

# Do “Challenging Sexism” lessons reduce gender stereotyping among male secondary school pupils in England?

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| <b>Registration date</b><br>14/09/2026 | <b>Overall study status</b><br>Ongoing  | <input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan<br><input type="checkbox"/> Results                                  |
| <b>Last Edited</b><br>08/09/2026       | <b>Condition category</b><br>Other      | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year |

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and study aims

Over the last decade there has been a concerning increase of misogynistic content online. This has been linked to an increase of participants in the ‘Manosphere’ - an online collection of websites, blogs, forums and chatrooms that unite over a shared hatred and resentment towards women. Alarming, this misogynistic content is often aimed at young adolescent males, raising concerns from parents, teachers and elected officials about the behaviour of young men in regards to misogynistic attitudes and behaviours. In response, the Department of Education announced that teaching about the harms of misogyny would become statutory for secondary school education in England, as part of Personal Social Health Economic (PSHE) education. In light of this, our research team collaborated with the official body for PSHE education, the PSHE Association (<https://pshe-association.org.uk/>) to create two Key Stage 3 “Challenging Sexism” lessons designed to meet the new statutory guidance. The lessons were developed using psychological theory regarding prejudice and misinformation reduction, and are therefore designed to encourage school pupils to critically engage with misogynistic and sexist views they may encounter both on and off-line. As such, the overall aim for this project is to evaluate the two “Challenging Sexism” lessons, to see if they are successful in encouraging more egalitarian gender beliefs amongst male pupils, in comparison to ‘normal’ PSHE lessons.

### Who can participate?

Independent and mainstream secondary schools can choose to involve their Key Stage 3 Pupils in the project. Key Stage 3 consists of Year 7 (age 11-12), Year 8 (age 12-13), and Year 9 (age 13-14) pupils. Pupils of all genders can take part in the study, however the main analysis will be run on male pupils. The involved schools PSHE teachers will deliver the lessons (either the “Challenging Sexism” or ‘normal’ PSHE lessons) and will be invited to participate in a brief feedback questionnaire, to understand how valuable teachers found the “Challenging Sexism” lessons.

### What does the study involve?

Pupils PSHE classes will be randomly assigned to receive the “Challenging Sexism” lessons or ‘normal’ PSHE lessons (that don’t involve discussions of misogyny/sexism). To measure pupils’

gender beliefs - a 9-question 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree), the Gender Belief Scale, will be used. These items are designed to ensure that we do not expose pupils to sexist messages when completing the scale. The scale can be completed either online or on physical paper worksheets.

The study consists of three research sessions, lasting one hour, that correspond with pupils timetabled PSHE lessons.

**Research Session 1** - At the beginning of the lesson, pupils will complete the Gender Belief Scale. For the remainder of the lesson, the pupils will then be taught either the first "Challenging Sexism" lesson or a 'normal' PSHE lesson depending on their classes' randomisation. After the lesson, teachers are asked to complete a Research Session Feedback Form. This form is used by the research team to understand and monitor what happened in the lesson. The forms asks teachers questions such as "What date and time did you deliver the lesson" and "Did anything go wrong with the delivery of the lessons or Gender Belief Questionnaire?".

**Research Session 2** - In the groups next timetabled lesson, the teacher will deliver either the second "Challenging Sexism" lesson to the group or another 'normal' PSHE lesson, depending on their classes' randomisation. At the end of the lesson, pupils will complete the Gender Belief Scale for a second time. After the lesson, teachers will complete the Research Session Feedback Form for a second time. Teachers will also be invited to provide us with their feedback on the "Challenging Sexism" lessons, by completing four feedback statements assessed using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree) e.g. "I will use the "Challenging Sexism" lessons again next year", and one open-ended question for any further comments.

**Research Session 3** - This session is used to measure pupils' gender beliefs after a delay. In the pupils' next PSHE lesson that occurs 4-14 days after Research Session 2, pupils will complete the Gender Belief Scale a final time at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher can then deliver any PSHE lesson they like for the remainder of the lesson. After the lesson, the teacher will complete the Research Session Feedback Form for a final time.

**What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?**

The main potential benefit of the trial is that the "Challenging Sexism" lessons will encourage more egalitarian gender beliefs, and provide children with the skills they need to critically engage with misogynistic content online. The study will also provide teachers with the resources and support they need to teach about this topic safely and informatively. Potential risks are pupils becoming distressed from the lesson content and/or a backlash effect. However, the lessons have been designed by psychological and educational experts, so the risk of distress is low. Children also have the opportunity to leave the lesson at any time. In terms of a backlash effect, our research team ran a smaller version of this study, with no backlash effect. The intervention has been carefully designed by psychological and educational experts and the materials are available beyond our trial.

**Where is the study run from?**

The study will be run remotely from the Department of Psychology at the University of York (UK). Data collection will take place in participating secondary schools.

**When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?**

September 2026 to July 2027

Who is funding the study?

The study is funded by the European Research Council and Economic Social Research Council (UK)

Who is the main contact?

Prof. Harriet Over, harriet.over@york.ac.uk

## Contact information

### Type(s)

Principal investigator, Scientific, Public

### Contact name

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## Additional identifiers

## Study information

### Scientific Title

Challenging Sexism in Schools (CSiS) Trial: Do “Challenging Sexism” lessons reduce gender stereotyping among male secondary school pupils in England? A cluster randomised controlled trial

### Acronym

CSiS

### Study objectives

Main Research Questions:

1. Will male pupils who receive the “Challenging Sexism” lessons show more egalitarian gender beliefs immediately after the lesson, than male pupils who received normal PSHE lessons?
2. Will PSHE teachers find the “Challenging Sexism” lessons valuable?

