Happily never after: Young women's stories of abuse in heterosexual love relationships." *Feminism & Psychology*: 305-321.

²³ Barter, C *et al.* (2009) Op. Cit.

²⁴ Hooks, Bell. 1990, "Choosing Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, Ed. Sandra Harding, (2004), 153-160. Routledge, London.

²⁵ Renold, E. & Ringrose, J. (2011) Op. Cit.; Dobson, A. S. (2013). Op. Cit.

²⁶ Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American psychologist*, 55(5), 469;

²⁷ For a discussion of the social emphasis on performing the 'eroticised girl child' see:

Renold, E. & Ringrose, J. (2011). Schizoid subjectivities? Re-theorizing teen girls' sexual cultures in an era of 'sexualization'. *Journal of Sociology*, 47(4), 389-409

This is further discussed in terms of the social currency this representation elicits in:

Dobson, A. S. (2013). Performative shamelessness on young women's social network sites: Shielding the self and resisting gender melancholia. *Feminism & Psychology*, Pg. 101/2;

²⁸ Stanley, N. (2011) Children Experiencing Domestic Violence: A Research Review, Dartington, Research in Practice.

²⁹ Preventing Domestic Abuse for Children (PEACH) study

³⁰ Hale, Becky, Fox, Claire and David Gadd. (2012) Research Report Evaluation of three European schools-based domestic violence prevention education programmes REaDAPt: First Evaluation Report.

³¹ Ibid. Pg. 27

³² Fox, C. L. Corr, M. L. Gadd, D. & Butler, I. (2014). Young teenagers' experiences of domestic abuse. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(4), 510-526.

adults or young people that can accurately claim to prevent intimate-partner violence against women' (MacMillan *et al.* 2009).

Research Aims

The project outlined the following broad set of aims rather than more fixed research questions with the aim of opening an experimental space from which the unexpected could emerge:

- To develop our understanding of ‘community’ as it is envisioned by teenage girls.
- To enable teenage girls to overcome the barriers to discussing the normalisation of violence within teenage communities and to understand the value of dissent, through a programme of up-skilling, peer mentoring and co-creation in digital media.
- To build confidence in this group of young women to challenge the normalisations of their community and enable them to support, through a wider campaign, other teenage girls at risk of becoming involved in abusive / violent relationships.
- To develop our understanding of the potential use of digital tools and of digital realms as supportive spaces employed by teenage girls experiencing intimate partner violence.
- To explore how these spaces can be employed as transformative arenas subverting the normative nature of teenage intimate partner violence.

Research Design

The research design, responsive to the projects aims, was deliberately outlined in a loose and flexible manner, anticipating an iterative process that engaged with the emerging findings of the project. Four work strands were identified and this served as a guide map to aid the collaborative design of the six month workshop series:

- Research and digital investigation
 - Scoping the academic, third sector and grey literatures to inform our understanding of teenage relationships in the digital age, teenage violence related interventions and related grass-roots campaigns/movements in the UK.
 - Examining the ‘market’ around technologies and digital innovations which might have potential to intersect in the normalisation of violence in teenage relationships.
- Digital making and ideas generation
 - Workshops and events bringing together different forms of expertise to inspire new and innovative digital designs and creative technologies relating to the field of teenage partner violence.
- Personal Social Health Education development
 - Incorporating personal development and up-skilling into all elements of GMH, informed by and responsive to the interests of the young women. Including: raising confidence; building digital knowledge, skills and personal expertise; broadening the sense of what’s possible; enabling young women to overcome the barriers to discussing the normalisation

of violence within teenage communities; enabling young women to understand the value of dissenting from the norms of teenage relationship violence.

- Evaluation and Dissemination
 - Creating collaborative networks with other related projects/organisations and initiatives in the locality and beyond through a steering group which can inform and support future working.
 - Enabling a space for the young women involved to amplify their voices into stratospheres of power.
 - To use this CCN+ pilot study as an iterative process through which GMH can develop its processes and understanding.
 - To contribute to the wider academic and public debates around teenage partner violence, co-productive and collaborative methodologies and young women in technology.

Evaluation was built into the project from the outset. Group discussions were recorded on flipcharts, individual cognitive maps created by all team members were revisited at regular stages and audio-recordings were gathered at each workshop. It was intended that reflective diaries maintained by all of the core team and young women accessing the project would be used as a central tool to reflect on what had happened and was happening, in order to ‘sense make.’ This was to be key to establishing an equality of input amongst the co-researchers and a shared sense of value for each other’s different experiences and understandings, a tool for both reflexivity and co-production that acknowledged subjective positions, recognising the validity of those different perspectives and the value there is in sharing them.

