Adolescent Masculinity and Homophobic-Name-Calling: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare. The authors confirm that all authors approve the submission and that the paper is our original work and not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Abstract

Aims: Homophobic name-calling continues to be common in some schools and friendship groups and is often perceived as innocuous 'banter' among friends rather than homophobic bullying. Research suggests that homophobic-name-calling in adolescent friendship groups is used to police masculinity rather than sexuality and is used to enforce conformity to traditional gender norms. This paper seeks to further explore this phenomenon. **Method:** This review is the first to quantitatively measure the relationship between masculinity and homophobic-name-calling in adolescents using a meta-analysis and narrative synthesis. **Findings**: The meta-analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between masculinity and homophobic-name-calling. Findings from the narrative synthesis indicate that several factors interact within this relationship, including peer groups andbullying. **Limitations**: This is a comparatively small meta-analysis, due to the limited quantitative research in this field. Further, all but one of the studies included were conducted in the USA therefore it may be difficult to generalise findings. **Conclusions**: Findings from this meta-analysis and narrative synthesise suggest there are two functions of homophobic-name-calling; the first being banter within peer groups and the second as a direct form of homophobic bullying. Importantly, both functions of homophobic-name-calling are rooted in the policing of masculinity.

Keywords: adolescence, masculinity, homophobic-name-calling, bullying, peer groups

Introduction

Masculinity

There are many attributes, behaviours and roles typically associated with masculinity. Connell (2005) argued that there are different types of masculinity, with hegemonic masculinity being the culturally idealised form in society. Hegemonic masculinity is a shifting social construct and its definition and characteristics are therefore fluid and dynamic (Connell, 2005). Today, hegemonic masculinity is characterised by what are considered 'traditional' masculine traits such as anti-femininity, dominance, achievement, risk, lack of empathy, and avoiding any appearance of weakness or expression of emotion (APA, 2018; Connell, 2005; Kupers, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is considered to be the dominant form in society, against which all other masculinities are compared. Masculinities which do not align with these characteristics are described as complicit, subordinate, and marginalised according to Connell (2005). Complicit masculinity describes that which may be 'deficient' in one or two characteristics but does not actively challenge hegemonic norms. Subordinate masculinity embodies that which is actively oppressed by hegemonic masculinity, often due to direct unconformity to gender norms. Lastly, marginalised masculinity describes those which are excluded due to social inequalities outside of gender such as race and class (Connell, 2005). Due to its dominance and social value in society, it therefore follows that men and boys are motivated or compelled to adhere to the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Willer et al., 2013).

Hegemonic masculinity is also associated with socially destructive traits such as misogynistic attitudes and homophobia (Harrington, 2021). Connell (2005) argues that men who adhere to hegemonic masculinity also hold institutional power due to the patriarchal society in which we live. A patriarchal society is one in which men hold power and privilege over women specifically and femininity more broadly in institutional, social, political,

economic, and legal jurisdictions (Beechey, 1979). Furthermore, in a patriarchal society, men who adhere to hegemonic masculinity, also hold power and privilege over other men who do not adhere to this type of masculinity (Connell, 2005). This leads to the marginalisation of the subordinate forms of masculinity and the marginalisation of women in society. It is within patriarchal power structures that hegemonic masculinity 'turns toxic' (Haider, 2016, p555), resulting in misogyny and homophobia (Harrington, 2021). Hegemonic masculinity, empowered by patriarchal structures, legitimises the subordination of other forms of masculinity, violence against women, and homophobia to maintain the institutional power of hegemonically masculine men (Connell, 2005; Haider, 2016).

Masculinity and Homophobia

Hegemonic masculinity reinforces patriarchal norms, disempowering women and femininity. Consequently, this invites men to distance themselves from femininity, and this anti-femininity is an essential component of hegemonic masculinity (APA, 2018; Connell, 2005; Kupers, 2005). The anti-femininity(APA, 2018; Connell, 2005; Kupers, 2005) creates fertile soil in which homophobia can take root. Sexuality and gender are often incorrectly conflated, and research suggests that men who adhere to hegemonic masculinity view homosexual desire as inherently 'feminine' (Kimmel, 1994). Pascoe (2005) argues that the homophobia featuring within hegemonic masculinity is perhaps a consequence more of the discomfort with gender norm transgressions than sexual norm transgressions. Homophobia is linked to the view of one's own masculinity and might be driven not by a fear of gay men but a fear of being perceived as insufficiently masculine by other men (Kimmel, 1994; Pascoe, 2005). Anderson (2009) defines this fear of being perceived as insufficiently masculine as 'homohysteria'. Homohysteria considers that to demonstrate one's hegemonic masculinity, men must routinely distance themselves from things or behaviours which are socially coded as 'feminine', including homosexuality (Anderson and McCormack, 2018). Homohysteric

cultures endorse hegemonic masculinity to such an extent that homosexuality is marginalised. In homohysteric cultures, men are restricted to a hegemonic form of masculinity and homophobia is used as a way of policing gender (Anderson, 2009).

