

Exercise 2

Right, shall we start? So, first of all thank you all for coming. It's lovely to see so many people here this evening. What I'd like to do is share with you the findings of some recent research that the group I represent, Women Working in Journalism, or WWIJ, has carried out on the media representation of teenage boys in Britain. Generally we've found that the negative stereotyping of teenage boys is extremely widespread and can have a serious effect on the way the boys see themselves.

We've all seen this kind of picture many times: a photo in a newspaper of a group of perfectly ordinary boys standing around wearing hooded tops. It's become, and is used as, a visual shorthand for urban menace, or even in some quarters for the breakdown of society, so it's clear that teenage boys have a serious image problem. The teen boys' 'brand', if you like, has become toxic. And media coverage of boys these days seems to be unrelentingly negative, focusing almost entirely on them as perpetrators of crime – or, conversely, sometimes as victims – and our research shows that the media is helping to make teenage boys even fearful of each other.

Exercise 3

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The figures show that more than half of the stories about teenage boys in national and local newspapers in the past year in Britain were in some way concerned with committing crime. The word most commonly used to describe them was *yobs*, followed by *thugs*, *sick* and *feral*. Other terms often used included *hoodie*, *louts*, *heartless*, *evil*, *frightening*, *scum*, *monsters*, *inhuman* and *threatening*.

There is some sympathetic coverage, of course, but unfortunately the best chance a teenage boy has of receiving a positive press in a newspaper is if they are hurt by another teenager. We did find some news coverage where teenage boys were described in glowing terms – things such as *model student*, *angel*, or *every mother's perfect son*, but sadly these were solely reserved for teenage boys who had suffered some kind of violence at the hands of other teenage boys.

We also surveyed nearly one thousand teenage boys aged 13 to 19 and found that 85% believe newspapers present them in a bad light. Interestingly, though, they felt that reality TV – with shows like *The X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent* – portrayed them in a better light – with just under 20% believing they were being portrayed negatively on programmes like that.

80% of the boys surveyed felt adults were more wary of them now than they had been a year or two ago as a result of all the negative press. However, perhaps the most striking finding is that many were now more wary of boys of their own age. It seems the never-ending diet of media stories about yobs and feral youths is making them scared of other teens. Nearly a third said they are 'always' or 'often' wary of teenage boys they don't know.

The most common reason for their wariness, cited by 51%, was 'media stories about teen boys' compared with 40% who said their wariness was based on their own or friends' bad experiences of other teens.

Also, nearly three-quarters said they had changed their behaviour as a result of this wariness. The most common change, cited by more than 45%, was boys avoiding places where teenagers hang around. Other changes included dressing differently and changing who they were seen hanging out with.

For much of the press, there is clearly no such thing as a good news story about teenagers. Stories about sport and entertainment, which you would have thought might have balanced other critical coverage, also often presented a negative tone. Less than a quarter of stories about teens and entertainment were positive, and only just over 25% about teens and sport were positive.

Our research found that – for all the coverage of teenage issues – the boys' voices themselves are rarely heard in newspapers. Fewer than one in ten articles about young people actually quoted young people or included their perspectives in the debate. So the real question is: how should we respond?