However, for various reasons including literacy needs, time constraints and digital aversion, the reflexive diaries were not a method the young women wanted to take forward. Instead, it was collaboratively agreed that semi-structured ‘narrative’ style interviews would be conducted with the young women involved in the GMH project in the month following the six month research phase. The interviews were loose ‘conversation’ styled spaces framed by a ‘prompt sheet’ which the team co-designed.

Digital Creation in Girls Making History

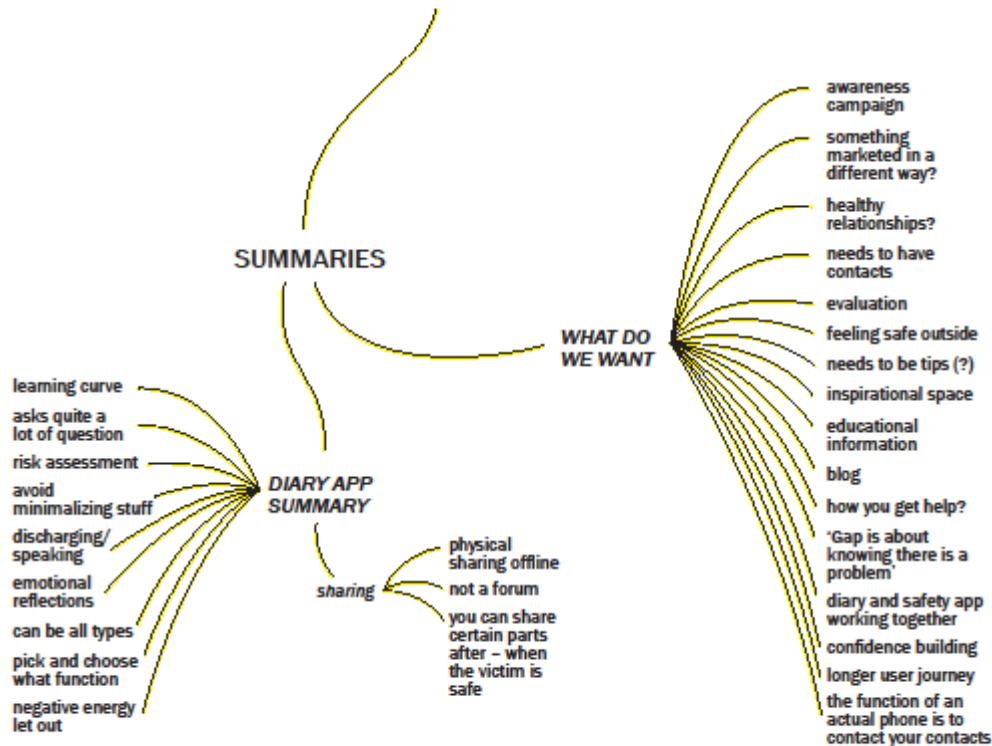
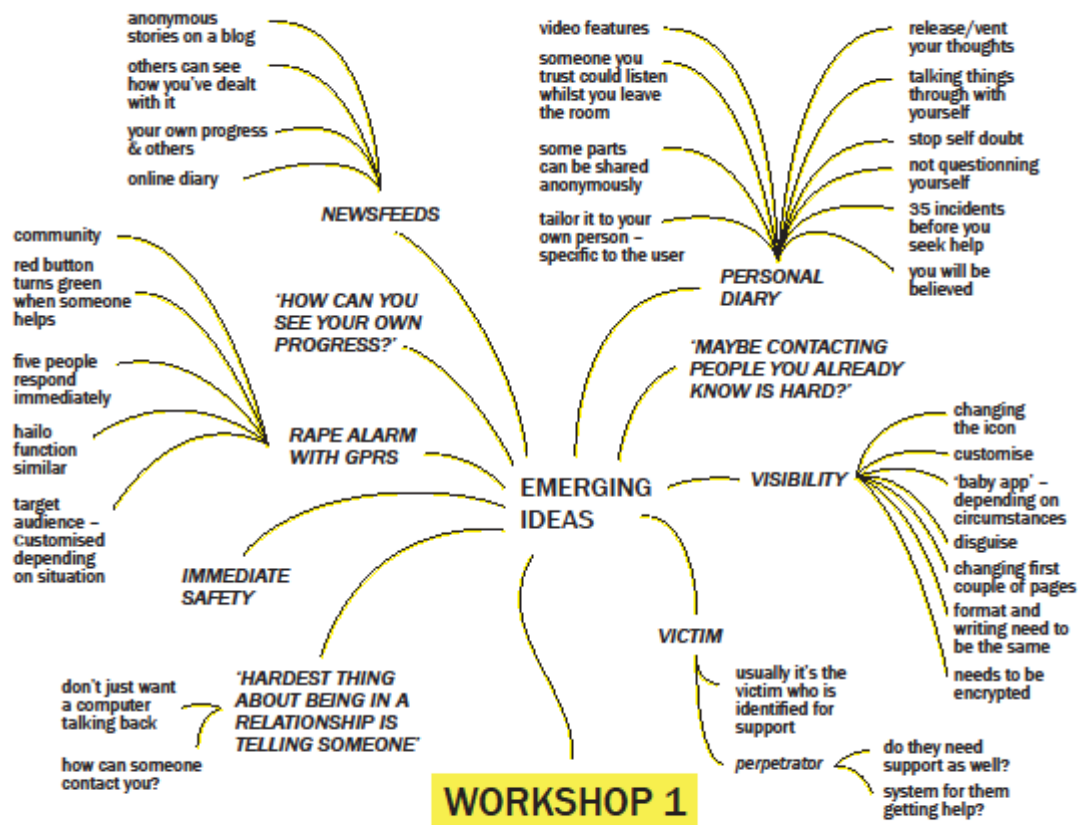
The overall aim for Girls Making History was to provide a unique space for young women to explore partner violence and create a digital tool that supports teenage girls at risk of, or already in the early stages of, abusive relationships.