Masculinity and Adolescence

The pressure to adhere to hegemonic masculinity starts early. Two studies by Renold found that hegemonic masculinity norms appear as early as primary school, with boys showing misogynistic attitudes, homophobic behaviours, and sexualised forms of harassment towards girls (Renold, 2002, 2003). As with men, adolescent masculinity has also been linked with homophobia (Gough et al., 2021; Kågesten et al., 2016; Pascoe, 2005). A systematic review by Kågesten et al. (2016) found that, globally, boys believed typical masculine characteristics included physical strength and toughness and that boys should avoid traits considered 'feminine', such as showing weakness or emotions; this review suggested that boys adhered to traditional gender norms because of the social stigma of transgressing them. The review also found that boys feared they would be targets of homophobic-name-calling (HNC) if they did not conform to hegemonic masculinity norms or if they displayed traits or behaviours typically viewed as 'feminine' (Kågesten et al., 2016); the authors concluded that 'boys experience restrictions not from being boys, but because they are the wrong sort of boys' (Kågesten et al., 2016, p25).

Adolescence is a critical time in gender identity formation (Beal, 1994), and between the ages of 10 and 14, adolescent gender norms are particularly influenced by peer groups (Kågesten et al., 2016). Adolescent male peer groups have been found to police masculine gender norms through homophobic language and name-calling (Carrera-Fernández et al., 2018; Fulcher, 2017; Odenbring and Johansson, 2021; Pascoe, 2005; Reigeluth and Addis, 2021).

Homophobic-Name-Calling and the Policing of Masculinity

Research suggests that phrases such as "that's so gay" continue to be common parlance in some educational settings and male adolescent peer groups (Anderson & McCormack, 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). However, this homophonic language and HNC is often directed at heterosexual targets (Fulcher, 2017). Adolescents who use homophobic language often do not view themselves as homophobic (Fulcher, 2017) and perceive the language as innocuous 'banter' within peer groups rather than direct homophobic bullying (Odenbring and Johansson, 2021).

Homophobic epithets and HNC are often a form of gender regulation among peers, rather than acts of homophobic aggression directed at sexually diverse individuals (Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2019; Pascoe, 2005). Homophobic epithets are used against boys who behave in ways that are socially coded as feminine and are used to imply that they are not masculine (Pascoe, 2005). Indeed, HNC may be a way to "assert one's masculinity by denying it to others" (Pascoe, 2005, p342). This suggests that HNC is used to police adolescent masculinity within peer groups and ostracise those who do not conform (McCann et al., 2010; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021; Reigeluth & Addis, 2021).

Yet the impacts of the policing of hegemonic masculinity norms are felt by both the heterosexual and sexually diverse communities. In schools, this language fosters a hostile environment for sexually diverse young people (DeLay et al., 2017), with homophobic verbal aggression (rather than a non-homophobic verbal aggression) increasing anger and aggression in heterosexual targets, and increasing avoidance in sexually diverse targets (Mullane, 2012). While adolescents might refrain from homophobia in the presence of someone they know to be gay (Fulcher, 2017) there are nonetheless negative consequences to homophobia for people of all sexualities and genders (Birkett et al., 2009; Rinehart et al., 2020). ***Research Questions***

A systematic review in 2020 explored the prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools, and identified school-related risk and protective factors relating to peer groups, belonging and social support (Moyano & Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020). However, this review will be the first to focus specifically on the role of masculinity on HNC in adolescents, and the interacting factors within this relationship. Much of the current literature exploring masculinity and HNC is qualitative in design (Carrera-Fernández et al., 2018; Fulcher, 2017; McCann et al., 2010; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021). Therefore, this review is the first to review the quantitative literature on the link between masculinity and HNC in adolescents, using a meta-analysis and narrative synthesis. This review will address the following question:

- How does hegemonic masculinity relate to homophobic aggression in young people?

Method

Literature Search

This review followed the guidelines outlined by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021). See the PRISMA diagram (Figure 1) detailing the process of identification, screening, and inclusion of papers. Studies were identified through the following databases: PychInfo, ERIC and SCOPUS. These databases were chosen due to their wide coverage and relevance to the topic. Scoping searches in other databases (e.g., Web of Science) yielded largely overlapping results, suggesting that our strategy, though limited in number, captured the core literature effectively To access peer-reviewed articles not published in academic journals, a grey literature search was also conducted using ProQuest's Dissertation and Theses database: this was to reduce the impact of the publication bias of only publishing research which report statistically significant results. Search terms included the concepts of traditional masculinity, homophobic aggression and school aged children (Table 1). Search terms for all concepts of the research question were used including alternative spellings and terms relating to the same concept. The systematic search produced 413 papers after duplicates were removed (see Figure 1). Titles were screened for relevance before abstracts were examined and studies excluded based on the chosen inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2). Finally, full-text articles were read in depth and further studies were excluded according to the exclusion criteria. A total of seven studies were included in this review.

Figure 1

PRISMA flowchart outlining the final search process, where 'n' refers to the number of studies.