Subsidiary Research Questions:

1. Will male pupils who receive the “Challenging Sexism” lessons show more egalitarian gender beliefs immediately after a delay, than male pupils who received normal PSHE lessons?
2. Will female and non-binary pupils who receive the “Challenging Sexism” lessons show more egalitarian gender beliefs immediately after the lesson and after a delay, than female and non-binary pupils who received normal PSHE lessons?

## **Ethics approval required**

Ethics approval required

## **Ethics approval(s)**

Approved 26/03/2026, The University of York Psychology Department Ethics Committee (Department of Psychology, The University of York, York, YO10 5DD, United Kingdom; +44 (0) 1904 323190; psyc529@york.ac.uk), ref: 202563

## **Primary study design**

Interventional

## **Allocation**

Randomized controlled trial

## **Masking**

Open (masking not used)

## **Control**

Active

## **Assignment**

Cluster randomization

## **Purpose**

Educational

## **Study type(s)**

## **Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Misogyny and sexism

## **Interventions**

Pupils PSHE classes will be randomly assigned to receive the “Challenging Sexism” lessons (intervention) or ‘normal’ PSHE lessons (control).

The “Challenging Sexism” lessons are underpinned by misinformation reduction theory - inoculation theory (McGuire, 1961, 1964) - and prejudice reduction by encouraging children to be empathetic towards victims of sexism (Stephan & Finlay, 1999), and to be active bystanders when witnessing sexism (Paluck et al., 2016). Interventions that encourage individuals to empathise towards victims have been well established to help reduce intergroup bias and prejudice (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Sexist beliefs have been associated with lower levels of empathy for victims (García-Senlle et al., 2024; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). By encouraging children to discuss how sexism can hurt all genders, and how to support victims, children can begin to understand the consequences of sexist discrimination.

The first “Challenging Sexism” lesson is focused on what misogyny is, looking in more detail about the harms caused by misogynistic misinformation, how to identify common misogynistic attitudes, explain why these attitudes are inaccurate, and assess strategies to challenge these attitudes. The second “Challenging Sexism” lesson is focused on understanding how

misogynistic ideas can spread, particularly focusing on where misogynistic ideas might come from, how misogynistic misinformation can spread online through influencer tactics and then provides ways for adolescents to safely respond and report misogyny. Each lesson is designed to last approximately 50 minutes.

For groups that are allocated to the control, 'normal', PSHE lessons, teachers can teach any other part of the PSHE curriculum, providing that 1) there are no discussions of sexism or misogyny and 2) they leave enough time to deliver the Gender Belief Scale.

Participating schools PSHE teachers will deliver the intervention or control lessons to pupils. To support this, teachers will be provided with detailed lesson plans for the "Challenging Sexism" lessons and a detailed experimental training guide. Training will take place over the online video software, Zoom, and will last for a maximum of 1 hour per participating school. The training guide will be presented to teachers, allowing time for questions. The session recording will be shared with teachers with the guide after the session.

The PSHE classes within the school will be randomised 1:1 to one of two groups: the "Challenging Sexism" intervention group, or the control group to receive PSHE teaching as usual. In order to allocate the classes to a group, schools will send over a list of class names, and which teacher each class will be taught by. The random allocation schedule will be generated in Stata v19 by the trial statistician at York Trials Unit, using stratified block randomisation by school and year group and fixed block sizes of 2. All classes in a school will be randomised simultaneously to maintain allocation concealment and their allocations sent to the school so that the appropriate classes can receive the "Challenging Sexism" lessons.

## **Intervention Type**

Behavioural

## **Primary outcome(s)**

1. Gender beliefs measured using the Gender Belief Scale (Likert Scale 1-7) at before the first lesson in timepoint 1 (baseline), after the second lesson in timepoint 2 (follow-up), and before the third lesson in timepoint 3 (approx. 1 week later)

## **Key secondary outcome(s)**

## **Completion date**

01/07/2027

# **Eligibility**

## **Key inclusion criteria**

The study will take place as part of participating schools Personal Social Health Economic (PSHE) curriculum.

1. The school must be able to deliver the primary outcome measure, the Gender Belief Scale, to children - either through an online questionnaire or physical worksheets.
2. Enough PSHE teachers must agree to take part in the trial's delivery to facilitate the study in the school.
3. Pupils must not have been taught PSHE lessons about misogyny and the problems associated with it previously in the 2026/2027 school year.
4. The school agrees to all requirements outlined in the School Information Sheet documents,

and agrees to deliver the intervention as planned and only to the classes randomised to receive the "Challenging Sexism" lessons until the end of data collection at the school.

### **Healthy volunteers allowed**

Yes

### **Age group**

Child

### **Lower age limit**

11 Years

### **Upper age limit**

14 Years

### **Sex**

All

### **Total final enrolment**

0

### **Key exclusion criteria**

Does not meet the inclusion criteria

### **Date of first enrolment**

01/09/2026

### **Date of final enrolment**

01/06/2027

## **Locations**

### **Countries of recruitment**

United Kingdom

England

### **Study participating centre**

**The University of York**

Heslington

York

England

YO10 5DD

## **Sponsor information**

**Organisation**

University of York

**ROR**

<https://ror.org/04m01e293>

**Funder(s)****Funder type****Funder Name**

European Research Council

**Alternative Name(s)**

The European Research Council, ERC

**Funding Body Type**

Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

National government

**Location****Funder Name**

Economic and Social Research Council

**Alternative Name(s)**

Social Science Research Council, ESRC, SSRC, UKRI ESRC

**Funding Body Type**

Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

National government

**Location**

United Kingdom

**Results and Publications****Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**

The anonymised datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a publicly available repository: UK Data Service.

## **IPD sharing plan summary**

Stored in publicly available repository