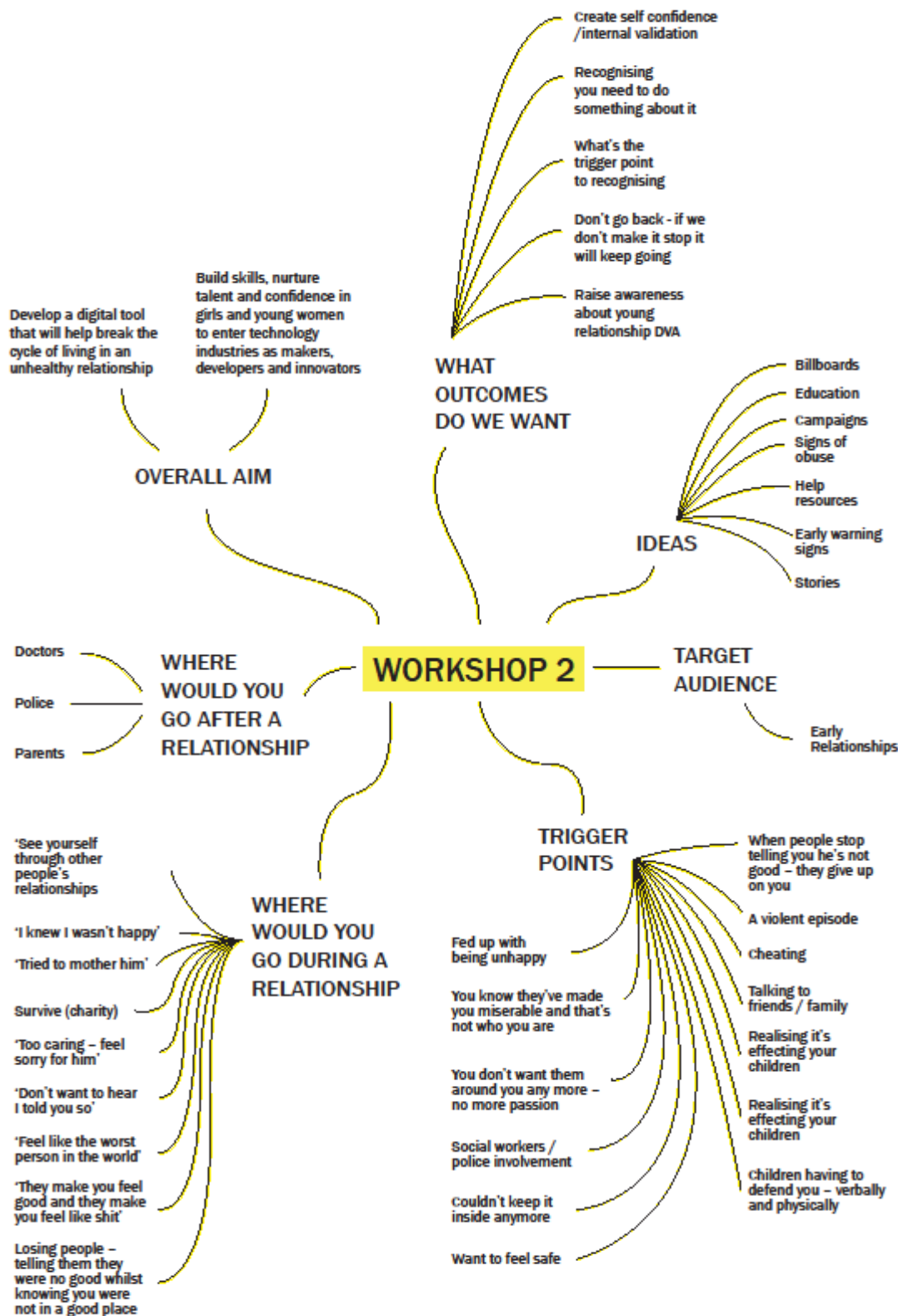
The workshop series that was central to this project created a space that collaboratively explored experiences of partner violence and what digital tool could have been useful in these incidents. The collaboration involved digital experts, artists, engineers, researchers and the young women themselves (see pages 13/14 for an illustration of the thinking developed from the first two workshops).