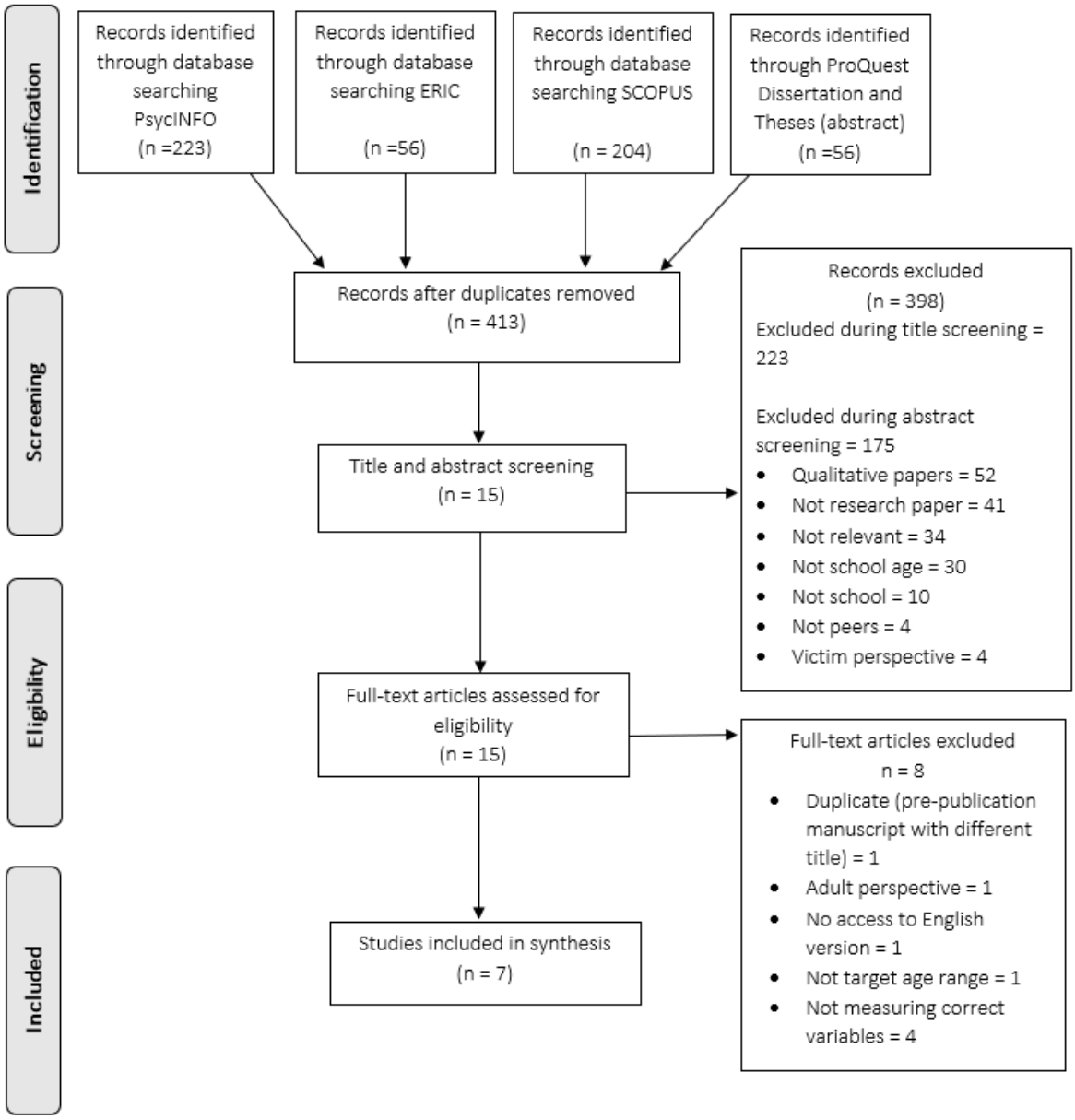


Table 1

Search Terms

Search term	Search strategy
Masculinity	"hegemonic masculinity" OR "hypermasculine" OR "hypermasculinity" OR "masculinity ideals" OR "masculine ideals" OR "masculinity norms" OR "masculine norms" OR "threat to masculinity OR "masculinity threat" OR "gender

	threat" OR "fragile masculinity" OR "masculine overcompensation" OR masculinity AND
Young people	"young adult" OR adolescen* OR youth* OR teen* OR "school age" OR school or child* OR "young people" OR pupil* OR student* AND
Homophobic aggression	"homophobic bullying" OR "homophobic aggression" OR "homophobic name calling" OR "homophobic harassment" OR "homophobic teasing" OR homophobia OR "LGB* bullying" OR "homophobic abuse" OR "homophobic verbal content" OR "queer bashing" OR anti-gay OR "anti-LGB* harassment" OR "LGB* harassment" OR "LGB* hate crime"

Note. Databases: PychINFO, ERIC, SCOPUS, ProQuest Dissertation and Theses

Table 2

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Study feature	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Article type	Full text articles	No full text articles
	Full text published or available in English	Full text is not published or available in English
	Article is published and peer reviewed or unpublished	Paper is a thesis, and a published paper is available which uses the same data
	Article is of any age	
	Study is conducted in any country	
Participants		Studies which measured teacher or adult perceptions

Study feature	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
	Studies including participants between 10-and 19-years-old at study onset Studies conducted in mainstream schools Participants are of any nationality and ethnicity	Studies which measured only victim perspectives Studies conducted outside of educational settings or schools
Methodology	Empirical studies Studies using quantitative research design Studies which quantitatively measured homophobic aggression (an act or name-calling against peers) Studies which quantitatively measured masculinity	Review studies Chapters in books Studies using qualitative designs

Results

Study characteristics

Table 2 gives an overview of the seven studies included in the review.

Table 2

Overview of Included Studies and Their Key Characteristics

Study	Population characteristics	Design and analysis	Relevant measures	Key findings in relation to review question	Effect size included in meta-analysis (correlation coefficient)
Birkett and Espelage (2015)	10-14 years old 5th- 8th grade 493 participants USA	Longitudinal and cross sectional Hierarchical linear modelling	Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS) Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT) University of Illinois Aggression Scales (bullying) Friendship nominations	Significant correlation between masculinity and HNC Youth who were victims of HNC increased their rate of HNC to others Bullying was associated with HNC for male peer groups Peer group levels of masculinity predicted individual levels of HNC but this effect decreased over time	0.28
Borgen (2016)	10-14 years old 35 participants Only males USA	Cross sectional Regression	Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity Scale (MAMS) Bullying attitudes University of Illinois Bullying Scale Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT) Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	Significant correlation between masculinity and HNC Bullying behaviour significantly predicted HNC but became insignificant when the mediator masculinity was included The mediator of masculinity, when controlling for bullying, was not significantly predictive of HNC	0.41
Espelage et al. (2018)	10-14 years old 5th- 8th grade	Cross sectional and longitudinal	Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS)	Within-person increases in masculinity did not significantly predict increases in HNC	0.024

	1,655 participants USA	Multilevel growth modelling	Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT) University of Illinois Bullying Scale	Higher average (between-person) levels of masculinity was not associated with higher levels of HNC HNC increased with age but the rate of acceleration slowed Higher between-person and within-person levels of bullying was associated with higher levels of HNC Higher level of sexual harassment was associated with higher levels of HNC	
Merrin et al. (2018)	11-14 years old 6th-8th grade 190 participants USA	Longitudinal Stochastic actor-based model	Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS) Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT) Attitudes towards bullying University of Illinois Bullying Scale Femininity Ideology Scale Impulsivity Friendship nominations Impulsivity Dominance Neighbourhood violence	Found no significant relationship between masculinity and HNC Increasing HNC was related to increasing popularity but this relationship was not linear Youth with the highest levels of HNC were less likely to be popular Youth had similar levels of HNC to their friends Changes in peer group HNC predicted individual levels of HNC Impulsivity was a significant predictor of HNC	Not included in meta-analysis due to missing data.
Poteat et al. (2011)	11-18 years old 284 participants USA	Cross sectional Hierarchical regression analysis	Normative masculine and feminine activities Male Role Attitude Scale (MRAS) Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT) University of Illinois Bullying Scale Fighting Relational aggression Beliefs Supportive of Violence Scale	Masculinity was significantly associated with HNC for boys (but not girls) Beliefs supportive of violence moderated the relationship between masculinity and HNC for boys (but not girls) Engaging in normative masculine activities was significantly associated with HNC for boys and girls Beliefs supportive of violence significantly moderated the relationship between normative masculine activities and aggression, but not HNC for boys Beliefs supportive of violence significantly moderated the relationship between engaging in normative masculine activities and HNC for girls	0.52
Slaatten et al. (2014)	9th grade	Cross sectional	Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT)	Various subscales of masculinity measure were associated with various subscales of HNC	0.04

	916 participants Norway	Logistic regression analysis	Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity Scale (MAMS) Sexual orientation	Emotional restriction significantly correlated with all subscales of targets of HNC except for 'a friend' Heterosexism was significantly correlated with the HNC subscales of 'someone they thought was gay', 'someone they did not think was gay' and 'someone they did not know' Logistic regression revealed that boys high on emotional restriction or social teasing (while controlling for other variables) were more likely to call others homophobic names Boys are more likely than girls to use and be the targets of HNC Boys are more 4x more likely to call a friend than person they did not know a homophobic name Boys are 1.7x more likely to use homophobic names for someone they did not think was gay than something they did think was gay	
Valido et al. (2021)	10-16 years old 5th-8th grade 1,655 participants USA	Longitudinal Latent growth modelling-regression or multiple regression	Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT) Seven items from AMIRS Impulsivity Empathy Social dominance Family conflict and hostility Parental monitoring Family social support Exposure to community violence Social support from adults at school Sense of school belongingness Peer social support	Higher average (between-person) levels of masculinity associated with higher HNC across time Higher average (between-person) rates of impulsivity, dominance, family violence and family support also associated with higher levels HNC Higher than average compared to their	0.15

Quality Appraisal

The quality of each study was assessed using an adapted version of the NICE Quality Appraisal Checklist for correlational studies, with a maximum score of 30 (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2012). If a study scored below 16, it would be excluded from the review. Scores ranged from 18 to 29 with Borgen (2016) receiving the lowest score. All studies were of sufficient quality based on answers to the questions and therefore none were excluded during this process (see Table 3).

Table 3

Quality Appraisal Ratings for Studies Included in the Review

Study	Quality score (/30)
Birkett and Espelage, 2015	26
Borgen, 2016	18
Espelage et al., 2018	29
Merrin, et al., 2018	28
Poteat et al., 2011	26
Slatten et al., 2014	25
Valido et al., 2021	28

Meta-Analysis Method

A random-effects model was used to conduct the meta-analysis. It has been found that in meta-analyses on correlation coefficients, random-effects models generally produce accurate estimates of the true correlation (Field, 2005). Random-effect models assume the populations in each study are heterogeneous and therefore effect sizes in the population vary from study to study (Field and Gillett, 2010). Random-effects models allow inferences from the results that generalise beyond the studies included in the meta-analysis. Furthermore, a random-effects model was chosen as the studies included in the meta-analysis draw from real world data, which do not conform to the assumption of fixed population parameters (Field, 2005; Field and Gillett, 2010). The statistical software MedCal was used to run the meta-

analysis, which uses the DerSimonian and Laird (1986) method to calculate the Correlation Coefficient under the random effects model.