Two key issues became apparent throughout the developmental stages of the digital tools:

- What if the abusive partner found it and used it as a means to create additional power, for example if it was a diary app write about your experiences?
- Often, when you're in an abusive relationship you don't realise it.

With these issues in mind two digital tools were developed.





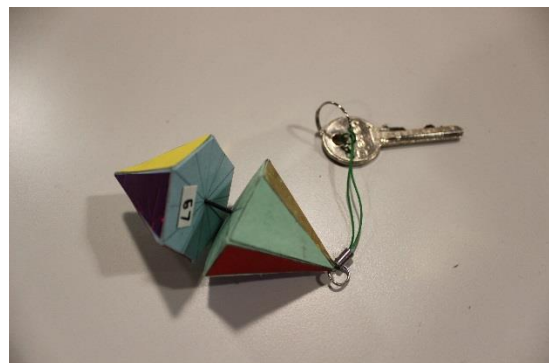
Digital Tool 1: The Emoti-Meter

Initially the wearable technology item was wearable jewellery however through research and discussion it was acknowledged jewellery was not able to be worn in educational environments. The chosen item became a diamond shaped key-ring.

The diamond itself fits in the hand and the two halves rotate with a satisfying click, allowing you to align the colours and play with colour combinations. The two halves of the diamond pull apart to reveal a central column. The bottom half of the diamond key-ring features six coloured buttons. Each button has a small counter connected to it.

Attached to the chain is a 'how to' guide, which introduces the idea that colours relate to emotions and that you can privately assign an emotion to each colour. Every time you press for example, the green button, representing the nervous emotion, the counter clocks it up. The counter is concealed and is only revealed when the diamond shape is pulled apart. So at the end of the day, or a week, you can reveal the counters and compare how many times you have felt nervous, scared, or excited.

This monitoring of your emotions over a self-organised duration of time will give the user the chance to gather the sense of their emotional wealth. It is supported by the 'how to' guide and a further 'support and information' guide which could be in the form of a website or an app (the address/access of which is detailed on the central column of the key ring).



Digital Tool 2 - The Game

The “Knowing the Signs” (working title) game was developed with the Games Hub in Bristol. Three of the games designers came to one of the workshops to speak to the young women and get a sense of what the project was about. Unlike many of the projects that the games designers have usually worked on it was a challenge to think of how you create a ‘game’ with such serious subject content.

The girls told the games designers their stories, and about the research that they had been doing and the most prevalent thing that came from the discussion was a need for young women to recognise what an unhealthy relationship actually is, hence the name, *Knowing the Signs*. The game puts the user in the third person, acting as if they are looking at an abusive relationship from the outside. This is a well-known strategy when discussing abusive relationships with young people, as they find it easier to reflect on other people’s situations than their own.

The game gives the user a series of scenarios from which they have to choose an answer. Some of the decisions are not necessarily the correct answer, but the game is about building confidence and peace levels. For example; “He tells you not to wear a dress” the options would be: ‘wear it anyway’/ ‘tell him that he’s upset you but change anyway’/ ‘immediately change’. The first option would build your confidence levels but lessen your peace levels. The more confidence you build during the game, the easier it becomes to leave the relationship.