To assess for heterogeneity the Cochran's Q statistic and I^2 were used. The Cochran's Q test indicated a significant level of heterogeneity $\chi^2(5) = 98.43$, $p < .0001$. The I^2 also indicated a high level of heterogeneity, $I^2 = 94.52\%$, as values above 60% are generally considered to indicate substantial heterogeneity.

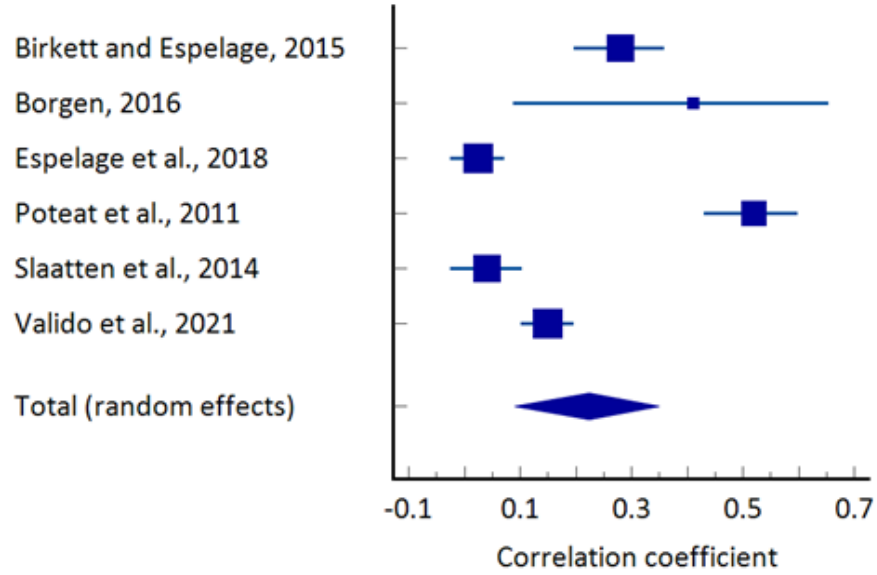
To assess for publication bias an Egger's regression test was conducted (Egger et al., 1997). The result was not statistically significant, $t(5) = 1.56$, $p = .168$ which indicates no significant evidence of asymmetry in the funnel plot, suggesting that publication bias is unlikely.

Results of Meta-Analysis

A random effects model produced an overall effect size of $r(5) = .22$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.35]. The meta-analysis therefore shows a statistically significant association between hegemonic masculinity and HNC. The forest plot for the meta-analysis is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Forest Plot of the Effect Sizes for Masculinity and Homophobic-Name-Calling



Note. Bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Narrative Synthesis

Masculinity and HNC. Birkett and Espelage (2015) found that hegemonic masculinity was significantly correlated with HNC at both waves of their longitudinal study, which included 493 young people between the ages of 10 and 14 in the USA. Furthermore, for the participants in this study, peer group levels of masculinity predicted individual levels of HNC, however this effect decreased over time. Valido et al. (2021) explored risk and protective factors for HNC perpetration in young people between the ages of 10 and 16 years in four schools in the USA. They found that individuals with higher average levels of hegemonic masculinity, compared to their peers, also reported higher levels of HNC across time. Poteat et al. (2011) investigated the interaction between beliefs supportive of violence, hegemonic masculinity, and HNC in adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 in the USA. This study found that hegemonic masculinity was significantly associated with HNC for boys.

Merrin et al. (2018) and Espelage et al. (2018) found no statistically significant relationship between hegemonic masculinity and HNC. The study by Merrin et al. (2018)

included 190 adolescents and explored HNC, bullying and hegemonic masculinity within friendship networks in a longitudinal study across three waves. The study by Espelage et al. (2018) was also longitudinal and collected data from 1,655 participants across four waves. Participants in both the Merrin et al. (2018) and Espelage et al. (2018) studies were between the ages of 10 and 14. The study by Borgen (2016) however, included participants between the ages of 14 and 18 and did find a significant correlation between hegemonic masculinity and HNC. This may suggest that the relationship between masculinity and HNC is more apparent in older adolescents. Indeed, the study by Espelage et al. (2018) found that HNC did increase with age.

In contrast to the other studies in this review, Slaatten et al. (2014) looked at how hegemonic masculinity was related to male participants' HNC directed at specific targets. This study also isolated the subscales of their hegemonic masculinity measure, the Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity scale (MAMS; Oransky and Fisher, 2009), to explore how each subscale correlated with each target of HNC. Several of the subscales were significantly correlated. The subscale Emotional Restriction was significantly correlated with all the target subscales except for 'a friend'. The subscale Heterosexism was significantly correlated with the targets 'someone they thought to be homosexual', and 'someone they did not know'. The subscale heterosexism was not significantly correlated with the target 'a friend', which was the effect size included in the meta-analysis. This study also used logistic regression analysis to explore whether subscales of the MAMS predicted HNC directed at different targets. Boys who scored higher on the Emotional Restriction subscale were more likely to have used a homophobic name in the last week directed at someone they did not think to be gay, someone they did not like and someone they did not know. Boys who scored higher on the Social Teasing subscale were more likely to have used a homophobic name in the last week directed

at a friend and less likely to have called someone they did not know a homophobic name in the last week.

Moderating Factors. The studies included in this review also looked at other factors in relation to HNC and hegemonic masculinity. These included individual differences such as age and gender, social factors such as bullying and peer groups, and risk and protective factors.

Gender. Several studies included in this review found that male participants had higher levels of both hegemonic masculinity and HNC compared to their female peers (Birkett and Espelage, 2015; Slaatten et al., 2014; Valido et al., 2021). Slaatten et al. (2014), found that a majority (74%) of boys studied had called another boy a homophobic name in the last week compared to 54% of girls. Interestingly, both boys and girls were more likely to call a boy a homophobic name, than a girl. This study suggests that HNC is more prevalent within male friendships groups, compared to female, and is used more by and directed towards boys (Slaatten et al.,2014).

Peer Groups. Three of the studies explored how masculinity and HNC were related to friendships and peer groups. Young people tended to be friends with peers with similar levels of HNC as their own, and changes in an individual's level of HNC was predicted by the HNC in their friendship group (Birkett & Espelage 2015; Merrin et al., 2018). Peer group masculinity seems to play an important role in peer group HNC as Birkett and Espelage (2015) found that peer group level of hegemonic masculinity predicted individual levels of HNC six months later. This study also found that peer groups with high levels of HNC victimisation later went on to show high levels of HNC perpetration, which researchers believed was related to normalisation of this language within the peer group as a form of 'banter'.

Indeed, Slaatten (2014) found that adolescents were four times more likely to call a friend a homophobic name than someone they did not know and were 1.7 times more likely to call someone they did not think was gay a homophobic name than someone they did believe to be gay. This implies that for these adolescents, their HNC served a social function and was used within friendships as part of 'banter' rather than to insult or bully.

Bullying. Several of the studies included in this review found that bullying was associated with HNC. Espelage et al. (2018) found both within-person and between-person effects of bullying and HNC, namely that when participants reported higher rates of bullying perpetration compared to their average, they also showed higher rates of HNC at the same time point. Further, participants with higher average rates of bullying perpetration also had higher average rates of HNC over time compared to those with low average rates of bullying (Espelage et al., 2018). This association between bullying perpetration and HNC was also found by Merrin et al. (2018), Borgen (2016), and Birkett and Espelage (2015).

The relationship between bullying perpetration and HNC has been found to be greater in male peer groups than female. The study by Birkett and Espelage (2015) found gender to be a significant moderator in the relationship between bullying and HNC, with the relationship being stronger in male peer groups. This suggests a connection between HNC, bullying and masculinity, however the studies in this review which explored this connection between HNC, masculinity and bullying found mixed results. Firstly, Poteat et al. (2011) found a significant association between masculinity and bullying in boys. Borgen (2016) used a regression analysis to explore the link between HNC, hegemonic masculinity and bullying, and found that although bullying perpetration significantly predicted HNC, this effect became insignificant when including hegemonic masculinity as a mediator. It is important to note however, that this study's participants were 35 football players, therefore these findings may not be generalisable. The relationship between masculinity, bullying and HNC is nuanced and

requires further exploration, however these findings show that bullying and HNC are distinct but related concepts.

Risk Factors. The studies included in this review found several risk and protective factors which influenced the likelihood of HNC in young people, some of which may be related to hegemonic masculinity. The risk factors included sexual harassment, impulsivity, and violence. A component of hegemonic masculinity is objectification of and sexual harassment towards girls (APA, 2018; Connell, 2005; Kupers, 2005) and therefore dismissive attitudes towards, or engagement in, sexual harassment may be a construct of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Espelage et al. (2018) found that within-person increases in sexual harassment, compared to the individual's mean levels, were associated with increased HNC. Furthermore, participants higher in mean sexual harassment also showed higher levels of HNC over time, compared to individuals with lower mean levels of HNC. The study by Espelage (2018) also explored individuals' dismissive attitudes towards sexual harassment and found that these attitudes moderated the relationship between bullying and HNC. The relationship between bullying and HNC was highest for those also high in dismissive attitudes towards sexual harassment at both within- and between-person levels.

Violence may also be a risk factor for increased levels of HNC in young people and normalisation of violence is a component of hegemonic masculinity (APA, 2018; Connell, 2005; Kupers, 2005). Valido et al (2021) found that individuals with higher average rates of family violence reported higher average HNC across time, compared to peers with lower rates of family violence. This may be due to the relationship between attitudes towards violence and hegemonic masculinity, as beliefs supportive of violence have been found to significantly moderate the association between hegemonic masculinity and HNC among boys (Poteat et al., 2011). Further, hegemonic masculinity was significantly associated with beliefs

supportive of violence and aggression in boys (Poteat et al., 2011), suggesting that hegemonic masculinity and violence are inherently linked.

Protective Factors. The study by Valido et al. (2021) was unique in exploring factors which may be considered positive and likely to reduce the rate of HNC in adolescents. At time points when participants scored higher on empathy, school belonging, parental monitoring, and adult support compared to their average they also reported lower levels of HNC. This effect was also found at between-person levels, as participants who had higher average empathy, school belonging, and adult support reported lower HNC across time than their peers. Overall, there were comparatively few protective factors against HNC investigated or identified in the studies.