Both the emoti-meter and the game address the two issues previously mentioned. If the abusive partner was to find the emoti-meter it would be easily explainable, the user is just monitoring their emotions rather than it being directly about abuse. Therefore, it is about the emotional wellbeing of the girl and educating her to start thinking about the patterns of her emotions. For example, if she was counting up high numbers of anger then the website would suggest reasoning and help. The game addresses the issue about the realisation of being in an abusive relationship and understanding the complexities of what it is like to be in one.

Key Reflections and Discussions

Violence in Teenage Relationships

The young women involved in GMH problematized their experiences of partner violence extensively, both in the context of their own personal relationships and the wider groups of young people they socialised with.

Gender-based harassment and sexual bullying emerged as a feature in the day to day lives of every single young woman involved in the project. The young women depicted a multiple-layered normalisation of gendered violence through explicit sexual insults with social groups, valuing one's self through sexual objectification and the regulation by young women of each other's performances of gendered norms. A number of the young women explicitly linking their experience of gender-based harassment and sexual bullying in their social networks and school-life with their subsequent violent relationships:

'I think the fact that boys at school had continuously called me all sorts of sexual bullying insults - not physical stuff but names - like calling me a slut and a whore, and accusing me of being a prostitute, and then when my ex-boyfriend came to do that, I was kind of used to it...And the school don't deal with it. That went on for years in front of the same tutor and all the same teachers'

However there were ongoing concerns raised by the young women that young men were being subjected to a pathologisation of their normal experimental behaviours and that young women were being 'trained' to interpret any gender-divided disagreements through a framing of harassment and abuse, concerns that echo those reported in other works with young people on the subject of teenage partner violence³³. In particular the young women in GMH highlighted the pressure on their male peers to conform and perform normative masculinities and were concerned about the potential criminalisation implied by the words bullying and harassment.

Tolerance of peer-to-peer abuse in teenagers is known to be regulated and rationalised by social groups, for example, 'joking' is known to render violence (in all its forms) invisible in teenage social groups despite it regularly being experienced by the subject as an ongoing campaign of low-level abuse³⁴. Within this context it does not seem unexpected that the young women involved in the project might attempt to impose a rationale onto the behaviours of their male peers. However, to make this assumption would be, in some ways, to deny the voice and expertise of these young women. Rather we would argue that there is an urgent need to open a co-productive space in which to delve into this peer-to-peer regulation collaboratively, with the young people themselves, drawing their perspectives on 'normal' and 'desirable' behaviours in their teenage networks and relationships into societal endeavours to understand and intersect into the phenomena of violence in teenage

³³ Hale, Becky, Fox, Claire and David Gadd. (2012) *Research Report Evaluation of three European schools-based domestic violence prevention education programmes REaDAPT: First Evaluation Report*

³⁴ Barter, C *et al.* (2009) *Op Cit.*

relationships. In addition, GMH found amongst the young women a substantial questioning of the healthy/unhealthy relationship behaviour rationale employed by many intervention programmes³⁵ and targeted campaigns around teenage partner violence as too simplistic, not recognising the complexity of behaviours that can be quite normal in these early teenage relationships where both young people are experimenting with ways of being. Once again, a need is identified for a co-productive space where these definitions of ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ in the contexts of teenage relationships can be collaboratively developed with the voices and experiences of young people at the centre.

A number of the young women discussed experiences of bullying which stretched back through their childhoods and, for most, was mirrored by violence and aggression in their family home. For some of these young women there was also a complicated revealing of their own aggressive and bullying behaviours. One young woman discussed multiple situations where she had been verbally and physically violent to young men in her social circle to the extent that the police had been called (an investigation was ongoing at the time of reporting). She discussed this in terms of her being ‘*mouthy*’, depicting a social hyper-vigilance which left her permanently seeking out signs of anger and disapproval³⁶ which she would then meet with violent resistance³⁷, fighting back against perceived perpetrations against the self (and others) both bodily and psychologically. In this context, worryingly, the work of GMH was used to provide a frame of understanding and powerful legal remedy against what young men might say or do in a situation of mutual confrontation, for example in the quote below the young women resisted the implication that a young man saying something rude to her in response to her own rudeness was not necessarily an abusive situation: ‘*actually [it is] domestic violence and you can get them in trouble for it really.*’

Self-protective violence in young women with childhood experience of partner violence is a problematic and complex arena and one to which more research is needed. The GMH core team has speculated whether the perpetration of violence (physical and otherwise) in situations where young women perceive elements of coercive and controlling behaviours is a response to the evocation of regressive feelings of fear and powerlessness. The mechanisms for their own violent acts place them in the semi-heroic position of ‘violent resister’, containing within that an implicit understanding of their status as ‘victim’ - this is regardless of whether or not they are the ‘actual’ victim in the said situation. They are unable to spontaneously reflect on this in a way that acknowledges responsibility because this challenges their sense-making which has operated protectively, enabling a powerful identity to emerge from a traumatic experience.