Discussion

The meta-analysis in this review found a significant correlation between hegemonic masculinity and HNC in adolescents. This is in line with previous qualitative literature which illustrates the use of HNC in adolescent boys' friendship groups (Carrera-Fernández et al., 2018; McCann et al., 2010; Odenbring and Johansson, 2021). Indeed, the studies in this review found that boys used HNC more than girls (Birkett and Espelage, 2015; Slaatten et al., 2014; Valido et al., 2021). Previous research has suggested that the main mechanism for HNC is its use to police masculinity within friendship groups as a form of banter, and often the perpetrators do not perceive themselves as homophobic (Pascoe, 2005). Findings from the studies in this review support this hypothesis. However, there were also strong links between HNC and bullying, suggesting that there may be two underlying mechanisms for HNC, one as a form of banter in friendship groups, and the other as a form of bullying, the underlying function in both is to police masculinity.

The first function of HNC illustrated in this review is the use of homophobic names as innocuous teasing within friendship groups. A study in this review found that boys were more likely to engage in HNC with a friend than someone they did not know and were more likely to call someone they did not think to be gay a homophobic name than someone they did think to be gay (Slaatten et al., 2014). This is in line with wider research which suggests that perpetrators of HNC do not perceive themselves to be homophobic and would not use HNC towards someone they believed to be gay (Fulcher, 2017). This suggests HNC is used within friendship groups, rather than as a direct aggressive act towards the LGBTQ+ community. Indeed, friendship groups play an important role in HNC perpetration as peer group levels of HNC significantly predicted an individual's level of HNC perpetration six months later (Birkett and Espelage, 2015). The studies in this review suggest this phenomenon is mostly found in male friendship groups. For example, Slaatten et al. (2014) found that HNC was used more by boys than girls and directed more towards boys than girls. Peer groups high in masculinity also had higher HNC (Birkett and Espelage, 2015), which suggests that these peer groups may be using HNC as a way of policing masculinity between friends. Particularly where peer groups value a hegemonic form of masculinity, HNC becomes a way to police its borders (Oransky and Marecek, 2009).

Although in adolescent peer groups, HNC may be used as a joke, often the boundaries of this joke can become blurred and escalate into aggression (McCann et al., 2010; Odenbring and Johansson, 2021). Indeed, the studies in this review found significant correlations between HNC and bullying (Birkett and Espelage, 2015; Borgen, 2016; Espelage et al., 2018; Merrin et al., 2018). This suggests that there is a different function of HNC as a more direct form of homophobic bullying. The study by Slaatten et al. (2014) found that heterosexism (a construct of hegemonic masculinity) was significantly correlated with using a homophobic name towards someone participants did not know. This suggests a use of HNC as a way of

ostracising people outside of a friendship or 'in-group'. Indeed, previous literature suggests HNC may be a way to punish and ostracise boys who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity (Carrera-Fernández, et al., 2018; McCann et al., 2010; Plummer, 2001). This suggests that the two functions of HNC, as banter within peer groups and as a direct form of homophobic bullying, are both rooted in the policing of hegemonic masculinity.

The studies in this review also found several risk factors which contributed to an increase in HNC: impulsivity, violence, and sexual harassment. Interestingly, all of the identified 'risk factors' are also considered definitional features of hegemonic masculinity (APA, 2018; Connell, 2005; Kupers, 2005), particularly sexual harassment (Robinson, 2005); perhaps these are not independent risk factors, but actually further evidence of the link between hegemonic masculinity and HNC.

Similarly, a protective factor against HNC found by one study in this review was empathy (Valido et al., 2021) and this may also be related to hegemonic masculinity, rather than a separate factor. A component of hegemonic masculinity is emotional restriction (Oransky and Fisher, 2009), and empathy is often considered a somewhat feminine trait (Ivtzan et al., 2012). Therefore, perhaps a lack of empathy is also a component of hegemonic masculinity as boys who adhere to hegemonic masculinity are motivated to avoid anything coded as feminine, including perhaps, showing empathy. An interesting direction for future research may be to explore the relationship between empathy, masculinity, and HNC, and interventions to increase empathy could perhaps be a useful tool in reducing HNC in boys (APA, 2018).

Strengths and Limitations of Studies Included in the Review

The quality of each study included in this review was assessed and scored using a NICE quality appraisal checklist (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2012; Appendix C). All studies were assessed as being of sufficient quality.

Three of the studies in this review used a cross-sectional design. These are useful in recording a snapshot in time of a particular phenomenon, however, as these studies were conducted several years ago it may be difficult to draw conclusions as to the relevance of these findings today. However, a benefit of systematic reviews and meta-analysis is the comparison of research, and as two of the studies in this review were longitudinal and two were both cross sectional and longitudinal, a degree of protection has been provided from the limitations of cross-sectional designs.

There was variability in the way the studies in this review measured hegemonic masculinity, however all the studies included used the same scale to measure HNC. The Homophobic Content Agent Target scale (Poteat and Espelage, 2005) is a widely used measure and has been found to have good convergent and discriminate validity (Poteat and Espelage, 2005). Nevertheless, as the Homophobic Content Agent Target scale relies on adolescents to self-report HNC it may be vulnerable to social desirability bias. As overt homophobia is declining and there is a shift in society towards appreciation of sexual diversity, adolescents may under-report their actual levels of HNC in fear of being reprimanded for using such language (McCormack, 2012). In future research, it may be beneficial to triangulate levels of HNC using teacher-reported scales or observational data to minimise the impact of this social desirability bias.