³⁵ See, for example, The Freedom Programme.

³⁶ Hale, Becky, Fox, Claire and David Gadd. (2012). Op Cit.

³⁷ Kelly, Joan B. and Michael P. Johnson. (2008). "DIFFERENTIATION AMONG TYPES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: RESEARCH UPDATE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTIONS." *FAMILY COURT REVIEW* 46.3 476-499.

The Co-Productive Methodology in Girls Making History

Girls Making History was borne out of a commitment to collaborative research and creating partnerships that are meaningful in terms of research contribution, community development and enhancing ‘self-knowing’³⁸ amongst all involved. In addition there was a desire to leap outside of the ‘comfort zones’ of academic and organisational expertise into an unknown and unpredictable territory that would draw on different sites and types of knowledge. Through this embracing of ‘uncertainty’ and allowing for ‘ways of getting lost’ we hoped to open up new possibilities and contingencies³⁹, in particular, to situate young women in a place and space that recognised the expertise of their experience and could speak to their marginality as a site of resistance⁴⁰. By challenging ourselves to widen and diversify ‘participation in the production of knowledge, ideas and capacities’ we hoped to create a pathway in which the possibly ‘disruptive truths’ of young women’s experience could ‘acquire greater authority’⁴¹ and enable the ‘micro-local’ to reach out into wider power structures. This drew on Freire’s (1970) discussion of counter-hegemonic approaches to knowledge constructions which have the potential to challenge the dominance of powerful majority interests and perspectives⁴². Ultimately GMH sought to foster both informational and transformational outcomes⁴³ targeting ‘individual and collective empowerment [that would] enable participants to work for progressive social change in their communities’⁴⁴, developing reflexively a collaborative experience of learning which would enable us to highlight the political dynamics of our endeavours⁴⁵.

GMH expressly situated the experiences and opinions of all those participating as equal, bringing together digital experts, campaigners, domestic violence ‘specialists’, academics and young women affected by teenage partner violence to experiment co-productively with what might be developed if a space was opened in which multiple ‘experts’ could come together. This approach has close affinity to models of action research where projects can ‘start with less action focused, qualitative approaches, and as relationships and insight develop, a more action research approach becomes

³⁸ Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. Fordham Univ Press.

³⁹ Pearce, J. (2008) ‘*We make progress because we are lost*’: *Critical Reflections on Co Producing Knowledge as a Methodology for Researching Non-Governmental Public Action*, NGPA Working Paper Series. London School of Economics.

Noorani, Tesheen. (2013a) *Productive Margins: Regulating for Engagement Scoping Study: Phase I*.

⁴⁰ Hooks, Bell. 1990, “Choosing Margin as a Space of Radical Openness”, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, Ed. Sandra Harding, (2004), 153-160. Routledge, London.

⁴¹ Brigstocke, Julian. (2013) ‘Democracy and the Reinvention of Authority’. *Problems of Participation: Reflections on Authority, Democracy, and the Struggle for Common Life*. Ed. Noorani Tehseen, Claire Blencowe, and Julian Brigstocke. Authority Research Network; 7-12. Pg. 11.

⁴² See discussion in: Ducrose, Beebeejaun, Rees, Richardson and Richardson. (2012) *Towards Co-Production in Research with Communities*. Accessed online 09/2013:

⁴³ Heron, J. & Reason, P. (2008). Extending epistemology within a cooperative inquiry. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.) *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 366-380). London: Sage.

⁴⁴ Banks, S. & Armstrong, A, *et al.* (2014). Using co-inquiry to study co-inquiry: community-university perspectives on research collaboration. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* 7(1).

⁴⁵ Noorani, Tesheen. (2013a) Op. Cit.

possible' (158)⁴⁶ and responded to the projects grounding principle that 'people are able to theorize about their lives and experiences and act in self-directed and consciously political ways to change their own communities' (90)⁴⁷.

Using a young person-centred feminist theoretical framework⁴⁸ and drawing on a workshop design which has been shown to mitigate some of the 'power differentials which exist between adult researchers and youth participants'⁴⁹, we set out to achieve a 'community meeting' space⁵⁰, a space of equilibrium in which a diversity of knowledge's, expertise and world views could be drawn together. In this place of reflexivity we could be mindful of our own positions, the ways we are each embedded with the materiality of the world and how that shaped our communication with each other. It was intended that the negotiating of meaning at these workshops would further develop reciprocity⁵¹.

This was not a smooth road as employing co-productive principles does not allay the risk that research will simply replicate the vulnerabilities and disadvantages that young people experience in other areas of their lives⁵² and GMH struggled with constraints on time and finances which meant that there was not the necessary space to develop the project in a truly collaborative way. At times it felt like the young women who were privileged in terms of finance and time (and could therefore travel to meetings and training) were able to collaborate far more than their counterparts. Similarly those for who life was most chaotic were disadvantaged in collaborative terms by the limited time of the 'employed' team who could not necessarily garner the regular and in-depth support they required to scaffold their engagement in planning and organisational matters⁵³. Echoing the reports of the DCRT (2011), we often found profound mis-matches between 'academic calendars, funding timelines and community needs and expectations' (7), creating challenges which then obstructed the time taken to build trusting (and therefore functional) research relationships. Retrospectively the project significantly over-reached in terms of what was possible within the budgetary and time-restraints

⁴⁶ Bradbury, H., & Reason, P. (2003). Action Research An Opportunity for Revitalizing Research Purpose and Practices. *Qualitative Social Work*, 2(2), 155-175.

⁴⁷ Gatenby, B. & Humphries, M. (2000), February. Feminist participatory action research: Methodological and ethical issues. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 89-105). Pergamon.

⁴⁸ McCarry, M. (2010). Becoming a 'proper man': young people's attitudes about interpersonal violence and perceptions of gender. *Gender and Education*, 22(1), 17-30.

McCarry, M. (2005). Conducting social research with young people: Ethical considerations. In *Researching gender violence: Feminist methodology in action*, ed. T. Skinner, M. Hester, and E. Malos, 87-104. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.

⁴⁹ Op Cit.

⁵⁰ Reason, P. (1994a). Three approaches to participative inquiry.

⁵¹ Lather, P. & Lather, P. A. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. Psychology Press.

⁵² Heath, S. R. Brooks, E. Cleaver, and E. Ireland. (2009). *Researching young people's lives*. London: Sage.

⁵³ McLeod, A. (2010). 'A Friend and an Equal': Do Young People in Care Seek the Impossible from their Social Workers?. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(3), 772-788.

which impacted the time and intensity of the work required to develop the thoughtful and considered ongoing dialogue which results in relationships of trust, and the collaborative planning of outcomes⁵⁴.

Arising Ethical Questions

Relationships and Obligation

There is a complex balance between acknowledging young people as autonomous beings capable of regulating their own voices/research contributions and recognising the ‘dance’ of power that is a constant dynamic, defining how knowledge is both ‘offered and sought’⁵⁵. Within GMH there were power dynamics not only of adult and child but of the perceived institutional gatekeeping roles that both the researcher and the KWMC creative technologist occupied. The researcher had originally joined the project through her leadership of a project for a domestic violence charity. However, once she became an employee of UoB a number of the young women began repeatedly discussing their future university plans, specifically access to universities and the role GMH might play in that. Similarly KWMC, as a powerful institutional player in terms of emerging media opportunities in the locality, was somewhere the young women frequently discussed in terms of future opportunities. We cannot fail to recognise that this future focus, in which UoB and KWMC were seen to have the power to hold or withhold a plethora of essential opportunities, may have produced a complex sense of obligation to partake in any suggested activities in relation to GMH.

In addition, as the GMH project used a co-produced workshop model that sought expressly to develop reciprocal relationships of respect, care and knowledge recognition, we must anticipate that the young women involved would find a degree of value in their relationships with the supporting adults and, as a consequence, they might fear that there could be a withdrawal of that supporting role⁵⁶. This raises questions about the meaningfulness of informed consent and the right to withdraw. On the other hand, GMH was constantly striving not to lose sight of the young women as ‘independent actor[s] who possess the power to say what they feel’⁵⁷ and there was a need to trust that the individuals involved were autonomous and capable beings who could respond assertively if ‘our involvement was not what they wanted’⁵⁸.

Anonymity and Digital Spaces

As a project that’s a public facing part of an internationally recognised media centre anonymisation presents a particular challenge. In accordance with the principle of co-productive working, all publications (academic and otherwise) and outputs from this pilot study are co-authored and, as the Media Centre will be expressly named on research outputs, it would require minimal deductive

⁵⁴ Durham Community Research Team (DCRT). (2011) Community-based Participatory Research: Ethical Challenges, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University.