Strengths and Limitations of the Review

At the time of writing, this was the first systematic review to look specifically at quantitative studies exploring the link between hegemonic masculinity and HNC. Furthermore, the inclusion of a meta-analysis in this review enables us to draw inferences from the data, whereas systematic reviews without meta-analysis often reach less confident conclusions (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). A benefit of meta-analysis is that pooling several studies increases the power to detect small effect sizes. When pooled together insignificant effect sizes from studies can contribute to an overall effect size. Due to increased statistical power, a meta-analysis can detect effects that may be missed in individual studies (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006) or overlooked in systematic reviews.

In this review, the sample sizes ranged from 35 to 1,655. A strength of meta-analysis is that it is weighted based on sample size, whereas, in traditional systematic reviews, studies are often judged as having the same weight of evidence, regardless of sample size. Although there are many benefits to conducting a meta-analysis, it is important to note that this is a comparatively small meta-analysis, due to the limited quantitative research in this field. Meta-analyses are improved with a greater number of studies (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006) therefore it would be useful to replicate this analysis if and when more quantitative studies are conducted.

A common obstacle in meta-analysis is the need to transform effect sizes into the same statistic for them to be pooled together (Field and Gillett, 2010). However, all studies in this review used correlation or regression analysis and therefore no transformations were needed. The study by Slaatten et al. (2014) was unique in separating the hegemonic masculinity and HNC measures into their individual subscales and did not report the overall correlation between the two scales. It was not possible to include all effect sizes between subscales in the meta-anlalysis as this would be drawing from the same population which

violates the assumptions of meta-analysis (López-López et al., 2018). The effect size of the correlation between the subscale heterosexism and the target 'a friend' was used as this was in line with previous literature that states that boys use HNC within friendship groups to police masculinity. Heterosexism is the most in line with previous literature that states that the motivation to police masculinity is to avoid things coded as feminine. Alternatively, it may also have been interesting to include the correlation between heterosexism and the target 'someone they thought was homosexual' as this correlation evidences the other function of HNC as a direct form of homophobic bullying. However, as the other studies in this review mostly explored HNC as a social function in friendship groups, it was decided that the correlation between heterosexism and 'a friend' target was the most comparable. Although Merrin et al. (2018) did calculate an effect size for the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and HNC, it was not included in the meta-analysis as the statistic was not reported in the paper and attempts to contact authors were unsuccessful. This statistic, although insignificant would have been a valuable contribution to the meta-analysis.

A significant limitation of this review is that most of the studies were conducted in the USA. It is therefore difficult to generalise these findings outside the Western world. Much of psychology is conducted in WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) cultures, and this review contributes to this shortcoming of the discipline (Henrich et al., 2010). This is yet more problematic due to the understanding that masculinity is a social construct and varies between cultures (Liu, 2005). A previous review (Kågesten et al., 2016) found that hegemonic masculinity is apparent in many cultures across the world, therefore it is important that future research explores the relationship between masculinity and HNC in different countries and cultures.

A further limitation of this review is that, at the time of writing, several of the studies included were conducted over five years ago (Birkett and Espelage, 2015; Borgen, 2016;

Espelage et al., 2018; Slaatten et al., 2014) and one was conducted over 10 years ago (Poteat et al., 2011). Therefore, it is likely that these studies, and therefore this review, may become less relevant. In fact, it is one of our hopes that this review will become outdated as this will mean society is becoming more accepting and appreciative of sexual diversity and that HNC becomes a thing of the past.

Implications for Educational Settings

It is important to understand the mechanisms behind HNC and hegemonic masculinity in order to challenge them. Research suggests that overt homophobia and heteronormativity continue to be problematic in society and in schools and educational settings in particular (Birkett et al., 2009). It is important that HNC is prevented as although boys may not intend to be homophobic in their use of HNC, it creates a hostile and damaging environment for sexually diverse young people, particularly those who do not disclose their sexuality (Birkett et al., 2009; DeLay et al., 2017). Therefore, future research should use our better understanding of hegemonic masculinity and HNC in order to create interventions in educational settings to reduce the negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity and in turn, reduce HNC. This may be through promoting more diverse forms of masculinity or decreasing the effect of the 'ingroup mentality' of hegemonically masculine peer groups by increasing contact and knowledge of other forms of masculinity (Sherriff, 2007).

As stated above, it may also be beneficial to create interventions which draw on protective factors against HNC, such as increasing empathy (APA, 2018). Schools and educational settings will play an important role in creating and delivering interventions as research has shown that hegemonic masculinity in schools is one of the greatest challenges to tackling HNC or bullying in educational settings (Hong and Garbarino, 2012). The first step is for educational settings to create school policies which specifically address HNC. Schools and educational settings with positive school climates and protective policies has been found

to be a protective factor against HNC or homophobic bullying (Espelage et al., 2019). As Connell argues, there are many forms of masculinity, and currently these are marginalised by hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). It is important going forward that other, more diverse, forms of masculinity are encouraged and celebrated in society, to improve the lives of boys and the people around them, particularly sexually diverse young people.

Conclusion

This review was the first to quantitively compare studies exploring the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and HNC in adolescents. The meta-analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between the two concepts and therefore we can conclude that hegemonic masculinity underlies the use of HNC in adolescents. In particular, adolescent boys use HNC as a way to police masculinity within peer groups and punish those who do not conform. Several factors interact within this relationship, including peer groups and bullying. It is important to better understand this phenomenon in order to find ways to counteract it and, in turn, create more inclusive, accepting and positive environments for gender or sexually diverse young people and make space for more diverse expressions of masculinity.

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