⁵⁵ Nunokoosing K. (2005) The problems with interviews. *Qualitative Health Research* 15(5): 698-706.

⁵⁶ McLeod, A. (2010). ‘A Friend and an Equal’: Do Young People in Care Seek the Impossible from their Social Workers?. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(3), 772-788.

⁵⁷ Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), 599-616.

⁵⁸ Gatenby, B. & Humphries, M. (2000), Op. Cit.

powers to connect anonymised or pseudonymised narratives with the project's website, twitter feed and associated material. These 'materials' include anonymised images and life stories and the risk of exposure, even without being able to directly connect images to individuals, can be high given that 'people's life stories can be recognizable to others who know them (even when written about anonymously), because of the uniqueness of the narrative'⁵⁹.

In GMH some of the young women wanted their stories and their names 'out there'. Some were seeking exposure as experienced 'experts' in the field, while others wanted to use their stories to raise awareness. There was a mindfulness of a difficult balancing between a 'duty of care' and acknowledging these young women as independent actors capable of executing their own decision making. This balance was further problematized by the awareness of possible futures in which some of the young women would retrospectively rather their stories were not in the public realm. GMH took the stance that to deny the young women the space to share their stories in the GMH workshops and, in pseudonymised and abridged form, more publically would ignore the 'competency and autonomy' of young people, obstructing from them an opportunity to 'voice...difficult experiences within a supportive and empowering environment [which] may offer coherence to disrupted lives, and serve to enhance self-efficacy'.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), 599-616. Pg. 609.

⁶⁰ Kearns, S. (2013). Working reflexively with ethical complexity in narrative research with disadvantaged young people. *Qualitative Social Work*.

Experts by Experience: Sharing Personal Stories in Girls Making History

Sharing stories was a central mechanism through which GMH engaged with the expertise of the young women involved in the project. Though GMH was expressly not attempting to create a therapeutic space there was significant hope that the sharing of stories might operate as a form of ‘praxis’ through which the collective could begin to think transformatively about relationship violence in the context of their own lives as well as considering the wider societal issue. GMH recognised group work’s potential as a ‘tertiary prevention’ through which those who have lived with partner violence could reduce harm by overcoming and make sense of their experiences⁶¹ using ‘skilled facilitation’ and mutual learning through sharing with other women of similar experience⁶².

The space for individual stories to emerge was within the context of practical skills/learning orientated workshops a space of reciprocity where ‘the exchanging of stories...acknowledges recognition as a basic human need’⁶³, envisaged as a shared and dialogical experience. In terms of listening and being listened to, some of the young women reported a process of transformation through which being trusted as a listener imbued them with the confidence that they would be listened to in a non-judgemental manner:

‘I kind of spoke a lot with confidence [at GMH] and like normally I don’t. And I don’t really speak out a lot like I have no confidence so I kind of hide away in the corner and stuff but in being there it kind of gave me a sort of voice that I wasn’t kind of scared to say what I felt and I was quite happy to be open and honest and like it kind of felt like - when you’re listening it felt like other people had like you had - other people had confidence in you to hear what they’ve gone through.’

However this experience was not universal. The workshops were not designed to specifically focus on experiences of violence, rather to use this expertise as a platform to think creatively as a future-orientated social-activism leaning collective. When volunteered, the young women’s stories were subject to an ongoing dialogue and questioning often forming a ‘case study’ through which to examine some of the thinking of the day. However, this was a highly problematic experience and it became clear that for a number of the young women they were seeking a therapeutic space in which, through sharing their stories, they could hope for some sort of healing. Needing far more than mere recognition, for some, the process of their story meeting and interacting with the stories of others somehow denied the recognition of their own experience as unique and individual.

⁶¹ Mullender, A. and Hague, G. (2000) *Reducing domestic violence ... What works? Women Survivors’ Views*. Home Office Briefing Note, London: Home Office.

⁶² Hester, M. & Westmarland, N. (2005). *Tackling domestic violence: effective interventions and approaches*. Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

⁶³ Cross, B. (2009) Feeling my way into story space. *Emotion, Space and Society* 2(2): 98-103.

Conclusion

GMH was a unique and ambitious project which employed an experimental and challenging methodology to collaboratively develop understanding of the normalisation to teenage partner violence and the ways in which digital tools might intersect in this phenomena. KWMC continues to work collaboratively with the young women involved in the project and is currently exploring additional funding opportunities to further develop the digital tools designed during the project.

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